

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

**PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

CORRECTED

At 814-815, Parliament House, Sydney, on Wednesday 25 May 2022

The Committee met at 10:15.

PRESENT

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Wes Fang (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Scott Farlow
The Hon. Courtney Houssos

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

The Hon. Catherine Cusack

* Please note:

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

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome everyone to the second hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in New South Wales. Before I commence, it is the custom of this Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I do that with all due respect as well as acknowledging other important contributors to the history of this site—those who constructed the Parliament House building and the parliamentary staff who, over many decades have supported MPs and made our work in a representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all. Today we will hear from a range of stakeholders, including council representatives from Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland City and the City of Canada Bay; the Australian Health Promotion Association; the Isolated Children and Parents Association; local P&C groups from Concord High School and Dee Why Public School; representatives of the Department of Planning and Environment; and School Infrastructure NSW.

Before we commence, I will make some brief comments about procedures for today's hearing. It is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded to take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence today, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of their evidence at the hearing. Therefore, I urge witnesses to be careful about comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence.

Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. In that regard, it is important that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the Committee's terms of reference. All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness according to the resolution of the Legislative Council in 2018. If witnesses are unable to answer a question today and want more time to respond, they can take a question on notice. Written answers should be provided within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. For witnesses appearing via WebEx, they will do so by emailing them to the secretariat. In terms of the audibility of today's hearing, I ask that everyone speak into the microphone. Finally, please turn off mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

Mr DANIEL CAVALLO, Director, Environment and Planning, Cumberland City Council, sworn and examined

Ms LISA LAKE, Mayor, Cumberland City Council, affirmed and examined

Ms LINDA DOWNEY, Councillor, Canterbury Bankstown City Council, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our first witnesses. Thank you for your time today and for your submissions. It is available to any of the witnesses to make a short opening statement. Councillor Downey, do you want to make a short statement to the Committee before we commence questioning?

LINDA DOWNEY: The council's submission puts into play the fact that there doesn't seem to be a great deal of liaison between councils and State Government departments. But there is one issue relating to a particular location in our ward that I want to raise with the Committee. It is an example of how planning seems not to be as efficient as it should be in the circumstances, particularly in relation to schools. I don't know whether or not you want me to proceed with some details; they're only general details.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, please.

LINDA DOWNEY: Is that where I do this?

The CHAIR: Yes. If you've got a specific example, fire away for a couple of minutes.

LINDA DOWNEY: Out in the Milperra area of Bankstown, the University of Western Sydney has a site. It's Milperra/Bankstown campus of its university. They are in the process of requesting a gateway determination through the Government to get that rezoned as housing. You will see in our report that the area of Canterbury-Bankstown—over the next 15-odd years—is about to have its population increase significantly. As a result of that, there is expected to be 15,000-odd new students in the area, and yet there does not appear to be a commensurate amount of infrastructure, or plans for infrastructure in relation to that. This Western Sydney site is a purpose-built educational institution that basically is going to be bulldozed to the ground. We, as a council, cannot understand, if there is a need for educational facilities into the future because of that huge increase in population that is being forced on us, how a purpose-built educational facility can be allowed to be sold off in the one instance, bulldozed secondly and have an extra 430 to 460 houses in its place. I know of schools in the area that have as many as nine demountables—and that is now, that is not projecting into the future with increases in student populations, given the increased density.

To me, that is poor planning in terms of councils and governments talking together and being able to provide facilities for public school students. Part of the arrangement is the expectation that this facility will become the subject of a gateway determination and be sold off to a housing development. Part of that situation is the university is providing a certain amount of that land and giving it to a local private school that is adjacent to that facility. So part of a government facility is being provided to a private institution because it needs more land, in terms of its educational requirements, and yet the public schools in the area aren't even considered in relation to that sort of thing. The kids who might go to public schools are not being considered in relation to that. I know from talking to local people that that is not a good outcome for our community. The community needs to be aware that that is a particular instance where we have an educational facility that is, like I said, going to be bulldozed to the ground. We know that there's a need for educational institutions and facilities into the future. Here's one where once the land is gone, it's gone; we don't get it back.

The CHAIR: Lisa Lake, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Cumberland council?

LISA LAKE: I would. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to provide information to what we consider to be a very important inquiry. I will give a quick introduction to our local government area. Some people are unfamiliar with Cumberland and the suburbs it encompasses, so I've provided a coloured map that shows our suburbs, and some demographic stats and a little bit of data about us. Cumberland council was formed in 2016 as a merger of parts of the Auburn, Parramatta and Holroyd councils. The current population is about 242,000 people. It's 72 square kilometres in size, and it stretches along the M4 from Lidcombe and Auburn in the east to Girraween and Pemulwuy in the west. We're one of the most culturally diverse areas in Australia. Fifty-two per cent of our population was born overseas, and our residents originate from 110 different countries. The top five at the moment are India, China, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Nepal. Sixty-six per cent of our population speaks a language other than English at home, and about 22 per cent of them have either no or very poor English proficiency.

I have lived in the area for 32 years and I can say anecdotally that this is a place where people are very focused on building a better life for their children than perhaps the one they might have experienced to date.

Ensuring that their children are well educated is central to that aspiration. This is an area of rapid population growth. Since I became mayor—only in January this year—I have presided over the citizenship of over 3,000 people, and 76 per cent of them were aged 40 or under. The next ceremony is in a month's time and will involve another 400 people. We are expecting those sorts of numbers to continue. The submission that you have received forecasts population growth in Cumberland from 2016 to 2036 of 30 per cent. We are expecting over 300,000 people to be living in Cumberland in 2036. We are expecting that more than 40 per cent of these additional people will be young couples with children. I understand this is higher than most Sydney LGAs.

It is fair to say that in recent years some of our government primary schools have been struggling with their student numbers. Our data from 2020 shows that at least 11 of these schools exceeded their enrolment cap that year, some quite substantially. The bottom line is that from 2019 to 2036 we are expecting an additional 5,000 infant primary school-aged children and an additional 5,500 secondary school-aged children. Assuming the proportions of those attending government schools and those attending non-government schools remain as they currently are, we will need the equivalent of five additional government primary schools, two or perhaps three additional government secondary schools, four to five additional Catholic systemic schools and one or two additional independent schools.

Our submission provides seven suggestions for going forward, but really there are three requests: firstly, that there be a comprehensive review of student capacity in our local schools, with a focus on areas that are currently experiencing significant development activity; secondly, that there be an audit of our existing public schools so that a program of maintenance and renewal can be devised by them; and, thirdly, that there be a plan for the delivery of new school places that will meet, as a minimum, the need that will exist 10 years on. These places could be in existing schools or in new schools, but it should be backed in with funding and delivery commitments. Thank you.

The CHAIR: If I could just start with a question, maybe the mayor or Mr Cavallo could answer it. What liaison does the council have with School Infrastructure NSW about demographic planning? Obviously you would have a pretty good handle on how many people you are expecting to come in over the next decade. Do you liaise with School Infrastructure? Do they request data from your demographic projections?

DANIEL CAVALLO: In summary, there is liaison. The liaison is very targeted; it is on specific issues or specific projects. There are general discussions from time to time, but generally it is more at their request rather than us going to them. We endeavour to talk to them and we do our best to liaise with them, but we find in practice that it depends on what they are working on and what is important for them and what their priorities are in terms of the level of information that they are willing to receive from us or the level of engagement that we have on particular issues.

The CHAIR: So you are saying it is ad hoc?

DANIEL CAVALLO: That's right.

The CHAIR: There is no formal situation where every year you make a submission about your demographic forecast and School Infrastructure then has a chance to build that in. It is more that, as issues arise, you might have a bit of contact?

DANIEL CAVALLO: In general terms, yes. There are mechanisms through State Government, such as the planning department, where there are common projections and assumptions. But in terms of local information, that really comes more as a secondary consideration, not necessarily a primary consideration.

The CHAIR: Within the boundaries of Cumberland, is Westmead Public the worst example of overcrowding you have got?

LISA LAKE: I think so. I think that's right, Chair.

The CHAIR: What does that mean in terms of demountables and the like?

LISA LAKE: I'm not sure about the exact number of demountables. But, living close by, I can observe that a lot of the school playground has disappeared. There are quite a number of demountables. I know they have a parking issue now because they can't find areas to park their cars internally. There's a lot of double demountables, too.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just follow up on the planning projections within government. You've got some pretty ambitious targets that have been set on you in terms of growth. Do you break those down for the planning department or do they break them down for you? Or is that just across your local government area and then that's the extent of the interaction?

DANIEL CAVALLO: In terms of planning projections, those projections are developed by the State, with input from different parties, such as council. In terms of what is allocated for a council area, that does come from the State. Then what happens in practice is that council then needs to interpret that and identify how that can be achieved with current infrastructure and planned infrastructure. In practice, with our growth, the housing targets, for example, are based on existing zoned land that could be built for high density, as an example. But, separate to that, to meet targets in the longer term, council needs to continue planning work to identify opportunities where further growth can happen. As part of that analysis, we're required by the State to then look at what it means for local infrastructure and also understand what it means for social infrastructure, such as schools.

We're given input. We don't really have a say on what that input is, but we contribute to it. But, with that input, we need to work with the State Government to see what we can accommodate with the capacity of individual LGAs and also make sure that's aligned with our broader strategic goals and the broader strategic goals of the State Government. In practice, with our housing strategy, those have been endorsed by the State Government. While council has a view and the elected council endorses that in principle, subject to State Government approval, the reality is that the State Government needs to be satisfied that we can achieve the housing targets. Then the challenge becomes, if those targets are supported, council doing the detailed work to actually make sure that the land is available for development. Then, separately, we need to advocate with State agencies, as an example, to make sure that the infrastructure does align with the growth that's projected in an area.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If School Infrastructure NSW says, "We've got this particular school"—let's use Westmead as the example—are you able to say, "Around Westmead, we know in the catchment area this is what we're projected to get to."?

DANIEL CAVALLO: With our housing strategy we've got some broad projections, by suburbs or wards, about what the likely requirement is. The best we can do in the short term is basically identify recent development activity, recent approvals from DAs, for example, and then feed that information in terms of the actual uplift. What happens in practice is that there's a lot of factors, such as migration and household size and demographics, and those can change from year to year. Cumberland's an area that, prior to COVID, had a high level of migration, had a high number of younger families and a high number of families with a larger household size compared to greater Sydney.

We can plan in terms of what development is coming. But, for example, a house might be built and, for many suburbs in Sydney, it might have a family of four. The reality in Cumberland is that same house might have six, seven, eight people. It could be an immediate family; it could be an extended family. That adds a level of complexity to projections and then what the needs are for school infrastructure, as an example, because common assumptions by the State may apply to an extent at the local level but there might be some local anomalies that aren't fully considered or able to be captured at that State level. That's where the local insight and the data is really important, to make sure that those that are planning for infrastructure at the State Government have the best available information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In your experience, does the department of planning ever engage with you to get that kind of feedback? We've done a couple of site visits. In fact, we've visited quite a significant number of schools. We've heard that feedback directly. I'd imagine, in local government, you would be hearing that feedback all the time. Does Planning ever try to get that feedback from you, that they have larger household sizes, that they have larger family sizes? This is crucial in terms of projecting what the size of schools is going to be. Is Planning trying to get that information from local government?

DANIEL CAVALLO: My understanding is that Planning collects data in terms of development applications and I suppose the yield of dwellings that are completed. We have a local strategic planning statement that is mandated by the planning Act in New South Wales, which has information on demographics and trends and actions that we are going to deliver that align with State strategies, as well as what we can deliver locally. But in terms of specific liaison, once again that is more of an ad hoc nature. The information is there, the information is provided to the State. But the State is a large entity, so we are unclear with that information exactly which parts of the State it would be going to. When we have interactions with particular parts of the State Government, we obviously reiterate that information, we advocate for the needs of the community, we refer them to public information that we have for our strategies and plans. But, at the end of the day, it is really based on the interaction that the agencies want to have with individual councils. Generally, our interactions are good, but it is more when they need something rather than having a regular forum—an ongoing forum where we can provide that information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is really helpful. Thank you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to explore that a bit further. I am quite familiar with the Lidcombe area and I pose this as a real-life example to get a sense of how the council interacted. My children went to Lidcombe Public School. When my first child enrolled there in 2007 I think it had about 300-odd students. When my last child left it was getting up to 900 students. In that time the council had redone the LEP in the Lidcombe town centre and I know that just recently it has also done further work in terms of revising the LEP on the south side of the railway station. Both of those processes have delivered significant high-rise development in that area that was going to undoubtedly result in additional enrolments.

There have been no further public schools built in the Lidcombe area since that process started in the latter part of the first decade of the century. So what happened? What was the role that the council played in that process? In terms of Lidcombe Public School, the solution that the department came up with fairly late in the piece. I think 2016 or 2017 there was approval for a further building on the site, greater classroom capacity. But that doesn't solve the other consequential impacts of higher enrolments in terms of traffic and inflow around the school. The school is just a nightmare at pick-up time and parents are parking close to a kilometre away from the school and walking back to collect their children. There is clearly no planning there. What happened? Can you explain what the interaction with the department was around that issue? That is the first question and then I will ask a subsequent question.

DANIEL CAVALLO: In terms of planning for Lidcombe, there have been iterations of revisions to the planning controls in that area and the most recent ones, as you mentioned, for the southern side of Lidcombe were formally gazetted by the Government last year. In terms of the process of the rezoning, we need to basically undertake the technical work in terms of understanding what we could do, what does that mean in terms of the built form in an area, and at a broad level what does it mean for infrastructure. That process then goes to a local planning panel for advice, which is an independent panel. Then that advice and the officer recommendations are provided to council for them to consider. If council considers that and supports the proposal, it then goes to the State Government to sign off. While council might have a view, at the end of the day the State Government is the one that has the final say on that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: When does School Infrastructure get the information that says there is a lot of additional development coming to this area and they need to start thinking about a school? This was in the offing in 2007, 2008, and there is still no planning for additional capacity in the area. The solution was just put more and more kids on one site that is not getting any bigger.

DANIEL CAVALLO: In terms of School Infrastructure, the expectation would be that the department of planning would be having some internal liaison with different agencies to provide that information and understand what it means. In practice, I don't know what happens because that is something that is outside my purview, and that is something that officers in the State Government might be able to answer. The reality is with planning, that State would sign it off. We need to identify potential infrastructure requirements associated with that. But beyond that point, if it is outside our control—for example, with education or public transport—we have to rely on the advocacy efforts of council or the liaison officer level. That's where we can get that interaction to make sure that there is an alignment between the actual growth happening at the location and then the provision of additional capacity to support that growth.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about the parking issue? If a school just keeps building its enrolments—we had that tragic situation at Greenacre when a kid was run over at pickup time. The physical infrastructure just can't take the additional enrolments. Where is the interaction with School Infrastructure on those questions? Is there any?

DANIEL CAVALLO: We will present issues as required on particular sites. I can't give a specific example at this point in the hearing, but for other locations we will raise specific examples and we will liaise with School Infrastructure or the local school as required. There are forums that council has at an operational level with schools to understand day-to-day issues. But a lot of that planning in terms of the growth, from my understanding, is managed by School Infrastructure in terms of how they can accommodate that growth and what does it mean operationally for that school. The interaction with council, as I've said before, would be ad hoc and targeted. When there is a specific issue or a specific need, we would have that liaison. Outside of that we would try to advocate and put information forward. But at the end of the day it is really up to the agency as to how they want to take that up and what internal processes they have to deal with those issues.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The Lidcombe example, again, there is significant development there. There is also the Carter Street growth precinct that is going to deliver a lot of additional people. Those kids are going to go to the new Olympic Park high school, the ones from Carter Street. But I think from all indications that is likely to hit its capacity fairly quickly. Where are the kids in Lidcombe, where all this development is occurring, going to go to high school?

DANIEL CAVALLO: So generally with the catchments for the Lidcombe area, many of the high schools are outside of the LGA boundary. With the nature of the school network and how it is developed, those locations are not physically in the LGA. The reality is that students are either going to private schools, either within the LGA are outside the LGA, or they are going to government high schools. Some are in the LGA but a lot of them are outside the LGA, particularly for the catchment around Lidcombe. The nearest high schools are really at locations like Birrong, which is outside the LGA, or Homebush. Granville would be the closest one on the eastern side, to my recollection, in the LGA. That is about three or four suburbs away.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Councillor Downey, I want to ask you about the Milperra site. Has there been any explanation given to council about how they are going to meet the additional requirements that are generated by the development that is occurring in Milperra in terms of additional enrolments?

LINDA DOWNEY: No, not to my knowledge. The department actually provided information to the Western Sydney people that there was no need for the site, that there's no need and to proceed with seeking a gateway determination, in terms of the zoning.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There has been no detailed feedback to the council about how the department intends to meet the additional capacity that is going to be required. I know there is development at Milperra golf course that is going to lead to additional housing in the area. Has there been any communication directly from School Infrastructure NSW?

LINDA DOWNEY: Not to my knowledge. Just on that question of the demographics, in terms of councils working with School Infrastructure, I am advised that there are instances where School Infrastructure NSW isn't considering the adopted growth projections that are being required of councils in terms of our local strategic plans providing for additional increased density, therefore increased populations. We are not getting any information about how resources are being provided in terms of our educational institutions. It is happening right across the LGA. Even last night, in terms of a Campsie master plan, which would increase the number of buildings by about 6,000 buildings, we are going to be going to the Greater Sydney Commission and asking them to establish a committee so that we can get a firm commitment in relation to the needs and finance to have all sorts of infrastructure, not just about education facilities. We are a little bit in the dark.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask you a bit about the history of the Milperra site? Can you give us some background on where that site came from? Has it always been with the university?

LINDA DOWNEY: It used to be the site of the Milperra Institute of Higher Education and when the University of Western Sydney came into being a lot of higher education sites were merged. As a result of that, I think there was a peppercorn arrangement whereby the land went to Western Sydney University and that is why they had to request approval from the New South Wales State Government in terms of isolating the land. They had to have an approval from the State Government. I understand there is a document somewhere, but I just do not have it with me, that says that the State Government says it is not needed for educational purposes. The university has been negotiating with a housing company to sell the land. First of all it has to be rezoned. The council has not backed the rezoning in terms of the initial application but now it went through a local planning panel and it has been forwarded to the State Government for a gateway determination.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The land is currently also available for mixed community use. Is that correct? There are playing fields, is that right, that are used by—

LINDA DOWNEY: Yes, local community groups were using the playing fields. It is a facility that the whole community can access. Even the way it is set up—there is a preschool. I know that they are going to maintain the preschool and a few other facilities there. But there is a lot of community angst about what is going to end up to be probably an overdeveloped site. Again, there has been no information provided as to where any of those additional children will go to school. Like I said, I know a local high school that has nine demountables at the moment, and even other schools in the area have a number of demountables as well.

The CHAIR: Councillor Downey, what is that high school with the nine demountables?

LINDA DOWNEY: It is East Hills Girls Technology High, and there are others.

The CHAIR: What are the others where you believe there is an excessive—

LINDA DOWNEY: I have not got specifics in relation to the others, but there are a number of demountables sitting on the front oval of Picnic Point High School.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I just address something before Mr Farlow asks some questions? Councillor Lake, are you a member of a political party?

LISA LAKE: I am, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Which party is that?

LISA LAKE: The Labor Party.

The Hon. WES FANG: Councillor Downey, are you a member of a political party?

LINDA DOWNEY: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Which party is that?

LINDA DOWNEY: I was elected as the number two candidate to the Canterbury-Bankstown Revesby ward.

The Hon. WES FANG: Are you a member of a political party?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I take a point of order.

LINDA DOWNEY: I just said yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it is relevant.

LINDA DOWNEY: The Labor Party.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: [Disorder] are on the public—

The Hon. WES FANG: It is relevant and I will explain why in a minute.

LINDA DOWNEY: The Australian Labor Party.

The Hon. WES FANG: It came out of questioning from another inquiry yesterday, Chair, that a number of witnesses turned out to be members of the ALP and it is just interesting to note that there are two more witnesses from the ALP today. Mr Cavallo, are you a member of a political party?

The CHAIR: I am ruling that out of order. Mr Cavallo is a paid officer of the council.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am asking if he is a member of a political party.

The CHAIR: I have to say to you, Wes, I do not particularly care what happened at a committee yesterday. I have never been at a committee where we interrogate people about their political allegiances. Those things are on the public record. People do not come here necessarily as party-political representatives. They come here to talk about these planning issues. Have you got any questions about school infrastructure and planning?

The Hon. WES FANG: I will pass to Mr Farlow.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Councillor Downey, in terms of the site that you are talking about, I know it relatively well as my dad used to work on Ashford Avenue, Milperra, at Western Sydney University. When it comes to Milperra Public School, which is in that vicinity, what is the current state of enrolments there? Do you have any information on that?

LINDA DOWNEY: No, I do not have any information on that one.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You mentioned that the Catholic school, which abuts that site, has been given some option on the purchase of land.

LINDA DOWNEY: My understanding is that they are not purchasing; it has been given to them.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you understand how much has been given to them of that site?

LINDA DOWNEY: No. I am aware of a figure in terms of the amount of money that was talked about, but I do not think it is appropriate here for me to give you a figure because I do not really have anything in writing in relation to what that was. That is something that is between the university and the school, but we can provide whatever information—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I am happy for you to take it on notice. That would be good.

LINDA DOWNEY: I can take it on notice and get the council to provide you with that information.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Also, with respect to that Catholic school that exists there at the moment, do you have any idea in terms of their current enrolments? Are they bursting at the seams as well?

LINDA DOWNEY: I do not have any information about that site. I know it has been progressively expanded over the years and I presume that its enrolments are increasing. It would not be expanding if it was not increasing.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: As a former councillor in a community with a lot of independent schools, I know that they can cause quite a few community issues when it comes to parking as they become more and more popular—and traffic flow. I imagine you have received a few issues forwarded to you from the community.

LINDA DOWNEY: Even the university. Unfortunately the residents have always been complaining about parking for students and the rest of it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Parking in the streets and the like.

LINDA DOWNEY: There is significant parking on that site because it was three large car parks on that site. It is a very significant site; it has a lot of facilities on it. From a personal point of view, to see a facility bulldozed into the ground for housing when we need those sorts of facilities is mind-boggling. That is my main concern.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I imagine like all areas, though, you have a need for housing as well in the area. It is not like Milperra is not a desirable place for people to live.

LINDA DOWNEY: Yes, but the council has not initiated that as a planning thing. That was initiated by the owners of the university. It is not something that the council has said, "We need more housing in Milperra." That has never to my knowledge been said. The university has taken this proposal as a gateway determination. They took it to the council; it was rejected. They took it to the local planning panel and the planning panel approved it and sent it on to the State Government. It is still being investigated.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But I take it as well, in terms of the Canterbury-Bankstown council area. I note it is the largest in the State now, isn't it?

LINDA DOWNEY: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There are certain population projections that occur within that area. At some point housing has to be found either from new stock like that or it has to be found from brownfield development sites where it is usually higher density. From the look of that one it seems like a relatively low-density development.

LINDA DOWNEY: Yes, but the council has had LEPs for other suburbs in that council area. They are still with the department of planning well over 18 months since they were submitted. It was even initiated in the previous council and it is now the three-year term of the new combined council and we are still waiting for a final approval of the LEPs for the suburbs of Panania, Revesby, East Hills and those other areas where they have railway lines. Council has put forward proposals for increased density along those areas, whereas Milperra has limited public transport. Like I said, the council has not initiated any increase in densities for that area. This particular site has been proposed by the university itself. Like I said, our area is taking 70 per cent of new residents up to 2036. It's proposed that there are supposed to be 180,000 enrolments in public schools in New South Wales up to 2039. Again, our population's going to take 70 per cent of that increase, and 15,000 new students are expected to be enrolled in our existing school population.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I turn to Cumberland council and Councillor Lake or Mr Cavallo, whoever would like to answer this. I note in the information you provided us about all the local schools—and thank you for that—it seems like there are a lot of students above the enrolment cap in a lot of the primary schools, but that doesn't seem to be replicated when it comes to the high schools. I know you don't have details for all of the high school enrolments there, but it does seem to be a disconnect between primary school enrolment and high school enrolment. What do you put that down to? Is it that people are going out of area for the high schools or they're going to independent high schools? Do you have any comments on that?

LISA LAKE: I'd say it's a bit of both. I think there's a growing trend for parents in our area to look towards independent schools for high schools. Certainly there's a growth in Islamic schools in our area, and I think that will continue. Also, of course, there are schools outside our area that are attracting students. My personal view is that I'd like to see a co-educational government school in the east end of Cumberland. I think that's really needed, and I think the department could be doing a little bit more to attract students into the government system.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of that east end of the area, I take it from some knowledge of the area that a lot of that eastern end would go to Homebush Boys. Am I correct that in terms of the council areas it would be part of the catchment from Lidcombe and the like? Anthony might be able to answer this better than I.

LISA LAKE: Mr D'Adam would know better than I.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, I missed the question.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: In terms of the catchment area, the eastern end would go to Homebush Boys, wouldn't they?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They're actually out of area for Homebush Boys. Homebush has a narrow catchment area.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It's out of your area now, but we heard that Wentworth Point also goes to Concord High before that new school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, they go to Concord High.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Although that new school in Wentworth Point is not in your council area, I imagine that would potentially also have some draw from that eastern end of the electorate.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's unclear.

LISA LAKE: I'm not sure; I can't answer that, Mr Farlow.

The CHAIR: Can I come back to Councillor Downey? At the bottom of page 4 of the Canterbury-Bankstown submission it states:

There are currently a number of potential missed opportunities in the Canterbury Bankstown area where surplus lands should be secured for longer term infrastructure ...

I presume that includes schools. Can you give us some examples of where you think the surplus land in your LGA should have been accessed for new schools?

LINDA DOWNEY: I'd have to take on notice where.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have a question about Lidcombe South. A parcel of land is currently being rezoned on an application from the Department of Education, I believe, or maybe they're the lead agency. I'm not entirely sure about whether it's being done through School Infrastructure NSW or if there's another lead agency, but the proposal is to zone for a school on some Crown land at Lidcombe South. Is there certainty about whether the proposal is for a government school or whether, because it's just a rezoning, it's feasible that all the land could be alienated and that land could be used for a private school? I'm happy for you to take it on notice if you don't have the answer.

DANIEL CAVALLO: Yes, in terms of the proposal for Lidcombe South, there is government land in the former Lidcombe Hospital precinct. Property NSW is the applicant on behalf of the Government to rezone that special purpose land from a hospital use to a school use. Our understanding from School Infrastructure, which is part of a package of material that was presented to the community and to council, was that the intention is for a dedication of land for State education. Our understanding is that it is for a primary school, not necessarily a high school. However, they're unable to give a commitment as to the use or timing of that land because the Government has not made a funding decision on that proposal. Should that proposal proceed, and that's currently being deliberated by council at present, the intent would be that the land would be dedicated by the State for the purpose of education but, separately, the State Government will have to make a decision about the timing, funding and scope of any school in that location.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In terms of the zoning, are they providing information about the projected enrolment for that school?

DANIEL CAVALLO: In terms of the site, they haven't given a projected enrolment. They've made an assumption as part of their technical studies for a school of up to 1,000 students, but they haven't given a commitment. They've done that more as a conservative assessment of impact and making sure that any traffic improvements or any requirements for the school would be able to be catered for a school of that size. That's in the documentation provided to the council and that's publicly available. But in terms of any final commitment from the Government we don't have that in terms of the size of the school, the type of the school or the timing of the school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: On notice, are you able to provide some information about the traffic impacts of a 1,000 enrolments for a school on that site? Are you able to provide on notice, in terms of the parcel of land that is reserved for the school site—because it is a large site but quite a significant part of it is going to be alienated for private dwellings that surround the school—what the square metreage would be?

DANIEL CAVALLO: We can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: That brings us to 11.00 a.m. when we need to hand over to your colleagues from Canada Bay and Concord. Thank you for your time today and for answering the questions as you have. We will report later in the year with recommendations to the Government to try to address these issues.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr ANDREW FERGUSON, Councillor, City of Canada Bay Council, sworn and examined

Mr PAUL DEWAR, Manager, Strategic Planning, City of Canada Bay Council, affirmed and examined

Ms MONICA COLOGNA, Director, Community and Environmental Planning, City of Canada Bay Council, affirmed and examined

Ms KATHRYN ZERK, President, Concord High School Parents & Citizens Association, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I thank representatives of the City of Canada Bay Council and Ms Kathryn Zerk from Concord High, which the Committee visited.

ANDREW FERGUSON: I am a councillor but I do not officially represent the council at this hearing.

The CHAIR: To each of the witnesses, it is available to you to make a short opening statement, if you wish. There is one from the council representatives, I think, and then Kathryn, if you wish to. Monica?

MONICA COLOGNA: Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission and speak to the inquiry. The City of Canada Bay is a local government area in the inner west of Sydney, extending from Drummoyne in the east to Rhodes in the west. The population of Canada Bay is anticipated to increase by about 36 per cent by 2036. That represents an additional 32,000 people residing within the City of Canada Bay. By 2031 there will be an additional 3,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 17 living within the City of Canada Bay attending secondary schools. Of this 3,000, approximately half, or 1,500, are expected to attend government schools. Of the seven government schools serving the City of Canada Bay, only one of them, Concord High School, is located within the LGA. Last year Concord High School had more students than teaching space, and by 2031 this school is projected to have a 53 per cent increase in student enrolments. It's critical that investment in new schools be planned and sequenced alongside the growth that's occurring.

The City of Canada Bay made a number of recommendations for consideration by the inquiry in our submission. Council strongly supports the preparation of plans with a medium-term horizon of 10 years to ensure that new student places are delivered based on forecast demand. Maintenance and renewal of existing public schools is critically important, and council's submission also recommends that an audit of all government schools be undertaken to inform an effective program of maintenance and renewal of these school sites. As a matter of urgency, council supports the view of the community that the capacity of Concord High School should be reviewed. Even with the planning for the new high school at Olympic Park, Concord High School is under substantial pressure from increasing student enrolments. With the Olympic Park high school not due to open until 2024, there's an immediate need to address the student population and the facilities at Concord High School. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Kathryn, do you wish to make an opening statement?

KATHRYN ZERK: Yes. On behalf of the parents of Concord High School, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to address this hearing and for the opportunity for us to advocate for the staff and students at Concord high. Just over a year ago I and two other members of the P&C executive team met with our principal in response to upsetting reports from parents, primarily around female students, some of whom were experiencing the onset of their menstrual cycles and were waiting for their entire lunchbreak to access the sanitary facilities, and reports of ongoing trauma caused by this distressing experience. In our meeting with the principal on 23 April 2021, we learnt of the significant shortfalls across the school, including female toilets, outdoor seating and classrooms.

Since this meeting we have lost trust in the Department of Education's capacity to keep our students physically and emotionally safe. We lost trust when we learnt from SafeWork NSW that the asbestos management plan at the school was not being monitored. We lost trust when we learnt that students were being taught in thoroughfares with potentially harmful noise levels, which negatively affects the students' ability to learn and concentrate, and in thoroughfares where students were required to sit on chairs immediately adjacent to descending steps. We lost trust when we learnt that the school was embarking on a legacy project to renovate the school canteen, which now runs a catering business on the premises, with increased costs to our families, yet one year on we are still waiting for the [inaudible] shortfall to be delivered.

We lost trust hearing of the dangerous slip hazards and the fear they cause the students when walking between the demountable classrooms following significant rain events. I lost trust when I was informed that the school could not follow my child's mental health safety plan because the school is too overcrowded. We lost trust when we asked the principal why there have been no facility upgrades scheduled on the Department of Education's

capital works program for the last six years, and why it appeared to us that no-one was advocating for this to occur. His response was, "I don't like to bite the hand that feeds me."

We hope this inquiry will shine a light on the processes within the department that have let our children down and have put their safety at risk. We ask why it has taken three full-time working mums to illuminate safety hazards and enact progress at Concord High School.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Kathryn, at the school on our inspection we noticed the improvement to the seating and also the outdoor playground space. What would the priorities be now? Is it mainly about the toilets, which obviously look substandard? There seems to be a general problem, which was pointed out to us by School Infrastructure, that these schools that were designed in the seventies and eighties are obviously in need of expansion and renewal but it is not easy to do because of the rabbit warren type of design that what was put there initially. What would be the priorities of the P&C if you had to itemise the improvements that need to be made?

KATHRYN ZERK: Absolutely. We are really, really grateful that the outdoor seating is being addressed and the oval is being addressed. We are very concerned that when it was promised back in May nothing happened until October, when they started communicating with us. It is upsetting that it has not been addressed yet, but it is happening. We are pleased. Definitely the toilets are a major, major concern. It is the biggest thing on the Tell Them From Me survey that the students are most upset about. Due to the P&C lobbying State and Federal members, we have had a promise. Minister Sarah Mitchell did come and visit the school recently, and we have had a promise that a new facility will be delivered. We are still not sure exactly when; that is in early stages. We would certainly like that to happen the fastest possible way.

There are significant issues with flooding into certain areas of the school, and some roofing. I understand that the library is going to be completely overhauled—new roofing for the library. It has been about 10 years of the teachers asking for this to happen. Certainly we are waiting for air conditioning to be fully throughout the school. But I think the real concern is that absolutely none of this would have happened if it wasn't for that meeting that we had in April. That audit of the school never happened until the afternoon before our meeting. What we are most concerned about is—how can this happen? Shortfalls do not happen overnight when student enrolments increase. Who is advocating for the students? Who is checking up on the facilities and working out what needs to be improved? We would like to see an annual audit done on the facilities to ensure that the appropriate numbers of classrooms and toilets are there at all stages.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask the Canada Bay council: Do you regard Concord High as the worst of the circumstances among your schools? You mention on page 4 of your submission that you have two new government schools planned: a primary school at Rhodes and a new high school at Wentworth Point. Is there any schedule for when they are expected to open?

MONICA COLOGNA: Yes, we do regard Concord High School as the most dire public school situation within the City of Canada Bay. In terms of the two new schools planned, the Olympic Park high school, we understand stage one of that is due to open in 2024. With the primary school at Rhodes, I am not sure of the opening date of that school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I will start with Ms Zerk. Thank you for the P&C submission. It really is just a catalogue of terrible circumstances and utter neglect by the department. I wanted to particularly ask you about the psychological impacts on students of the overcrowding and the poor amenity. I know you elaborate on this to some extent in your submission, but could you perhaps speak a bit more about what you think the psychological impact of this poor amenity is?

KATHRYN ZERK: Of course. Thank you. We only know this through our students and how our students are feeling and how we observe our children. But we certainly see that our children feel really embarrassed about where they go to school. They don't like to tell people where they go to school. They feel unmotivated. When they're in a situation where they're in a school that's just in dire decay, they don't feel motivated. They don't feel like they're being cared for. They're surrounded by neglect. They feel neglected, surrounded by neglect. I should add that I do have the student Tell Them From Me survey here. We see a sharp decrease in optimism. When students decline in optimism, they decline in their learning and the way they feel about themselves.

I also have concern from a perspective of inclusion. There is significant number of students who have specific needs, whether it be from generalised anxiety, students with sensory processing issues and students who are on the autism spectrum, who are terribly overwhelmed in those situations. I was personally told by the school that my child couldn't be there because she couldn't handle the noise and the overcrowding. So we had to look for an alternative. That's not really creating a school that is there for every student.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think that the state of Concord High School is driving parents into the private system? I note that there's a significant number of private school enrolments in the Canada Bay area. Do you think this is, potentially, part of a deliberate plan by the department to effectively push parents into the private system so they don't have to make the investment in schools like Concord?

KATHRYN ZERK: I'm sure that's a valid point. I can't really guess what the Department of Education is trying to do. I certainly know anecdotally from just even my small group of friends and other parents that a number of them have moved their children into the private sector, even students that have started at Concord High School. I know a number of people who have been passionate about public education, who have moved their children, after the first year, into the private, which is quite concerning. I know a number of parents who have actually moved outside of the catchment to go to another school. So, yes, it's certainly driving parents out.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You raised the very interesting point around work health and safety consultation and trying to give students and parents a voice. Your submission is full of identified safety hazards. Can you perhaps talk a little bit about why you think it's necessary for there to be a student or parent voice in terms of the safety processes and safety systems that exist in the school?

KATHRYN ZERK: I think the P&C—our primary purpose is to support the school. That is what we're trying to do. Personally, I'm a great believer in the community; community brings up a child. I believe in my local community. I believe in public school education. We send our children off to school 200 days of the year. We need to know that they're safe. I think it's very important for us to have transparency over the issues and to have a schedule, a list of maintenance that needs to be done. I think a parent representative would be very powerful on the work health and safety committee. We have been denied that. We have asked several times over the last year for a representative to be on the committee. We have been declined. We have also asked for minutes of the meeting to be provided to us. We have been declined. We would like to understand the hazards because right now the communication is so limited. We only know what we have investigated ourselves and what our children tell us, but we know there are many things that our children don't tell us. We really feel we need to know so we can support the school and help enact a safe environment for our children.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Zerk, thank you for your time and advocacy on behalf of your school community. I can only imagine how difficult it is. In the Committee and also in the upper House we often talk about how we want to see school standards improve, but your testimony to us today is saying that even the basic things are not being provided for students at Concord High School. Thank you for the time, the effort and the advocacy. It is a very basic expectation that when students go to New South Wales public schools they will have access to toilets, that the roofs won't leak and that they will have adequate classroom space. I think that is important and I thank you. I have some questions for the City of Canada Bay Council. Let me know whether they are best directed to Councillor Ferguson or the other representatives of the council. You have a clear understanding that there is huge growth happening in your area. I understand that the State Government has set some targets for that. How plugged in is School Infrastructure or the planning department to get feedback on how that is progressing? Are they able to hear that feedback regularly.

ANDREW FERGUSON: I might say, I was scheduled to say a few broader remarks, if I can?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of course, absolutely.

ANDREW FERGUSON: Then I will specifically respond to your question. I am an elected councillor in the area and I am very accessible and active in the community. I have also lived in the local area for 30 years and two of my four sons went to Concord High School. I also have the opportunity as an elected councillor to listen to feedback from the community about pot holes and footpaths and parks, but often the remarks are on other issues that are State and Federal. I do pay attention and I have a great interest in education. I have formulated lots of opinions and many, many local residents echo the remarks of Kathryn Zerk from the parents and citizens, not orchestrated with the P&C but independently raising the same issues about neglect of the school, the overcrowding and the negative impact on the wellbeing of students.

I have also spoken to parents who have not sent their children to Concord High School, and have sought private school solutions. That often creates great financial stress on families, particularly when there are increases in the cost of living and many pressures that families have. I echo the remarks of Kathryn and I have that same concern about the neglect, the overcrowding, the impact on education and the denial of public education opportunities for many local residents. I have a very small role in these sorts of proceedings, but I do want to be an advocate for the community and speak up, because something desperately needs to be done.

The area, as outlined by the council, will suffer very significant growth in future years and there just seems to be a dysfunction between what council endorses in terms of planning proposals and that impact. It just doesn't seem to be tracked by the Department of Education. We have now got this extraordinary overcrowding of

a school with 1,300 students when there should be 800. With the further growth we are going to see a compounding of the problem. I really see a lack of integration between what is happening at a local level and the planning of the Department of Education. I have only been on the council since 2017, and I am certainly not aware of any effort or communication with council or elected councillors about our opinions and where planning will go and where density will be. I have never participated in a council workshop about those sorts of issues.

I really think it is a failure by government. Council are important stakeholders in the community and they have a lot to offer in terms of the local area, the wellbeing of the community and what's going to happen in the future. I think there is a need for a lot of work in this space. I might also say, I see no community consultation by the department with the local community. As I said, I have lived there for 30 years and I just think the department needs to engage with the community to find out are there people sending their children to private schools because of their concern of neglect and overcrowding, and what are the implications on their family in terms of their living standards and their needs. I think a lot more needs to be done by the department with the council and the community about engaging in a far more meaningful way in the future.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Dewar or Ms Cologna, we heard on one of our school visits that principals are reduced to calling around local developers that they know to get a sense of when they have got stuff coming online. That is pretty ridiculous. Surely the council would have a pretty clear understanding of when this growth is being approved and what the time frame is for it coming online?

MONICA COLOGNA: That is exactly right. We are in a unique position in that we have the benefit of the census data and the forecast data. I know that the department of planning produces its own projections as well, that often differ to the forecast data that the ABS produces. In addition to that, we, as council's planning staff, see on the ground what's happening in terms of the development applications and planning proposals that are coming through, which shows real time what's coming up in the immediate future. We certainly have that data and we are very happy to work with School Infrastructure NSW to provide that data. In terms of engagement with School Infrastructure NSW, we have had some discussions recently relating to our submission and the specific problems. We have approached them rather than them approaching us.

One other point I would like to make is that it is really critical that the planning for school infrastructure goes hand in hand—and that includes renewal as well—with planning for growth. In Canada Bay we have two renewal precincts led by State Government. One of them is the Rhodes peninsula and the other one is the Parramatta Road corridor. One will see over 9,000 new residents and the other one will see almost 9,000 new residents. The State Government's plans for Rhodes did identify school infrastructure and that is coming through in the proposed new primary school within Rhodes. For the Parramatta Road corridor, there was some planning done but it has fallen off at the delivery stage. That is very, very challenging. I think there is opportunity for better integration in terms of planning for school infrastructure, and renewal and growth precincts.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am interested to hear what you are saying about the fact that Planning has different projections to the ABS data. In your experience, is the ABS data more accurate or the planning department data?

MONICA COLOGNA: Certainly from our perspective we find the ABS data to be slightly more accurate. We find the department of planning's data to be slightly more conservative, I guess, in terms of the projections. That is why we look at both sources of data and then we overlay our own knowledge of what is happening.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What do you think the source of that is? Why is Planning's data more conservative?

MONICA COLOGNA: It is hard to speak on behalf of the department of planning. I can only think that it is related to the assumptions that they overlay on the data. They have their own demographic section within the department of planning and they make their projections based on certain things that they know. Whereas the ABS potentially overlay different assumptions on their analysis of the data.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You mention in your submission the example of the Rhodes East public school as being a good example of integration with the planning work of the council. Can you elaborate a bit further on how that works? Why have we got a primary school but not integrated planning for a high school? Why one and why not the other?

PAUL DEWAR: I can try to answer that question. The Rhodes peninsula was a State renewal precinct. The Department of Planning and Environment prepared what's called the Rhodes Place Strategy. As part of that strategy it included planning for a new school. That involved essentially identifying land that would be set aside in the future with the distinct purpose of providing a school. The analysis that was done was that there was a need to provide a new primary school in that location, given the existing Concord primary school was already at

capacity, and they would need to provide another facility to meet the demand that would grow out of this new growth. That early up-front work is identified in the plan. There is no budget or commitment to deliver it in any time frame, but we at least appreciate the fact that there is identification of the need for a school at that early stage so that the necessary business case can be made to government so that Treasury can then allocate funding at a future date.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there a site?

PAUL DEWAR: There is a site but it is not yet owned by the Government; it is still in private hands. It is just a shading on a map at this stage.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about the assumptions around the need for primary school capacity? What were the assumptions around where those kids would go when they need to go to high school?

PAUL DEWAR: That is a really good question. We share the same concern. We do not think the same attention has been turned to the needs of high school students.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: This is to the council staff. In terms of your submission—and thank you very much for it—drilling down into some of your projections on table 1 of the 2031 enrolments, do they take into account the current mix of non-government and Catholic school choice within the Canada Bay LGA?

MONICA COLOGNA: Yes, that is correct; it does.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Looking at it when it comes to the Canada Bay LGA, for primary school for Catholic schools, it is about three times the State average, I think, from the ABS stats, and about double when it comes to secondary school. Non-government is about 1½ times higher as well. Having a look at some of those figures, Russell Lea Public School—and I went to Homebush Public School so I remember playing Russell Lea as a very, very small school in soccer matches and cricket matches and the like. That is quite significant growth there, but I see that the site with the redevelopment can cater for up to 600 students. Is that right for Russell Lea?

PAUL DEWAR: Yes, Russell Lea was recently subject to a significant upgrade so there is some spare capacity there.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So there is lots of capacity at Russell Lea for that growth to come, but that is probably a different kettle of fish to the western side of the council area where you have a lot of intensified development along the Rhodes peninsula and the like. Have you had any discussions with School Infrastructure about the size of that Rhodes East campus?

PAUL DEWAR: We have spoken generally. It is a very small site. It will not have a significant capacity to accommodate playing fields or open space. There is even talk about the children—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There is not really any open space or playing fields, though, in the Rhodes peninsula at present either.

PAUL DEWAR: That is right. The discussion is about where those children would go when they want to access outdoor space. There is also discussion about the capacity of that school in the long term, whether it is going to be 600 or 1,000. I think 1,000 would be pushing it based on the size of the site.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How big is that site that has been identified at the moment?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You can take that on notice.

PAUL DEWAR: I have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay, thank you. You have also had another new school established in recent times, which is Victoria Avenue. Knowing that site as well, that is relatively constrained too and I do not think there would be much scope for any expansion there, would there?

MONICA COLOGNA: No, that is correct. It is an integrated primary school with a childcare facility and early child care there as well. It is adjacent to a park that functions as a playing field. You are right, it is quite a constrained site and, because it is a newly built facility, there is no space to expand that unless property acquisition was to occur of adjacent residential development.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is that really capable of happening in that area?

MONICA COLOGNA: I think it would be very challenging.

PAUL DEWAR: The adjoining sites are earmarked for residential apartment buildings. It would be a very expensive exercise to acquire that land for the purpose of the school.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Your independent and Catholic schools have had significant growth as well—I think of St Mary's and Rosebank. Is it Our Lady of the Assumption down at North Strathfield as well?

MONICA COLOGNA: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There are quite a few independent and Catholic schools that are in the area that are growing as well. What sort of challenges are you finding from that in the local community?

MONICA COLOGNA: In terms of challenges, the independent and Catholic schools are not as vocal in terms of their needs and concerns. But certainly Rosebank, for example, is part of the Parramatta Road corridor. We are conscious that the sites immediately adjacent to Rosebank have capacity and zoning to be redeveloped into medium- to high-density residential development predominantly. That may present some additional challenges around that school. The Rosebank campus is quite constrained, as is Our Lady of Assumption at North Strathfield, and that is the site of the new metro station as well. That is a very small school site. It is quite well designed, but it is a very small, tight site.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: From all of this, has the council identified any other areas where new potential school infrastructure could be placed as part of your planning strategies at all?

PAUL DEWAR: We have not done any detailed investigation to determine where a school could be located. Our analysis has been restricted to the demand for a new school.

MONICA COLOGNA: If I may add to that, it is quite challenging in that we are largely an inner Sydney LGA and residential land prices are quite high.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There are no real greenfield development sites?

MONICA COLOGNA: That is right, yes. Open space is at a premium in terms of our community and the growth that our community is experiencing. It is very challenging in that we do not have surplus industrial land or other sites that we may be able to turn over for education. It would be quite challenging to facilitate new school sites within the LGA.

ANDREW FERGUSON: Can I mention an opinion about some of the issues. I think there is a perception, which is valid, that there is going to be very substantial growth in density and student population in the western part of the LGA, in particular around Rhodes, but there are other very significant pockets of growth that are occurring and will occur in the future. One is the Mortlake area, making a transition from industrial to high rise. Also, in the LGA there will be three new metro rail stations. I would venture to argue there will be substantial growth around Concord Oval—which is deemed to be the Burwood North rail station, but we call it the Concord Oval rail station—and then another one in Five Dock.

There will be significant growth in density not just in the western part of the LGA but also more broadly. In terms of locations, obviously an upgrade of Concord High School is a real option, but the metro rail stations provide other opportunities as well. Obviously there will be one at North Strathfield along the rail line for the metro station. There is very significant industrial land at Concord West that will inevitably make a transition from industrial to residential. Some of that land has a very large footprint, such as the old Westpac site, for example, near the rail station. I am not identifying any particular site, but there are opportunities for a new high school, if it is not just to upgrade the existing high school at Concord high.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So there are opportunities for the State Government and council to work together in identifying some potential sites for new school infrastructure in the area.

The Hon. WES FANG: On that issue, Ms Cologna, in relation to engagement with School Infrastructure, do you get the opportunity to speak directly to them and perhaps suggest, like Councillor Ferguson has indicated, that there are issues around the provision of new schools and that perhaps along growth corridors and transport corridors there is the opportunity to purchase land? Do you get that opportunity to speak to them directly?

MONICA COLOGNA: Yes, we do get the opportunity to speak to them directly and we can certainly make those suggestions as part of those discussions.

The Hon. WES FANG: How often do you get to speak to them?

MONICA COLOGNA: Again, it is on an ad hoc basis. We have spoken to them maybe twice in the last two months or so and that has largely been initiated by council. The second meeting was specifically about Concord High School and what School Infrastructure NSW is looking at in terms of Concord High School. The first meeting was a more general meeting, more related to the provision of school infrastructure generally.

The Hon. WES FANG: But you get those invitations to attend those meetings and there is general business at those meetings?

MONICA COLOGNA: Yes. Again, council has facilitated or sought out those meetings rather than the other way around.

The Hon. WES FANG: When you seek a meeting on an issue like Concord or a broader issue around the provision of services for school infrastructure, they are very open to actually meeting with you and sitting down and resolving those issues?

MONICA COLOGNA: They're certainly open to meeting with us and discussing the issues, yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: Just for consistency, Councillor Ferguson, I questioned the previous two witnesses. I'm guessing by the surname and the fact you have a very clear resemblance—are you a member of a political party?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's in his submission.

The Hon. WES FANG: It's actually not; that's the point. It is not written in his submission, it is not written in here and it is not written anywhere.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think it's pretty clear when he says, "My father was Jack Ferguson".

The Hon. WES FANG: Councillor Ferguson, are you a member of a political party?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm sorry for this.

ANDREW FERGUSON: With the indulgence of the Chair, I'm not just a member but a life member of the Australian Labor Party, which I'm very proud to be a member of.

The Hon. WES FANG: That's one up on the Chair.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Zerk, in your opening statement you said you'd had a meeting with the Minister. Was that the meeting in April that you referred to?

KATHRYN ZERK: No, the meeting in April last year was just with the principal. Were you asking about the education Minister?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes. You also made a comment that when you met with the Minister there was a commitment to a new facility, and I wondered what you meant by that.

KATHRYN ZERK: The toilet. There was a decision made; there was a promise. From our intense lobbying from the parent community, the education Minister came—it must have been about a month ago. As a result, they had made a commitment—I can't see it in my notes—to fully create a new toilet structure, so it's really toilets. They've made a commitment for the toilets. We do have ongoing consultation on a master plan, but that's very much up in the air. From my understanding, it's simply going to Treasury later this year. But definitely they made a promise to deliver a fully brand new toilet facility.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And the master plan issue was raised with the Minister when you met with her. Is that correct?

KATHRYN ZERK: That was done through our local member late last year, and the master plan had started being produced late last year. It's just in the consultation, community focus stage at the moment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have any representatives from School Infrastructure NSW engaged with the P&C on the master plan process?

KATHRYN ZERK: Yes. It has been done through the school and a P&C representative is invited to the focus groups. That is in the very early stages—the focus group stage.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Zerk, I want to ask a follow-up question on that. Do you know if the parental representative that's on that group is required to sign a non-disclosure agreement or to adhere to any confidentiality rules?

KATHRYN ZERK: Yes. I went to the first one but, unfortunately, many of us are working full-time and they're held during the day, so we're struggling to get someone who can attend every session. I went to the first one, and I was told at the beginning that it was to stay confidential, about what was discussed at that meeting—at that focus group.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What do you think of that requirement? You're there as a representative of parents. The expectation from other parents would be that you would report back on what the progress will be. What kind of burden do those kinds of restrictions place on you as a representative?

KATHRYN ZERK: We're struggling to know what to report back; that's absolutely right. We can't report back. There are a lot of things that are said in there. There were mostly teachers involved, and there's a lot of things that are said in there that we can't report back—some fairly alarming stories and certain wishes that you think are just basic wishes that we can't report back. Exactly, there's a real limit in transparency in this process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And a limit for parents to have feedback on the process more broadly. It literally then falls on this one parent to represent parents but yet not be able to consult on what their views might be on things that come up through the process or hear feedback on the actual progress. Is that correct?

KATHRYN ZERK: Absolutely, absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask whether there is any discussion with the council in relation to the catchment boundaries for the high schools. Obviously with Sydney Olympic Park High School coming on line that will affect the catchment boundaries. Presumably it will take some of the students who are in Rhodes who would currently go to Concord High School. Where they draw those boundaries are obviously going to have an impact in terms of the demand that is placed on existing school infrastructure. Is there any discussion about how and when they will redraw the boundaries?

MONICA COLOGNA: Do you mean School Infrastructure NSW or the Department of Education and council?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think it would be both School Infrastructure NSW and the department engaging with council about proposals to alter the catchment boundaries.

MONICA COLOGNA: There has been no engagement on that to date. Our understanding is that those decisions are made by education. We have certainly had a look at the proposed catchment boundaries, yes, but there has been no discussion about that today largely.

The CHAIR: That concludes this session. I thank the four witnesses for your presentation, submissions and the time you have given us today. We look forward to making some recommendations that assist, particularly Concord High where, from the inspection, it was evident that a lot more improvement is needed.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Mr STUART HERRING, Chair, Dee Why Public School Parents and Citizens Rebuild Subcommittee, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement to the Committee?

STUART HERRING: Yes, I would. Thank you for having me today and taking the time to review our submission. Ours is a case of many issues that are impacting us, namely the impact of announcements by Ministers; schools built to their maximum capacity on day one, limiting available investment for other schools—in our case it is Manly Vale, which was announced and built to maximum capacity and sits barely half-full; lack of demographic planning and consideration to the broader socioeconomics at play; a lack of appropriate cluster planning to address the issues, and ours aligns closely with exhibit 5 on page 13 of the Auditor-General's report; and poor and opaque communications, particularly around the specific reason for why the school was not approved for a rebuild even though we meet School Infrastructure's Eagle Eye and filtering criteria.

I would like to raise two further points that have become apparent from our experience that we did not include. The first is, where a rebuild does not proceed there is a gap with no-one responsible working with the school and the parents to outline a plan for how the department will address the issues faced by the school in lieu of a rebuild or upgrade. This could be a combination of maintenance investments, boundary changes, one-off investments in pieces of work not normally covered by standard ANU processes or clarity around timelines for when the situation will be reviewed again. Instead, we are left with nothing and that lack of engagement and clarity is a key driver of anger and frustration. The second point is the unacceptable burden placed on community organisations, namely the P&C who respond to the lack of planning and engagement. Only after extensive hours of lobbying and raising awareness have we had some level of traction. We are grateful for the investment we have had but it is not enough and every stage feels like a fight and an unacceptable level of responsibility on the P&C.

The CHAIR: How old is the school?

STUART HERRING: It has got its centenary this year—turning 100.

The CHAIR: A good even number. Is it the expectation with the promised or foreshadowed rebuild that it would be across the road, across Fisher Road on this site that is available and currently used for some of the outdoor play? Was that going to be the plan of a completely new school built on the other side of the road?

STUART HERRING: The works that were done to investigate options are covered under a confidentiality clause, so I am not privy to all of the information. However, my understanding from conversations with the principal were that many options were considered, including a split site, but where they had landed on due to issues relating to expense was to rebuild on the current site.

The CHAIR: The rebuild proposal never got to the stage of identifying an alternative site; it was something that was put out by your principal in a newsletter as likely to happen?

STUART HERRING: They had identified the current site to use to rebuild on. The initial preference was to do a full rebuild across both sites. However, I don't believe there are any other schools in New South Wales split by a major arterial road such as ours. The footbridge alone, apparently, was rumoured to cost \$8 million just to get up.

The CHAIR: What are the main problems with the existing site justifying a rebuild?

STUART HERRING: There are a number of issues. The first would be making sure the classrooms—so the education space—come up to the current standards. There are probably about 16 classrooms that would be considered inadequate and then a further eight demountables on top of that that would need to be addressed. Secondly, with the school's growth, since 2014 we've seen a huge growth going from 210 up to 575 currently. We're now down to a situation where there is inadequate play space for proper health and wellbeing—no natural grass at all, just one synthetic court and one basketball court.

The CHAIR: Are any of those classrooms that you've mentioned 100 years old?

STUART HERRING: I don't know the actual age of them.

The CHAIR: What's their general vintage and design, if you could describe them to us, other than old? If they're not 100 years old, what period do they come from and what makes the 16 classrooms inadequate?

STUART HERRING: I'll take those questions separately. The first one, there are about five or six that would definitely be considered heritage listed. I can get back to you later with the period. In terms of what makes them inadequate, the key is a lack of breakout spaces. For where we have learning support, in some instances that

has to happen out in the corridor or out in the open, exposed to others and to the elements. The other one is size and space, and a lack of other things, such as storage and wet areas, that teachers value.

The CHAIR: Have they got problems like leaky roofs and malfunctioning floorboards?

STUART HERRING: We certainly had leaky roofs. They have just been rectified through investment in re-roofing the school. We have issues around the acoustics of some of those classrooms as well, so they have to keep the doors closed to minimise noise issues. That compounds other issues with a lack of air conditioning or anything like that, so then you have hot and stuffy classrooms or you have loud and noisy classrooms.

The CHAIR: Without visiting a school it's hard to get a picture of the actual issues, so that's very helpful.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I note from your initial comments that you can't disclose what happened. Were you the parent representative?

STUART HERRING: I was not. That person felt sufficiently deterred from coming forward to speak here today.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I feel very sorry for them that they feel that as a representative of parents on that particular working group they weren't able to report back to parents. That must have put them in a really difficult situation.

STUART HERRING: I'm sure it did.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: As part of that working group, they're obviously a voice for parents. But by signing a non-disclosure or confidentiality agreement, they're not able to report back to the P&C or to other parents on what's happening, are they?

STUART HERRING: As a result of that, that individual chose not to be in the working group for fear of breaching that confidentiality agreement.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you think this is the way that should work, having parent representatives as part of working groups to try to include parents in this planning, yet they cannot speak to other parents or report back on what's going on and seek that ongoing consultation? Do you think that's an issue in the building process?

STUART HERRING: I think it's good to have parents involved in the building process and that appropriate consultation. I don't think it's appropriate to have that bound by a confidentiality agreement. I think the gap clearly sits not necessarily with the parents but a role around the communication of what's happening, why it's happening and what would happen as a result of decisions that are being made.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. I want to move to something slightly different. You talked about the inadequacy of the play space. You've got 575 kids in a school built for 210?

STUART HERRING: I can't speak to exactly how many it's built for. I know that for those 575 kids, we have eight demountables on site, which obviously eats into the space. I know that the play space they currently have is about 7.7 square metres per child, yet we've got this land across the road, which is abundant and useful, but had no toilets or water facilities up until recently. We had to lobby very hard to get some demountable toilets in there, which meant that if children went across the road for play during lunchtime there were no seats, there were no toilets and no shade. If something had to happen, there was no recourse for them to be able to get back to the other side of the school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is hugely problematic. This question about demountables going on to play space is one that has come up consistently in the inquiry because of the need for kids to be able to get out and run around, especially young kids, and burn off that energy they have. Has your school done things like staggered lunchbreaks, or are they looking at other ways of using this limited space?

STUART HERRING: Not so much staggered lunchbreaks, but they have managed to do cohorts being able to use the one available synthetic soccer area. Certainly the younger kids, particularly kids in year 1, will find that they will often retreat from play for fear of being knocked over because of the sheer number of people, and there are not a lot of soft surfaces. So they have moved to cohorting to allow at least some play space for the kindy and year 1 kids on certain days, to have the freedom of movement.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you know how long that synthetic grass has been there? Just to give you some context, we have heard from representatives of the department that there is an administrative preference for synthetic because it is available through all weather and does not need to be mowed. Do you know how long the synthetic has been there?

STUART HERRING: I don't know. I do understand that the principal was exploring whether it is time to replace it, but obviously that comes at a cost.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Right, so there are no soft surfaces or grass for kids to sit on?

STUART HERRING: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Nothing?

STUART HERRING: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What is it like in hot weather?

STUART HERRING: I don't know. I am not personally sitting there myself. Look, the site is blessed with many, many trees, which is nice, so they do have that shade.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In your submission you talk about the practice of trying to reduce the school catchment area. Can you elaborate on why that is not a viable solution?

STUART HERRING: Sure. My understanding is that that came up as an option when they looked at building across both sites. Realising there were some cost issues or challenges around making that happen, the view was then to rebuild on the current site. But in order to try to make sure that those changes could be best managed for the long term, the view was, "Let's try to also reduce the boundaries." But it has then got to the point—my understanding was that they said, "Well, if we're reducing the boundaries, maybe we don't need to do a rebuild." The challenge with the boundaries is—I am not sure if you can see it in the image, but we are talking about a long, major road, Pittwater Road, the most significant road on the northern beaches. Kids that are literally 800 metres from the school now need to traverse 1½ kilometres down this major road, through an industrial area.

That creates two issues. One is a safety issue in terms of being able to make that journey. The second becomes a dislocation of students. The attempt on the map was to be able to show the dislocation between the different cohorts that now would be attending Brookvale Public: those over on one side of Warringah Road and Pittwater Road—Warringah Road also being a major crossing—and those that are in Dee Why but now having to travel down to Brookvale. It really tears at the fabric of Dee Why, which is identified as a strategic growth area. It feels like rather than catering to and addressing the situation at Dee Why Public School, which is going to continue to grow, they are trying to put a bandaid solution on.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What role did parents have in the rezoning process?

STUART HERRING: I am not aware. It was a decision that came out just as my kids were starting at the school, so I was not a part of it. I don't know. I can try to ask and come back to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, if you could find out whether the P&C was engaged in any way, what that engagement was and at what stage through the rezoning. Did the department come to the P&C and say, "Look, we're considering doing this. Do you have any feedback? What's the go?" Or was it simply, "Look, this is what's going to happen"?

STUART HERRING: I know the principal was involved, but I believe that partly he was trying to help work with the plans around how we get a rebuild through and viable. If it had to be done again, I think they may make different decisions on that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I'm not sure whether this was covered in Ms Houssos' questions. In terms of the privacy concerns, were they ever elaborated to you, what those concerns were?

STUART HERRING: I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on it. I wouldn't know the full extent of what happened. My understanding was just that it was clearly articulated that, as a non-disclosure agreement, you just need to be mindful of that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So there was never any explanation given to either you or other members of the P&C as to why non-disclosure was required, why the department was requiring—

STUART HERRING: No. In fact, we asked many times for specific information around why is the school not proceeding for a rebuild. We continued to get a generic response back, without any specifics, which was extremely frustrating. When we asked for further information, it was just, "All those reports are confidential at this time."

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In terms of the process of arriving at the conclusion that the school needed to be rebuilt—what was the genesis of that process? Are you able to tell us a bit of the story of how the school arrived at the conclusion that it needed to be rebuilt and entered into that process?

STUART HERRING: I was not present for that portion of it. However, the letter from School Infrastructure suggests that—correspondence suggests, due to the growth, because you recognise that we'd had 173 per cent growth over a four- or five-year period, that we needed to explore options for a rebuild. How that hadn't been anticipated, I don't know. Dee Why is a strategic centre, had obviously seen huge growth and further growth expected. Obviously that goes through the appropriate channels. Maybe that's what triggered it to say that we need to actually explore a rebuild for this school because it's simply not appropriate capacity.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's correct to say that it was the department that suggested that a rebuild was necessary in the first instance. It wasn't something that the school community had said, "No. This school is just not working anymore. We need to rebuild it." The department had reached this conclusion and planted the idea that the rebuild was appropriate with the school community. Is that a correct assessment of how it unfolded?

STUART HERRING: I can't confirm that. I'd have to go and explore and ask—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I'm happy for you to take it on notice if you want to have a look and see if you can provide a bit of detail about whether the department—

STUART HERRING: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I suppose what I'm getting at is whether the department initially raised the expectations that a rebuild is the solution and then changed its mind, or whether this is something that had been generated by the community against resistance from the department and finally they relented, and then they've backed down. If you could perhaps provide on notice some more detail about this.

STUART HERRING: Sure. I can certainly say the school community were very welcoming of the idea. It feels like it's much needed, particularly given the fact that—like we say, when felt the concerns of the parents around play space, we're talking about Dee Why. Although it sits on the northern beaches, which is blessed by an abundance of space, 83 per cent of Dee Why population sits in a medium- or high-rise environment with little or no open play space, other than a few parks. I think it feels like a consolidation of that socio-economic situation when you look at the school as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How big is your P&C? We've heard from others about the burden that advocating for these issues has on P&C members, who often are working. The burden falls on a small group of people.

STUART HERRING: Yes, it's small. At Dee Why Public School, it's very small. In fact, this year, we're struggling to have a president in the role, simply just trying to find the people with the appropriate skills and time.

The CHAIR: What's your latest from Brad Hazzard as to the prospects of the rebuild?

STUART HERRING: The latest from Brad Hazzard, he wrote to Sarah Mitchell, who responded back, who was clear that it wouldn't be proceeding at this time. So what we're left with is—through ongoing lobbying and engaging via council, we did manage to finally get some engagement with a member from Assets Management Unit, who has come out and had a look and has kindly put some demountable toilets across Fisher Road, which is helpful, although they're still being installed. Outside of that, there's some upgrades to carpets and things like that that will go on. But we are left with applying for Community Building Partnership grants as a P&C to try to put some play space in place.

The CHAIR: Is your fallback position to get some improvements on the other side of Fisher Road?

STUART HERRING: Yes.

The CHAIR: What chance is there of that? Is there any positive indication about it?

STUART HERRING: All improvements that will be done on Fisher Road side, other than putting the demountable toilets on, will fully have to be funded and worked through by the P&C. At the time, the Schools Infrastructure or Asset Management Unit's responsibility is to the buildings. No play equipment comes into their remit. So we fall between a gap, where any improvements to that land will be solely up to us.

The CHAIR: Is it synthetic?

STUART HERRING: Across Fisher Road is all natural grass.

The CHAIR: How usable is that? I know in south-west Sydney with the rain we have had in the last nine months some of the sporting fields will not be used in the winter because they have literally become a bog.

STUART HERRING: Yes, there are a few challenges. There is some existing play equipment on it, which is, to my understanding, about 25 years old and is currently not considered play space. We are hoping that we might be able to get the department's help to even demolish that so we can at least free up that space. The land does have a number of sinkholes on it that have emerged and that is partly related to an easement that runs through it. We are working with council to try to address that as it is a stormwater easement. Again, that feels like it is all the P&C that is having to drive each of those conversations and drive an outcome.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your time. We hope that you get some resolution of these issues as quickly as possible. The Committee will be looking at them in terms of our recommendations as well.

(The witness withdrew.)

Mr PAUL KLARENAAR, Advocacy Lead, Australian Health Promotion Association, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for your time today and your submission. You can start with an opening statement if you wish.

PAUL KLARENAAR: The Australian Health Promotion Association is concerned with the health of the whole population and kids are obviously an important part of that. Giving people the right start in life is key to their development later in life. Our submission was specifically about some New South Wales health promotion research looking into the relationship between free play space and physical activity among children, because we know that sufficient physical activity and physical health has a relationship to academic achievement as well as social and emotional health.

The New South Wales Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines have referred to a sort of standard rule of thumb of at least 10 metres square per child in the playground as being the sort of space which is necessary for a school. The research that was conducted into this recently—led by the Prevention Research Collaboration at the University of Sydney—to look into that relationship between space and physical activity, found that [inaudible] the probability of physical activity or sufficient physical activity occurred between 15 and 25 metres square per student. That was particularly the case where loose play equipment was available in the playground or in the play area, such as balls and skipping ropes and so on.

It appears that after 25 metres square—in other words, when there is more space for kids beyond 25 metres square per child—it is not so crucial. But above 15 metres square and up to 25 metres square seems to be that threshold that will give a child sufficient opportunities for physical activity on a day-to-day basis. So our key recommendations for new school builds and renovations, where retrofitting is possible that [inaudible] primary schools should refer to a minimum requirement of 20 metres squared per child of open space, and a best practice goal of more than 25 metres squared. Along with that, in existing schools where renovation is possible, potentially, but it's not practical to get beyond that 25-metre threshold, alternative strategies to provide active play opportunities should be considered and implemented. That was our main point.

The CHAIR: If I could start with a background question. Who are the members of the Australian Health Promotion Association and what are the main research activities?

PAUL KLARENAAR: The Australian Health Promotion Association is the peak body for health promotion across Australia. Most of the members are health promotion professionals working in either the public sector, so the State Government health services; or non-government organisations; some work in councils, like local government; and different areas along those lines. The primary goal of the Australian Health Promotion Association is to advocate for the profession, to make sure the profession stays strong, well funded and organised with an ultimate goal of improving the overall health of the Australian population. There is a particular focus on ensuring vulnerable communities and people who have less opportunity to be healthy in their day-to-day lives can be so. There is a professional journal, a peer review journal that the Australian Health Promotion Association oversees and that brings in all kinds of research from all kinds of different academic organisations and health services.

The CHAIR: In your work, does it go beyond the useful material you provided here about the dimensions of open play space per student? Have you looked at questions about classroom design, acoustics, access for the hearing impaired; those sorts of issues?

PAUL KLARENAAR: We haven't looked specifically at those items. But absolutely we acknowledge and are aware that there are lots of contextual design factors that can improve physical activity opportunities, socialisation opportunities and educational opportunities. While not directly leading research in those areas, we do facilitate that through the journal and support that kind of research. I suppose this submission was specifically to make the point that good design will make a big difference in terms of providing physical activity opportunities. That might be the only option where retro-fitting is not possible in schools, or a new school design is not possible. There is a minimum space requirement that will either result in a better outcome, in terms of physical activity for kids, or a sub-optimal outcome, which would be below that 15-metre square per child in schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much, Mr Klarenaar, for your time and for your submission. It has been really helpful for us. One of the issues that has really struck us as we have been out visiting schools is the lack of physical space, even in brand new schools. That gets exacerbated when poor planning means that demountables are put on to play space. I asked a question of the Minister, "How many schools do not meet the 10 square metres per child guidelines?" She wrote back and said that it is not a benchmark. The Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines is not a benchmark by which schools are assessed. I asked her which schools

do not meet that. We have a high school in Parramatta where we have 1.14 square metres per student of play space. What is your opinion? There are 39 schools that do not meet the 10 square metres per child benchmark. We have got one that has literally got one square metre. What is your opinion on New South Wales schools that are cramming in kids like this?

PAUL KLARENAAR: The research we have referred to is specifically about primary schools; we have not actually looked at high schools. Part of the reason for that was that most high schools actually do not have such a space problem. On the surface, one metre square per child sounds insufficient. That would be the reaction from anybody hearing those kinds of numbers. We did not specifically look at high schools, but I suppose it goes back to our point though that there does seem to be a threshold whereby you can have insufficient space, regardless of the quality of the alternative designs and practices around scheduling recess and sports times in such a way where you stagger the start times and things like that and where two different classes have different opportunities at different times to get that physical activity. With a number like one metre square per child, you would imagine that would have to be suboptimal and not give kids enough opportunity in terms of productivity.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On one of our visits to the number of different schools that we visited, we heard from the principal that it is starting to have behaviour implications for the kids. I reflected to her that I have a very active five-year-old son who definitely needs to get out and run around. I asked her what the implications are for behaviour in the classroom for children and she explained that there are implications in the classroom if they do not actually run around but also if there is not enough space, the kids are literally running into each other on the play space. From a health outcomes perspective, what insight can you give us into what we can expect their learning outcomes to be if they are not having enough space to run around in and burn off that energy?

PAUL KLARENAAR: There is overwhelming evidence that physical activity is linked with mental health benefits, mood, social benefits and academic improvement, so I do not think that is in dispute at all. Logically, insufficient physical activity opportunities or space will result in insufficient academic outcomes as well as greater incidental opportunity for conflict because of insufficient space. There is some design evidence suggesting that play space should be carved out so that you have sort of clear divisions around what this space is meant for and what that space is meant for so that there is less confusion and therefore conflict between children. I think the benefits of providing physical activity opportunities relating to academics and social and mental health are pretty beyond dispute.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I appreciate that your research was focused on primary school aged children. We have heard that some standard designs of high schools now are actually progressing without a high school oval. What would your opinion be about schools that do not have an oval?

PAUL KLARENAAR: There are obviously a lot of real-world factors at play. Every school and every location has its own issues. A high school oval, logically, is likely to be of benefit. Having said that, our research did find that if you provide space but do not put things in it, like things to play with, it is less likely to be utilised. It is not just the space; it is actually what is there and what the design incorporated. Part of the reason we did not focus on high schools in the first place was because many of them do have an oval and that automatically increases your square metres per child quite a bit. The differences between schools are less relevant because you are not comparing apples and apples necessarily. All other things being equal, a high school oval is going to be a good thing for high school kids' physical activity and that opportunity. But there are a lot of contextual factors as well that can blur the lines a little bit. You would not necessarily say that a high school without an oval but with a whole lot of other spaces and opportunities for physical activity is going to be a negative thing. But, all else being equal, it probably makes it a bit more difficult to achieve the physical activity outcomes that we are after.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: As our Chair remarked at the time, it certainly makes it difficult to have a cricket team or a soccer team or have a game of footy if you do not have that kind of space, and then allow students at lunchtime to have training or the like, or an informal game or whatever it might be.

PAUL KLARENAAR: Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have two questions. The first is an elaboration of the type of professionals who are in your association. It was not really clear who your organisation represents in a professional capacity. What kind of professions are we talking about?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Health promotion practitioners come from a diverse range of academic qualifications. Generally health promotion practitioners hold population health or public health degrees and so on within universities. Often they are allied health professionals or other types of health professionals, or even urban planners and people from local government. The Health Promotion Association also has an accreditation process whereby members go through a process to demonstrate that they are proficient and have the sufficient

qualifications and experience to become registered health promotion practitioners. So, yes, health promotion officers or health promotion professionals—it is a diverse range. Because we are talking about improving people's lives over their life course in all sorts of settings, the individual expertise and specialities can vary quite a lot, from urban planning, traffic design, primary school activities and healthy eating up to building the curriculum or working with disadvantaged communities and the sort of expertise involved there. It is definitely a large church of health professionals who join health promotion.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the previous session an observation was made by one of the witnesses about the mental health impacts of the lack of space and the high enrolment numbers. I wonder whether you could provide on notice, or today, some information about the types of other design features that might help to address mental health issues in schools.

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes, there is a companion document that goes with that research. It is a one-pager that has some examples of what schools have done when play space is not available to provide those physical activity opportunities in more flexible and outside-the-square ways. I can certainly provide that on notice. The types of things—I talked before about how there could be practices like staggering the play times and so on so that all the kids in the school are not playing at the same time. The provision of shade and equipment in play areas is important, as is defining play spaces. Also, there is a lot more taking advantage of multistorey designs where you can have play areas on top of buildings or in undercover areas where kids can achieve their physical activity. That, as I said, is a broad list of things. They are the types of things that different schools are taking advantage of and that can be used. Going back to the original point of the submission, those things are absolutely going to make a difference, but you do need a minimum amount of space. There does seem to be a minimum amount of space required to get the health benefits of physical activity.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there any evidence around trees and gardens? We went to one site where I could barely see a single tree on the site; it was all hard surfaces. What's the evidentiary base around the impact of those kinds of natural environment elements that need to be built into the planning for schools?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes, there is a recognition that planetary health and environmental sustainability is important. There's been a lot more research into the connection between human health and environmental health. The green spaces that have shade, that have soft surfaces, that have foliage and so on that can be touched as well as smelt and seen—all of those things have really big physical activity benefits because it gets people outside; socialisation, because people are in a more comfortable space to interact with each other; and then enrichment and mental health benefits. We tend to think of nature as if it's a historical—even through ranges where there are benefits of being at home in it. There's a lot of research now quantifying those types of benefits in terms of mental health.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there any evidence about grass versus artificial grass in terms of the types of play and types of behaviour that occur on the different surfaces?

PAUL KLARENAAR: I'm sure that there is. I can't quote it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that something you could have a look at on notice?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes. I think it could be quite easy to find some of the research relating to that, absolutely.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thanks, Mr Klarenaar, for your evidence. I'm interested that you talked about the rooftop play areas as a way to use space. One school that I visited, Homebush West Public School, is in a constrained site. We heard evidence this morning from City of Canada Bay Council, and you're talking about areas there where, unfortunately, you can't have a large footprint so you have to make the most of the space. Are there any other things that you've seen or that people would advocate that you think could be utilised better in those constrained sites, apart from that rooftop play area?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes. To expand on some of the examples I gave earlier, things like designing playgrounds that are easy to supervise with clear sightlines are important, so there is supervision and behaviour is easily monitored. Line markings on schools are important, and playgrounds—just simple things like handball courts and hopscotch, and so on. They also are known to generate physical activity. Providing access to other spaces that wouldn't traditionally be used for physical activity during lunch, for example, like school halls and so on. We talked about rooftops, but there are other options.

In terms of practices, there's play equipment that was discovered within the research is very important. All-weather play areas, so making sure that you've got covered areas when it rains. We've witnessed a lot of that lately, and I'm sure schools are finding the importance of all-weather play areas at the moment. Another thing is actually working within the curriculum to build the capacity of students to lead their own activities, whether it be

buddy systems or mentors or selecting sports captains to drive activities and so on. Then, obviously in collaboration with neighbours and local council and so on, to potentially use the adjacent space around schools, where schools can safely take advantage of a space that's not necessarily on the school grounds but is nearby or next door. They're the sorts of things in the companion document, which I'll provide on notice, around alternative strategies.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: School design is important in this sense, as well, and we're looking at a lot of areas with constrained footprints. We heard from Canada Bay council this morning about Victoria Avenue Public School, for instance, which is effectively co-located with—I think it's Central Park next to it, where the school can sort of spill out and use that community facility. Years ago I chaired a committee into childhood overweight and obesity, and one of the recommendations of that was being able to open up school space for use as well. When school design came the defective was, rather than ovals being centred in the middle of the school, that you could lock them off effectively and have them as versatile space for the community as well, which could address some of those challenges. In terms of that 20 to 25 square metres per child that is the ideal that you have outlined in your submission, what do you find in the gradient? How do you come to that figure in particular as being the prime effectiveness for students?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes, I noted that as I went through the statistical tests that the departments understand and apply that to the [inaudible]. There is a GIS mapping system that was developed by the University of Canberra in partnership with the school to map the space available. It discounted things like car parks and rest areas that can be used for running around on. That was cross-referenced with the SPANS data, which is the school's physical activity and nutrition survey, which provides the terms of better physical activity at levels on a school by school basis. So it has a look at [inaudible] minimum square per child at the schools that were running a selective and then compare that to the amount of physical activity that the kids were undertaking within those schools. The statistical [inaudible] show that after 15 metres square there is [inaudible] physical activity [inaudible]. Between 15 and 25 metres squared, that is going to occur to those that are [inaudible] in terms of their physical activity levels and also probability of needing physical activity guidelines for kids and then we got to the 25 metres squared in one—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: It plateaued.

PAUL KLARENAAR: It tapered off, yes; it plateaued.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Effectively, I imagine that changes the nature of what children can do. When you are at that 25 metres squared, you can play a game of football on an oval compared to if you are stuck under that figure you are maybe playing handball and that is what your choices are limited to at lunchtime or the like?

PAUL KLARENAAR: Yes. I think that is a fair assumption, that the research did not look at—could not get into that sort of granular looking at what activities the kids were doing. That would be a fair assumption that that is what is happening.

The CHAIR: That brings us to the conclusion of your session. Thanks for your time and contribution. It is much valued.

PAUL KLARENAAR: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms LAURA STALLEY, NSW State Council, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Would you like to start with an opening statement? We have got your submission, which was very good. Time is available for you to also say a few things at the beginning of your evidence.

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. I have written a little something so I can be on track. Thank you for inviting the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales to be a part of this review. New South Wales ICPA is a voluntary not-for-profit advocacy group that believes all students, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to equitable access to education. We have just celebrated 50 years of ICPA. We have 722 member families, who are located across regional and remote New South Wales. On State council we have several areas—or portfolios, as we call them—that we advocate for, including allowances, communications, distance education, early childhood, rural schools, travel, tertiary, special needs, and health and wellbeing. We hold an annual conference, where our members bring their issues. These are then discussed and voted on by our members. Once passed, these issues form the basis of our advocacy. I live in western New South Wales on a sheep station with my husband and three children. My children are currently completing their primary school via distance education, and I hold the distance education and early childhood portfolios on State council.

The CHAIR: Can I ask for some extra detail about the School of the Air in Broken Hill? How many students would be there at any one time at maximum numbers? When you say "transportable buildings", is it mostly a demountable-type site?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. There are two classrooms at the back and then the rest of the building. There are two buildings at the back, which are two classrooms. There is a library, there are the staff offices and I think the toilets are demountable. The studio area is an older-style building, and the main administration office is transportable as well.

The CHAIR: Is it true that you'd like extra students to be there at any one time but, because of those physical limitations, only a certain number can go there?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes.

The CHAIR: What sort of number of students attend the school?

LAURA STALLEY: There are 148 students, with 21 of those being preschoolers. The preschoolers do not have a place on site due to restrictions and having to have fences and all those requirements, so the school hires or goes to another location where the preschoolers attend. Then you're left with 127 students. Not all students will come in at the same time because of those restrictions of having different stages. Sometimes one stage might be in for the whole week. For example, generally stage three will come in for a whole week at a different time. There are times when the whole school is there, but they have to arrange excursion so the children are going off site. Sometimes they try to utilise, if it is available, the school next door. They sometimes try to utilise the oval there if that school isn't using it already. There isn't a huge area within the school. There's a cemented area just outside the administration office where the children will play ball. There's no playground. If they can, they will try to work with the school next door for them to come out for morning tea, if they are able to use the oval next door.

The CHAIR: Is the top priority to have permanent toilet facilities rather than demountables?

LAURA STALLEY: I think the top priority is to allow all the students to attend the school at the same time. Currently, if you have three children, they might be across three different stages. You might have two children in at one time and one at the end of the week, so you might be in Broken Hill for the whole week. The children who aren't registered to go into school at that time are allowed to go in for their satellite lesson for 20 minutes or half an hour—however long their satellite lesson is—and then they have to leave. It is a matter of if there is schoolwork set, the family has to bring all their schoolwork to complete in the hotel room. Some families are doing two trips. They're taking their children 200 kilometres home and coming back, and maybe even doing a swap over and bringing the next lot of children. It is quite a financial burden. These parents don't complain because, at the end of the day, they want their children to have the best access to education and the best opportunities. But it would be great for the community as a whole if the students could all attend full-time and have that classroom experience because that is what they are missing out on. They are not having interaction with their peers. They are living on remote stations and need to see their teachers, see their peers and have that interaction.

The CHAIR: So it is a question of convenience, then, for the families, but also a collegiate issue of getting the whole school together.

LAURA STALLEY: Yes, and I think educationally it is really important that the students have in-person interactions with their teachers. They are often at home with maybe a supervisor or a mother who is not a trained teacher, so having time with their teacher who is trained is vital for their development. It is really important for the students to be at school together for their social and mental wellbeing.

The CHAIR: Is there any indication from the Minister or the Government that these improvements are possible?

LAURA STALLEY: This was a new motion. We had our conference in Bourke back in March and this was a new motion that has come up, but it had been presented to us just prior to that. Several of our members had mentioned that they were wanting the school to be there at the same time, and the NSW Department of Education did say that it was something that they could look into but no promises. Now we haven't had too much more—we have talked about it, but not too much has progressed with it.

The Hon. WES FANG: Can I assume that a lot of the children who are preschool age are siblings of other students that are attending the school as well?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes.

The Hon. WES FANG: So having the preschool students there while the older students are there as well creates that more involving atmosphere where they have that sibling interaction but also that friend interaction. Is that a fair assumption?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. I guess we are parted but united. Obviously we would love to have the whole school there at the same time; that would be so beneficial. Our main priority is getting the K-6 students there at the same time. That is number one. But if we could get preschoolers there at the same time, it would be amazing.

The Hon. WES FANG: So for preschoolers it involves being able to segregate or secure the area so that they have that safety?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. From my understanding, you have to have different fences. There are different requirements for preschoolers than there would be for primary school aged students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps informed by the National Quality Framework instead of the—schools aren't required to.

LAURA STALLEY: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: At the outset, thank you so much for the incredibly important work that your organisation does. I know they have done it now for 50 years, but they have certainly helped inform this inquiry and the Labor Opposition as well. Thanks very much for your time and for coming all the way today. We have spoken to you before on the phone, but it is nice to be able to talk in person. You talked about the upgrades at the Finigan School of Distance Education. Can you explain a bit more about what has happened there?

LAURA STALLEY: ICPA had been advocating for quite some time for new facilities to be implemented there. I think in 2019 or maybe even early 2020—I could be wrong, but I think 2019 was when it was completed. It was a state-of-the-art facility. It is from K to year 12, so it is a bigger range. It has a lot more classrooms. It has state-of-the-art furnishings and all of that sort of stuff, which is very much welcomed by ICPA New South Wales to have that upgrade done. It is something that we aspire to roll out to all distance education centres; obviously we are not just advocating for one in particular. This report that we did mentions Broken Hill School of the Air, but obviously we would like this to roll across to make sure that all distance education centres are equipped with what they need to cater for the students that are there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry. Excuse my ignorance. How often do the students come into the centres?

LAURA STALLEY: It can vary, depending on the stage. But I would say there are about six to eight times a year that we go into Broken Hill. That can range, depending if you have stage—if you only had a stage one child, you might only be there for two or three days. If you had multiple stages, you might be there for the week as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But it's a similar amount of physical interactions, irrespective of the year? Or do they increase or decrease?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. For example, a stage one might be in for two days, but a stage two and three might have three days. And the stage sixes have their own individual time, where they can be in for up to a week, five days.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I know in our previous inquiry we talked a lot about reducing the barriers to allow preschools to operate on school grounds. Obviously, there's that little period where we need a preschool and maybe we won't necessarily need it in the future. How are you going with that? I'm happy if you want to take it on notice.

LAURA STALLEY: This is the pop-up, pop-down model?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. That's right.

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. It has been really successful where it has been set up. It's something that ICPA NSW has been advocating for a long time for. There's still one centre that is to be set up. There are just a few barriers there. But it's a great incentive for these small communities that—if anyone doesn't know, what's happening is that small towns that have a school already are utilising the school grounds, and they're putting a pop-up, pop-down sort of model preschool, where they'll go through distance education. They might have one of the teachers that will implement that preschool program for two days. It's a great stepping stone for these children, to get them the 600 hours, I think it is, of universal access to early childhood.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I know there has been a massive delay with those new female dormitories at Yanco Agricultural College. Did you get a reason for the delay? They still haven't started construction. Is that right?

LAURA STALLEY: I've been trying to do a little bit more research. I'd have to take that on notice and find out a little bit more information for you. As far as I'm aware, the construction hasn't started yet. I think we've been told that it was meant to be finished in 2024. That's not that far away, really. It's a bit over a year and a half. Whether it would manage to be finished in that time frame—also, with the COVID restrictions that did have to come into play, my understanding is that there, obviously, had to be a bit of reshuffling. It's really vital that this—the infrastructure, the dormitories—I guess, happen as soon as possible.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was just going to ask you about the distance education component of your submission and the installation of technology into schools by the Department of Education but also then the linkage of that technology to Sky Muster and the like. Can you explain a little bit more some of the issues there and what you see as a way forward to relieving that burden on families?

LAURA STALLEY: Okay. I can give you a little bit of an update on that. ICPA NSW has been asked to talk with the Department of Education. We created a bit of a technology team around the installation of the NBN Sky Muster. Currently, we're on the Optus network, which—I'm probably going to get my technology terms incorrect—doesn't have a massive bandwidth. The program that we're using on our computers—our computers haven't been able to be updated, because of the internet that we're using, which means the programs are unable to be updated as well. Some of our member families have computers that their child started with in kindergarten, and their children have now left distance education. Those following children are still using those same computers.

So the computers are out of date, the program is having problems with the internet, so there are often crashes on the React program that they use, which is a videoconferencing program. They have been talking for a number of years about the rollover to NBN Sky Muster. It is happening as we speak; they have started making the phone calls to roll the NBN Sky Muster out. I guess our members are feeling quite disappointed because NBN Sky Muster was started in 2016 and the members have been bringing this to our conferences for many years, wanting to know when we are going to roll on it, when we are going to have better internet. That is essentially six years. That is almost the whole of a child's primary school that they have not had access to this better technology. Once the technology is rolled out, we will have better internet, we will have more capabilities of using different platforms. We will also get upgraded desktop computers. The desktops will then be upgraded. They have given us a time frame that it should be completed by the end of this year. Obviously, with distance education, internet connection—the accessibility to peers and teachers when they are not having that daily face-to-face interaction—is so vital.

The Hon. WES FANG: Is it the Sky Muster connection that is holding up the rollout of that technology?

LAURA STALLEY: No. I guess it's the processes. The New South Wales Department of Education has had to work with child safety in terms of making sure that the internet access that they are getting will be—

The Hon. WES FANG: Secured.

LAURA STALLEY: —secure for the children because they also have a lock on what children can view as well. Then there are policies and processes that go with it, and then COVID as well.

The Hon. WES FANG: It needs a dedicated connection separate to, say, the household connection. Is that how it operates?

LAURA STALLEY: NBN Sky Muster is a satellite, obviously. We are going to have to get new satellites installed. We currently have the Optus satellites on our home schoolrooms. They will obviously be taken off. For one of our members, who has NBN Sky Muster in their household already, and their schoolroom is attached to their house, or they have NBN Sky Muster—they have put NBN Sky Muster on their classroom already—it will be a simpler installation. There is an education port on the NBN—

The Hon. WES FANG: Modem.

LAURA STALLEY: —yes, modem. It will be installed through there. It will work off the already installed. But for a family that doesn't have it already, that will be a whole new installation that NBN will do. Once that connection is made, then the New South Wales Department of Education will send out the technicians to install the new desktop computers in the classrooms.

The Hon. WES FANG: Excellent. Thank you very much for explaining that.

The CHAIR: Other questions? If not, thanks, Laura.

LAURA STALLEY: I was wondering, obviously we have had our conference in March, and since this submission there was one other infrastructure motion that was presented. I was wondering if I was able to present that?

The CHAIR: Please do.

The Hon. WES FANG: Absolutely.

LAURA STALLEY: I will read what the motion is, if that is all right. It was that the New South Wales Department of Education work on solutions to allow distance education students to access hostel accommodation at the Dubbo School of Distance Education site. The Dubbo School of Distance Education hostel was built for the purpose of helping families to have affordable accommodation when they come in for their residential camps, athletics carnivals and swimming carnivals. It has been increasingly difficult for the families to be able to stay at campus if there are not enough families attending those events. At times there hasn't been the required number of families staying in the hostel, which has seen many families obviously having to pay for larger accommodation or even camping in swags and tents at the caravan park. We have spoken to the NSW Department of Education about this. We have suggested that maybe there can be—obviously there are child protection policies and all of that because it is on the NSW Department of Education school grounds. We are talking with them at the moment, but I just wanted to raise it here. We are talking with them and seeing if there is a way around how we can allow these families to access this hostel while they are in there with the students.

The Hon. WES FANG: If there are not enough students attending the event or the school lessons they are not able to open it. Is that correct?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. A member has also told me that it also requires a teacher to be on site with the family for them to be able to stay there.

The Hon. WES FANG: At all times?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes. It can also be difficult getting a staff member to stay on these sites.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is in the Dubbo grounds?

LAURA STALLEY: Yes, that is in the Dubbo School of Distance Education, which is preschool to year 12.

The CHAIR: That is one for you to fix up, Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think it is more than one.

The CHAIR: Thank you for your time today and for all the wonderful work the association does in what is obviously an important area of education. We look forward to our ongoing collaboration with you and trying to help out where we can.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Dr KIM JOHNSTONE, Acting Director Economics, Population and Land Use Forecasting, Department of Planning and Environment, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr MATT BERGER, Manager, Population Insights, Delivery, Coordination, Digital and Insights, Department of Planning and Environment, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us. Would either of you like to make an opening statement to the Committee?

KIM JOHNSTONE: Yes. My colleague, Matt Berger, and I are here today, as we have said, from the Economics, Population and Land Use Forecasting team within the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. Our experts are particularly focused on development of the New South Wales population projections. The Department of Planning and Environment prepares the population projections out for 20 years. These are the New South Wales common planning assumptions that are used by School Infrastructure NSW to do their planning and delivery of school infrastructure. The New South Wales population projections are currently updated twice in every five-year census cycle.

The population projection data provided to School Infrastructure NSW addresses potential demand for students driven by two key demographic drivers: births—the number of babies born; and migration, which includes both domestic within Australia and international. Population projections are the result of assumptions about migration levels, and the age profile of those people who move in and out of the State as well as within New South Wales; birth rates and the age that women have babies; and death rates of those age profiles.

The New South Wales population projections that we prepare are based on a multi-regional model that is both top-down, that is New South Wales as a constraint for the assumptions and the population projection outputs, and bottom up. We apply assumptions at a local level taking into account local factors. Previous projections prepared by the department of planning have been based on local government area boundaries, which have been quite large. The new population projections that we have worked on have been developed based on statistical area two boundaries. This is a boundary from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It is much smaller than local government areas; you could think of it as akin to suburbs, although it is different from official suburb boundaries.

As I have said, assumptions for the population predictions are the key driver of outputs, and we develop these in consultation across New South Wales government agencies, in consultation with local governments as well as demographic experts from around the country. All of the assumptions that we use are approved by the NSW Common Planning Assumptions group. We also use data on current and future housing supply to inform the distribution of the projected populations so we can ensure greenfield and infill sites are populated. We use something called the housing unit method; this is an approach used in other metropolitan cities such as Melbourne and London.

The department also provides to School Infrastructure data on the Sydney housing supply forecast, which is a forecast updated annually in consultation with local governments and industry as well as data that we have access to. In addition to that, the departments ePlanning program has provided School Infrastructure NSW access to digital data on development applications and complying development certificates via an application programming interface for the full term and this gives them access to short- and medium-term information regarding the timing of housing development, which of course has flow-on effects to population. I close by saying that the department works closely with School Infrastructure NSW to provide them with the data that we are responsible for in a timely way, and in turn School Infrastructure provides feedback to our model through endorsement of our assumptions and suggestions for improvements to our model outputs, which is what we are working on on a continuous basis. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will start by drilling down into something you mentioned. In providing data and forecast to School Infrastructure NSW, you mentioned a change that has been made from broadbrush LGA type data down to what you described as statistical area boundaries, the equivalent of suburbs. When was that change made and is that not the logical unit for school planning? Schools are suburban much more than based on LGAs.

KIM JOHNSTONE: This is a change that has happened between the last release of projections in 2019 and the current release, which we have just completed and sent through Cabinet. We are just waiting for public release. They have already been provided to School Infrastructure. Certainly this is a change that has been advocated for for some time. With the development of the SA2 boundaries by ABS, we have now had the data to be able to do that. I might hand over to my colleague Matt Berger who has been involved in this change process. He might want to talk a bit more about this.

MATT BERGER: Kim is correct; we used to use local government area boundaries. We moved to the SA2s, which are around 15,000 people, and we have done that for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that demand from uses like health and education and transport for more granular data has been increasing for the last—it is always increasing. Secondly, what we have been able to do is that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has developed a series of internal and overseas migration estimates that they now publish at this SA2 level. We are now taking advantage of data that was not previously available. As soon as the data became available and we could verify it against our own sources, such as data from Transport for NSW, we revamped our entire methodology to now use these new data sources to address the demand for more granular data.

The CHAIR: This started to happen in 2019. Is that right?

MATT BERGER: The ABS only made its series public around 2019. The 2019 series was developed over 2018 and 2019. It takes a while to put the numbers together.

The CHAIR: When did the State Government start using this SA2 data for the first time?

MATT BERGER: With this first set of numbers that we are releasing now.

The CHAIR: So they have not been used until this point. You are awaiting release, and all population planning and forecasting has been at LGA level?

MATT BERGER: The population projections were at LGA level. The housing supply forecast that Dr Johnstone mentioned, that is available at a much more granular level. Within the city—within Greater Sydney in particular—there is more detailed data available.

The CHAIR: In the past, why weren't you using census collector districts and building up a small number of those into a suburban unit?

MATT BERGER: That is a good question. In the absence of this ABS data that measures the net flows between these SA2s from these suburb-type units, the other data that we had been using was a question from the census every five years, "Where were you five years ago?", and, "Where were you one year ago?" While we can get the location of where a person is in the current census to mesh block or SA1 or formally census district at this quite granular level, the ABS would only ever provide us with data on where they were in the past at a broad level, like LGA or SA2. We do not have any migration flow data between CDs or between mesh blocks. We can't model the data at that level. There is a range of other concerns around how accurate the data is and how other components—how accurate death statistics are, how accurate births are, how accurate the population measures are at that level as well.

The CHAIR: What is the accuracy problem with birth and death data? Do you think we are missing a large number of people who have been born in New South Wales at the registry or those who have died?

MATT BERGER: When we are using the data that feeds into our process, we use data from the ABS, which has come via the registry, but we also use data—and this is more important for us—from the Perinatal Data Collection. This is a survey that is run for new mothers—like, within a day of the baby being born. That is run by the New South Wales Department of Health as well as the departments of health of the other States and Territories. This is really important because ABS data, for example, records where a baby was born. We are more interested in where the mother and therefore the baby will normally live. We use this data from the perinatal collections. Some of the data—most of it is right down to an SA2 level—captured in the hospital is at a much broader level. It might just say northern Sydney or it might say Sydney or it might be a postcode. We need to do some modelling there looking at some other data sources to apportion that out. The level of detail at which the health agencies provide the data back to us, and which they are confident about, shapes and constrains the level at which we produce estimates.

The CHAIR: What about the use of the local government housing target and development and consent information? It seems to me that if you are aggregating census collector districts—you have your perinatal data; your death statistics; plus, from local government authorities, their actual on-ground housing data—that you would have a pretty good handle on what is going to happen over a five-year period, wouldn't you?

MATT BERGER: That's a really good point. Because of that point, that's why we use the Sydney housing supply forecast, which incorporates all those types of measures for the Greater Sydney area. We don't have a detailed measure for outside the greater metropolitan area, and another consideration we have to have is it's not just the completed dwellings. We care about dwellings that have disappeared, as well, so we need net completions. We're also concerned with how many of the dwellings are vacant and, of the ones that are not vacant, what's the number of people in each of the dwellings. Those two descriptors can vary quite a lot in different parts of the State, and they change over time as well.

The CHAIR: In the data you've provided to School Infrastructure NSW over the years, is there a feedback loop? For instance, would School Infrastructure come back and say, "Look, we've had this major calamity at Oran Park, where the school had 40 or 50 demountables and the population projections were all wrong for what sort of school was being built"? Is there a feedback loop where errors are learnt from and the cause of those errors is identified?

MATT BERGER: There is, and because of this—as we get to smaller areas, the likelihood of a relative error being greater—we work closely with Education and with Transport and with Health and with the Greater Sydney Commission and so forth, and we seek feedback on the assumptions. For example, do we think this fertility rate is right for this area? Do we think that migration pattern is right for this area? We also include those agencies in our governance groups. We have a technical group for the officer level, like myself, where we talk about all the details and all the mathematics, and we include the equivalents from School Infrastructure there. We have broader governance groups where we include director-level officers, where we're signing off the broad assumptions. These two groups, and the representatives from these groups, get the feedback about "Is this growing faster than we expect? Did we miss something here? Why does this look different from the ABS data?" We have those conversations all the time; that's part of our daily operations.

KIM JOHNSTONE: Can I also just say, I think that the relationship between Planning and School Infrastructure has been evolving, and it's probably the strongest that it has ever been. Certainly the development of the SA2 model is directly in response to the type of feedback that we've been receiving from School Infrastructure for some time, and some of the things that we are looking to do with that model in terms of being able to test different scenarios are really a direct response to the way that we work with School Infrastructure to have a better understanding of the way that they use our data and are able to feed that into their planning processes. The access to the ePlanning portal is another new development which really just gives us these digital tools, giving us much more ability to share information in a timely way so that School Infrastructure can have some insights into what's happening on the ground.

Of course, at a population level, we may have modelled certain migration and fertility rate assumptions. But if there's a development that either has stalled or accelerates much faster because of market factors, with access to that ePlanning data they can now make an assessment about how that might be accelerating. Often what we find is that the projection is generally okay out to 20 years. There's a greater margin of error the further you go and the smaller the geography. Some of the timing can affect that. Really, the impact of COVID has seen that we're still growing but it's going to be a little bit slower, for example, than we may have previously predicted in 2019.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I want to start by asking some follow-up questions to your opening statement. You said that you make assumptions at a local level. How local are those assumptions?

KIM JOHNSTONE: Those are at the statistical area 2 level that we were talking about.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But that only started in 2019. Is that correct?

KIM JOHNSTONE: Yes, prior to that it was at local government area level.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Those 2019 changes are only now being fed into the system, so anything that's been planned prior to now has been based off local government area projections and not these SA2s.

KIM JOHNSTONE: Yes, correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When you were doing it by local government area, did you do any further analysis? Did you do any suburb analysis or did you simply do it my local government area and that was it?

MATT BERGER: When we did local government area projections, what we produced with them was an agency breakdown. So we could see how the population ages over time, which is important for both children and potential new mothers in this case. We also had the components to change births, deaths and migration. In addition to that, because of this demand, we produced an integral public sector series at the SA2 level that was just the totals, but we didn't have the age/sex breakdown because we didn't have any data to do that. We shared that with—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Berger, you did not have what at an SA2 level?

MATT BERGER: We didn't have any age or sex breakdown. We had population by age and sex for the local government areas but we used that to make a synthetic forecast, if you like, at the total level for the SA2s.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. So what you are saying is before 2019 you knew the total populations by SA2s but you had no idea what the age and gender breakdown was, which is not particularly relevant for schools?

MATT BERGER: That's correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's helpful, thanks. You said in your opening statement that you do it in consultation with local government. I have to say that's completely contradicted by what this Committee has heard today from local government who has said it is, at best, ad hoc what they are hearing from—the ability they have to feed into particularly School Infrastructure NSW. Can you explain what that consultation with local government is?

KIM JOHNSTONE: That's a process that the team—I will just throw to you, Matt, afterwards—has during the setting of the assumptions phase in terms of the level of those migration and assumptions, in particular. The other level of consultation that we benefit from with the population projections is the consultation through the Sydney housing supplies forecast across Sydney where there's an annual consultation with the councils in terms of anything that may be happening on the ground that is not already picked up within the data. I can't talk any more detail about that. I'll have to get more information from my colleagues in the land use forecasting team. Matt, do you have anything to add to that in terms of the consultation from local government to inform the assumptions for the population projections?

MATT BERGER: Yes. For the 2019 series, we did a series of visits to local councils via the joint organisations and their predecessors, the Regional Organisations of Councils. We went to probably around a dozen of their meetings that touched pretty much all of regional New South Wales except the South Coast. We sat down and we talked about what the dynamics of the population change was. They are births, deaths and migration and so on. These are the things that we see from the ABS. What do you see differently? We got a lot of constructive feedback. That peak in deaths was about flu season and so on, and that's when people moved out because of floods and so on. We got that data to validate, but we can't get to every council all the time. So we used those JLO and regional organisation meetings to talk to them as groups. From those, if people have concerns, we have follow-up meetings. We had follow-up meetings with Narrandera and Griffith, for example.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why didn't you go to the South Coast?

MATT BERGER: With South Coast, we made several offers to the regional organisation and we didn't get any feedback from the office.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Excellent. It's good to know. There is a number of schools down there. There is a series of schools down there that have huge issues. It's interesting to know that they didn't feed into that process. Can you tell me who's on the common planning project group?

KIM JOHNSTONE: It's chaired through NSW Treasury, and there's representation from across the New South Wales Government. I would have to pull up the website to see the list of all the agencies that are represented.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You can take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you want to take that one on notice and come back to us?

KIM JOHNSTONE: Yes, I would.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I also want to know who's serving on it. I'm not just interested in the agencies; I'm interested in who is the person serving on that group. In terms of the Sydney housing supply forecast, do you break that down by SA2s as well?

KIM JOHNSTONE: We do, but that is a much more granular, spatial view of what's happening on the ground because of the way that information comes in in terms of developments.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to say by SA2, "We're going to have this many new houses, we're going to have this many new apartment blocks and we expect we're going to have this many people moving in"?

KIM JOHNSTONE: The Sydney housing supply forecast doesn't talk about people; it is simply a forecast of dwelling completions based on what's in the pipeline and an estimation of that realisation rate from DA through to completion, as I said, based on what we know through the data, in consultation with local governments and so forth. But that's just about the housing supply.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How often is that updated?

KIM JOHNSTONE: That's updated annually.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And then that information is then fed through to School Infrastructure?

KIM JOHNSTONE: It's one of the data feeds, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have modelling, or is it School Infrastructure NSW that has modelling, that says, "Right, we've got this many units coming in so we expect this many people. We've got this many houses being completed in Gledswood Hills, so we expect that this many people will be moving in"?

KIM JOHNSTONE: That's not work that we do at the department of planning, except when we feed that through into the population projection model, where we take account of that update. So there's additional work that School Infrastructure does in addition to the data that we provide. Matt, do you have anything to add to that?

MATT BERGER: Yes. We work out a vacancy rate and a household size for each of the areas. The other thing that we do on top of that is we then add in people who don't normally live in traditional housing—so boarding schools, nurses' quarters, barracks, aged-care homes and so on—so that we get more than just the housing part of the population, we get the full part. That's important for areas like Hunters Hill, which has Joeys, for example. They've got a lot of schoolchildren who don't live in traditional housing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In terms of the dwelling completions, when you provide that information to School Infrastructure to do their own analysis, do you tell them how many bedrooms are in each dwelling so that they can project from that?

KIM JOHNSTONE: No. That's not part of the dataset, as far as I'm aware.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you tell them the type of dwelling?

KIM JOHNSTONE: We have detached and—Matt?

MATT BERGER: The housing supply forecast breaks it down by greenfield and infill. It's not quite but it is low density and high density. The supply forecast is mostly total dwellings by year and by area.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So they don't get any insight to say it's going to be four new houses or it's going to be four new apartment blocks?

KIM JOHNSTONE: Not through the Sydney housing supply forecast. School Infrastructure has access to ePlanning. This is a relatively new development. ePlanning has more information on those dwelling approvals and the complying development certificates in terms of that level of detail.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You talked about looking at the fertility rate for an area. How do you break that down?

KIM JOHNSTONE: What do you mean, "How do you break it down?" By age or by geography?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm interested in by geography. What's the smallest area that you look at it by?

KIM JOHNSTONE: The latest release will be at the SA2 level. Prior to that, it was at local government area level.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you see large differences between different parts of Sydney? I ask because when we went out we did a north-west visit and a south-west visit. We had a lot of feedback from the north-west that part of the reason for the overcrowding in schools was due to families purchasing into properties, whereas in the south-west the sizes of the families are much larger. Do you provide that kind of feedback and that kind of information to School Infrastructure?

KIM JOHNSTONE: You can see the different levels of fertility rates across Sydney and the rest of New South Wales coming through in the data, and those assumptions are applied to the projections, so that informs the output of the numbers of births and the number of children that are in the projection model. We—and, of course, School Infrastructure—through looking at the assumptions had access to those. It is not just the fertility rate, though; it is also the number of women in those ages of having children that informs those numbers of children and the numbers that will go through to the schools. We do not make assumptions on the population model in terms of how many people are living in each household. We make assumptions about the population drivers of change—fertility rate, migration and so on—and take those into account. Matt, you might have more to say in terms of the geographic distribution of those fertility rates.

MATT BERGER: Yes. The observation that they vary greatly across the city—they do. They vary greatly for a whole variety of reasons: type of housing, age of people living there and so on. That definitely comes through in the model. We can see areas where there are a lot of babies being forecast to be born because there are a lot of potential mothers, and we can see other areas where there are a lot of mothers but the number of babies per potential mum is much higher. So we have both things: the mums being high, which is like the north-west case, and the bubs per mum being high, which is the south-west.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We were told by Canada Bay council earlier today that the department of planning projections are usually more conservative than the ABS projections, but they found them usually more inaccurate. Why is that?

KIM JOHNSTONE: The ABS don't do population projections. They do one lot for Greater Sydney and balance of State as their smallest geography after each census. That is why we do them. We are the only State-based agency that does such State population projections at this level. There may be private providers that also prepare population projections that that is compared to.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will definitely be putting that back to Canada Bay council to get some more feedback, which we might come back to you on. Obviously you are in the population projection part of the Department of Planning and Environment, so I am happy for you to take the next question on notice and refer it to whoever else in your department deals with this. What role does the department have in acquiring the land for schools in new greenfield development sites? Are there any parameters or requirements around that land?

KIM JOHNSTONE: That is outside my area of knowledge, so I definitely will take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: First of all, in terms of the population projection model, what are the intervals into the future that you project the population to? What is the furthest interval that you would project population for—20 years in advance, 10 years in advance, 15, five?

MATT BERGER: For the 2019 series, the last series, we published at five-year intervals in the same years as the census—2016, 2021, 2026—out to 2041 for LGAs and 2061 for New South Wales as a whole. With this new series we are publishing individual years. So it is 2021, 2022, 2023, all the way out to 2041 for the SA2s—and for LGAs, but we monitor the SA2s—and out to 2061 for New South Wales as a whole.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: My next question is about validation. Do you track back and look at your projections and validate to see if you got it right?

MATT BERGER: After every census, the ABS finalise their population estimates for the previous five years. They'll do that in the middle of next year. They will finalise the estimates for 2016 through 2021. What we then do is look at all of our previous series—the 2019 series, 2016 series, 2013 series. We go back and we see how close or how far were each of those series from what the ABS finalised their numbers to be. We get a measure for each of our series over time and how accurate they are and how much they diverge. We share this with other agencies. We do that after each census. We update and we share that result with agencies. Sometimes it allows us to go back to the ABS and say, "We think there are some problems with your data," which they have sometimes. Other times, we have issues with one of the components in part of the State. In the next cycle, we target that as an area of improvement.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Roughly, how often are you under? How often are you over? How often are you on the money?

KIM JOHNSTONE: At a New South Wales level, we're within 2 per cent margin of error. We're pretty much on the money. That margin of error increases for the smaller geographies. It increases in particular age groups. It is those age groups mostly affected by migration, both domestic and international, because it's the most volatile aspect of population change, generally. That makes it the most difficult of the assumptions to set, and you're more likely to see error there. For example, when Federal controls over international migration change and change those levels, we may see divergence from assumptions about net overseas migration. Certainly, we see fluctuation too about moves in and out of New South Wales and around Sydney as well and out to the regions. Matt, you've got more detail with the most recent evaluation? Anything to add?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just clarify? In terms of migration, you must have a model that then you adjust for that. You have some kind of adjustment in terms of the overall projection that takes into account the migration estimate. That's [disorder] only going to be a minor component of the variance, isn't it?

KIM JOHNSTONE: No. It's a really important aspect. It's important for two reasons. One, it's an important flow of people in and out of every place. People are highly mobile across New South Wales in terms of internal migration, moving house. We set an age profile for that migration assumption. As we set both what we think the in and out and net flow will be in terms of the numbers of people, we have an age profile underneath

that that takes account of, for example, international migration. It's largely people in their early 20s who are in the inflow into New South Wales. Those are the assumptions that we adjust when we review the projections. They can have a big impact in terms of what we see both at the State level, down to local areas.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Given the settlement patterns in Sydney in particular, are there particular areas that you would red-flag and say, "These projections are going to be almost impossible to get accurate"? Pre-2019, for example, you were projecting only at local government area. An area like Blacktown LGA, which has a high degree of inflow migration, the capacity to actually project the population accurately—given your reservations and the absence of sufficiently accurate data on settlement patterns, it's a stab in the dark, isn't it, in an area like Blacktown, where you'd have actually no capacity to properly project. Is that fair to say?

MATT BERGER: It's more the other way around. Areas that are big will bring more evidence to the table. For an area like Blacktown, which is 400,000-plus as a starting point, we have a lot of historical information about the net overseas flows and net interstate flows. The variability in that assumption compared to the overall projection is quite low. We don't actually red flag but where the model is at its weakest is where we have very small areas. The SA2s vary in size from about 8,000 to about 32,000. Most of them are around 10,000 to 15,000, and the model is really good above 10,000. When we are down in the 2,000s, there is just so little information. As Kim was saying, you only need one or two families to move in or out of one of those small areas for the projection to be off, and we can't manage individual families, of course.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is at SA1 level. You are talking about analysis at SA2 level. There are 12,000 to 15,000 people in the SA2 level, isn't there?

MATT BERGER: In SA2, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is quite a large number for one or two families to make a huge difference, isn't it?

MATT BERGER: Sorry, can I just clarify that? Most of the SA2s are in this 10,000 to 15,000 and the model performs quite strongly at that level. It is where we get down to the very small SA2s—and there are handfuls of them. There are probably a dozen of them that are quite small. Lord Howe Island, for example. There are 450 people on Lord Howe, so that is very, very tiny.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What we are getting at here is School Infrastructure says that their projections are based on your information and that is why they are getting it wrong in terms of enrolment numbers. You are saying no, your data is correct. In those areas where we have greatest concern, particularly on the urban fringe in LGAs like Blacktown, we are trying to establish who is right. If your numbers were actually accurate, School Infrastructure has a problem, but if your numbers are wrong, then obviously their account of what is going wrong points the finger at you guys.

KIM JOHNSTONE: I think it is fair to say that as soon as we release a projection, we know it is going to be different to what it is. So we are pretty good at understanding how populations work but it can't predict what babies will be born on what street. For places where there may be lots of change, a few things could happen. Housing supply could come on faster than previously anticipated when we set those assumptions or people could use the dwellings that are coming online in different ways than we may have assumed. If two families move into a dwelling where there may have been an assumption of just one, that is also picked up. The other thing that can happen is we can see a change in fertility rate. Perhaps one of the best examples of that was in 2008 when for the first time in New South Wales since 1971 we had 100,000 births. We had never seen that before. That was a combination of a slight upturn in the total fertility rate, but also we had a huge increase in the number of potential mothers in the population.

That was an uptick that wasn't necessarily foreseen. It happened in Australia as well as the United Kingdom, the United States and across Europe, and wasn't necessarily picked up. If you have those kinds of small changes that are at the New South Wales level it may not have an impact, but we can predict the number of children with quite diverse certainty for the State as a whole. It is the fact that people are able to move around in ways that we don't control and people have children as they decide. We pick up some of those factors as best we can in terms of setting those assumptions, but some of them—and I think this is where the projections are one of those inputs and how we look at other information about what may be changing on the ground. Matt, do you have anything to add to that?

MATT BERGER: Not really, other than on the Blacktown issue. Everyone in Blacktown is less than 1 per cent—for Blacktown as a whole—over the last set of projections. That is not to say that every bit inside Blacktown that schools necessarily need to use—whether that was done. I do not know what has been done at that level.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We visited Northbourne Public School in Marsden Park. That suburb pretty much was not there when the last census was run. How do you actually project the population there?

KIM JOHNSTONE: That is when we use the housing unit method. Did you hear that question, Matt?

MATT BERGER: Yes. Stuff down in the south-west is good, but Marsden Park is an example. We use this one all the time and it is one of the ones we look at with great scrutiny. Marsden Park was quite small in the last census. What we see coming online there is new housing stock that we see in completions and we see in the supply forecast. In our upcoming projection, we have the supply forecast in effect driving the net migration assumptions into that area. So the more supply we have relative to the rest of Sydney, the faster the migration will grow in that area. To cut that answer short, we use the supply forecast for areas where we don't have any history to guide us.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Kim and Matt, for your expertise. It has been a real wonks session for getting across demography. As you were speaking about the birthing projections, it occurred to me how useful would Mick Fuller's sexual consent app be, to know all that data as to what people are doing at the beginning of that process. I do not think you will get hold of it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That's a little bit nebulous.

The CHAIR: It would be a demographer's dream, wouldn't it, as well as others. Thank you for your time. It has been really useful and it helps our deliberations.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

ANTHONY MANNING, Chief Executive, School Infrastructure NSW, affirmed and examined

GLENN DOWNIE, Executive Director, Asset Management, School Infrastructure NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Mr Manning, would you like to make an opening statement?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to share the work that the Department of Education is undertaking in regard to School Infrastructure NSW. As Chief Executive of School Infrastructure, I am the Department of Education's lead executive for its School Infrastructure program. As the Committee is aware, I have been extensively engaged in the Committee's inquiry to date. Mr Downie is also responsible for the department's School Infrastructure asset management program. Together, we are best placed to support the full range of issues being canvassed by the Committee's terms of inquiry. School Infrastructure is a division of the department that was established in August 2017. I was appointed as chief executive at that time, and I report to the secretary of the department.

Specifically, I am responsible and accountable for driving the service planning, procurement and construction of school facilities to meet changes in population growth; ensuring that school-based assets are regularly renewed and maintained; supporting the department through managing office accommodation; working closely with school communities, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Infrastructure NSW and the Greater Sydney Commission to deliver public education infrastructure where and when it is needed.

My colleague Glenn Downie is the executive director of asset management, leading a talented team of asset management professionals who are responsible for improving school facilities through the delivery of minor capital works; oversight of out-sourced facilities management contractors; provision of information to schools on financial reporting, risk management and insurance; responding to any other infrastructure related inquiries; and supporting schools in COVID recovery through adapted learning regimes, cleaning regimes, improved natural ventilation of teaching spaces, delivery of targeted programs, and support improved ventilation more broadly across schools.

I was pleased to be able to show members of the Committee some of the new and upgraded schools we have delivered and importantly to see the students and teachers learning and teaching in those facilities. I hope the Committee observed that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to deliver the school infrastructure that is needed across the State. There are different challenges in different communities that require different solutions. School Infrastructure NSW is tasked with delivering the Government's increased investment in new and upgraded school infrastructure. This has included more than 120 new projects that commenced between 2017-18 and 2018-19. As the Auditor-General stated in her 2021 report:

This significantly larger program of work required rapid development of internal capacity, governance arrangements, and project management systems. This needed to be done at the same time as scoping and planning for the list of announced projects.

Since its establishment, School Infrastructure has grown and developed as an organisation in order to respond to this significant investment. This is highlighted by the fact that progress has already been made on the recommendations from the Auditor-General's 2021 report when it was released. We have since completed work on those recommendations and I would like to be able to table the department's response to the Public Accounts Committee, which I have here. As the Committee saw when we visited the schools in the north and south-west of Sydney, there are different dynamics at play when planning and delivering infrastructure. Never do we want to underinvest, and nor do we want to overinvest and have infrastructure that is not utilised. If I could also table a letter addressed to you, Chair, with a recap of the visits and the key points that were discussed.

While building and upgrading schools in the past few years we have also seen a mobilising of resources and efforts to support schools through the COVID pandemic and natural disasters, including fires and floods. Despite those additional challenges, our focus continues to be on delivering for schools and their communities and supporting the essential work that our teachers do. Mr Downie oversaw the distribution of more than 50 million rapid antigen testing kits to more than 3,000 schools and around 6,000 early learning childcare centres across the State. This team then responded to the devastating floods, rolling out 100 pop-up classrooms across the Northern Rivers. School Infrastructure has already delivered \$7 billion of new and upgraded school infrastructure across the State and is currently delivering a further \$7.9 billion in projects. While this is a record program, this funding is finite and needs to be targeted to greatest needs. Education of students is always prioritised. The department will never turn students away from one of our public schools. Glenn and I are happy to take your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, and thank you again for the assistance you provided to us on site as part of our inspections. Could I start with a proposition about the most difficult parts of this process? It seems to me that, say, Schofields is a great achievement as to how to deal with a country school swamped by population

growth and suburbanisation. At Northbourne it seemed, at least to my eye, to be a fairly successful model for how you create a school in a suburb that did not exist a few years ago.

There are two that seem particularly intractable. Can I get your response on them? One is the Concord High type of solution where you have an old, aging, poorly designed facility that in theory you would probably like to knock down and start again. We have many more of those and we heard this morning from councils closer to the centre of Sydney who have those infill population pressures and an expectation that the school facilities will be a lot better than what we have at Concord High today. The second type of intractable problem seems to be Riverbank Public where you have a high level of success with communities that want to flock into the school well beyond the capacity to cope and you have a huge level of demountables—well over 50 per cent of the classroom supply. On the second one, is the solution to cap off the catchment and not take out-of-area enrolments anymore? What is the thinking for the first one I raised about Concord?

ANTHONY MANNING: If I take the second one first, the work we need to do is really closely aligned with the principals of that school and the supporting DEL and EDs from School Performance. I think we need to look very carefully at the capacity and capability of each of those schools to manage those numbers. I think what we saw at Riverbank was a very competent and capable principal who was very focused on what she was delivering and was delivering great results. In that situation I think we would continue to support that and that mechanism would work, and there is a great deal of support from School Performance to make that happen and make that work.

There isn't a one size fits all. It is close work with school performance. It is understanding where the stresses and strains are and understanding what we can do as an organisation to support those. I do not think it is as simple as saying that the number is a thousand, and we move on from there and we build another school down the road. I think it depends on that Principle and that structure that goes with it.

The CHAIR: How do you contrast that with Oran Park, which was a planning disaster? The solution there has been, other than for existing families, to reduce the catchment to one street.

ANTHONY MANNING: Oran Park, was one where there was—again, this is pre-School Infrastructure—a strategy around critical mass for opening new schools. The last thing we want to do is establish a new school where we might have 50 kids or 100 kids because that really does not give us an opportunity to run those services. What we saw was a slow burn in Oran Park that suddenly appeared to be really very quick. As a consequence, we have now added additional schools to take the sting away from that. We continue to work with them in terms of how that manages. We are working through a number of mechanisms as an organisation to enable us to respond faster to demand. One of the issues we have is the gestation period for infrastructure projects. Often there is extensive pre-planning. There is then a year of formal planning work before we can get into the statutory planning process. Quite often it can be three or four years between recognising that we need infrastructure and being able to deliver a brand new school.

We have been working quite extensively over the last few years, particularly at how quickly we can respond to those things. We have delivered thousand-place primary schools in six months from a construction period. Bella Vista was an 18-month project to deliver a thousand-place school. We are working through mechanisms to make sure that we can respond to those more quickly and we are working through a structured process around land acquisition to make sure that we actually have sites available to us, either through VPAs or other mechanisms, so we can be more responsive as part of that process. I think there is a mixture of tools available to us to do that. The more we build a track record, the more we are able to drive that and make sure we have designers and contractors who can respond to us in the time that we need. If we were building one or two schools a year, we would not have a cohort of supporting supply chain that could deliver that. At the volume we are working at now, there is a significant supply chain that supports us. A lot of that is really about adapting that more quickly.

In terms of the first question on Concord High School, there is an increasing demand around schools that have—Concord I think was built in the late seventies. They are beginning to show their age, particularly around some of the modern teaching methods that we are beginning to see. We are beginning to work through the programs of how we go about tackling those schools and how we look at potential upgrade programs for those schools. It is not necessarily a question of just maintenance. We can maintain anything, but that is essentially keeping it in the same condition but keeping it safe. It is actually then how we deal with upgrades to projects and where we think they go. Whilst the focus initially has largely been on growth—because that has been the key challenge—we are moving more and more to looking at what we do with upgrades, what we do with schools like Concord. That is because the more new schools we deliver, the bigger that gap is with some of those older ones. We are beginning to work through the pre-planning around mechanisms that we can adapt for those schools. We

can identify schools where we see low utilisation as a trigger for us to get in and do some investment. We are beginning to shape those capabilities up so we can respond to those in the same sort of manner.

The CHAIR: In their evidence to the Committee, the NSW Teachers Federation said there was what sounds like an accord process underway with the department and School Infrastructure under the philosophy that design should be led by pedagogy, that design should accommodate the best available teaching methods. Is that process nearing finalisation, where there is some agreement with the federation about the future design of the classroom?

ANTHONY MANNING: Absolutely. That is something that I have been working on with Henry Rajendra in particular. We have both agreed that we need to standardise and normalise classrooms. When I started in the Department of Education, the Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines had 26 different standards for classrooms that could be applied. We have done a lot of work to rationalise that down to as minimal a number as we can. We also found the guidelines were quite open and broad, so you could broadly interpret most spaces to be somehow consistent with the EFSG.

In order to move from a cottage industry scale to an industrial scale, we really need to have a base standard that we can all be comfortable with, and then we manage the margins rather than anything else. The Teachers Fed and us have been working on a standard for that that we are comfortable we can roll out quite successfully, will deliver all of the aspects that we need to and will provide the flexibility for teachers depending on how their teaching methodology works. But we're pretty close.

Come 1 June there's a visit up to Gillieston, and we've added Fern Bay to that. Fern Bay is a prototype building that we've put in that we think meets those requirements quite nicely and begins to become a bit of a prototype for how the rest of it will go in. It will be quite similar, you will have seen, to some of the schemes you have already seen. It takes a lot of those ideas but begins to standardise it so we can be clear that that's the standard that we're delivering. It still gives us flexibility in how that building is positioned, how that building addresses the site, how the envelope works to make sure that it fits architecturally and a whole range of others. But it essentially begins to roll out a standard for how the internals work, how classrooms react and how teachers can use the space. We think that's an effective way to work between us and the federation.

The CHAIR: What's your research base for that process? We've written to you, Mr Manning, to try to get clarification on the status of this document that I tabled, *Exploring fit-for-purpose contemporary learning spaces*, from School Learning Environments and Change, School Infrastructure NSW. Is this the document you rely on for understanding high-effect-level classroom design and for teaching methods that get the best results for the students?

ANTHONY MANNING: The answer to the question is yes and no. That is a literature research that gives us some indication around some pedagogical delivery models; it's not a basis going forward. From School Infrastructure's perspective, I don't think our role is to tell teachers how to teach. That's not my area of expertise. But my job is to make sure that we are giving teachers the flexibility to roll out whatever model of teaching is the right teaching model for them, so what we're trying to roll out is true flexibility. There are teachers and subjects and cohorts that lend themselves to open-plan learning; there are other cohorts that lend themselves to a traditional classroom space.

What we're trying to ensure is we're able to deliver all of those, and it's really down to each individual teacher or principal to utilise the infrastructure to suit what that lesson might be and how that might work. There's no overarching vision that says everything is going to be open plan; there is an overarching vision that says teaching will continue to change over the next 40 or 50 years. We acknowledge what's happened before us, and I can take you to facilities in Campbelltown built in the sixties that have these big concertina walls to open the classrooms up so they can become as one. So we've seen it come and go. We need to make sure that the infrastructure we deliver is flexible, so it is part of a suite of information that we begin to look at.

One of the roles for SLEC, who are part of my organisation, is then to support schools if that's the model they want to go down. It's not about saying, "This is the model; you must do it". That's not our job. Our job is to support schools to make the decisions they need to to work out what is the best model of teaching for them. On the tour you saw—I think it was Schofields where you saw the three classrooms rolled into one space. I think it was part of that tour to see how that model works. The intent is to make sure we're delivering true flexibility, so you can open and close the doors. The classrooms function perfectly suitably for that. I think that's the way for us to go forward, not to engage in "What is the right model?", because I don't believe there would be a single right model. It would be down to teachers and subjects.

The CHAIR: But isn't that the disconnect? CESE has identified a single right model—explicit teaching. Its research paper pretty severely misrepresents a lot of the Hattie research about collective teacher efficacy. If there is one thing that works best for students, why don't we physically design our classrooms around that?

ANTHONY MANNING: Again, teaching isn't my background and my experience, but what I do know from the five years that I've spent in the department is that you can go across a whole range of schools and a whole range of teachers, including principals, and they have their own views about what they think works effectively and can demonstrate how that works.

The CHAIR: Maybe this is why New South Wales has the fastest falling school results in the world. But this is a separate area of debate, of course. Are there other questions, please?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, thank you very much; we have had two really productive days visiting schools in the north-west and the south-west. But that showed us some pretty serious examples of where the department has got the planning very, very wrong. Northbourne Public School, Gledswood Hills, Riverbank primary school in particular are all fantastic schools, but what went so badly wrong?

ANTHONY MANNING: I think I would disagree with your conjecture that any of those schools went badly wrong. Riverbank—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You don't think that the planning—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Mr Manning is trying to answer the question.

The CHAIR: Yes, we will give Mr Manning a chance to answer.

ANTHONY MANNING: As the Chair has pointed out, Riverbank is the subject of the fact that it is actually a really popular and successful school. I wouldn't call that a failure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let me be very clear. I am not saying that the school is a failure. I am saying that the planning process is a failure.

ANTHONY MANNING: Again, I would continue to disagree with that assertion. As for schools like Northbourne and Gledswood, you have had the presentation from the department of planning. The complexity of projecting population, particularly around migration, in those sorts of areas is very complex. We are now beginning to get some really good data in terms of being able to manage that. But the reality is those projects were planned based on the data that was available to us at the time, and the planning was appropriate. The fact is that at Gledswood Hills we have seen a much higher increase in dwellings being constructed and living in than was ever projected for this period of time. But in the case of Gledswood the Government has made a commitment to deliver stage 2 and that's what we are focused on doing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Northbourne Public School was where they lodged the original DA for 500 students for the pop-up school. They then had to re-lodge the DA and up it to 1,000 students before the pop-up school had started. Now the pop-up school is still there after the actual school has been completed. There are pretty clear examples here that School Infrastructure NSW got it completely wrong. I take your point about Oran Park. I understand that was before School Infrastructure NSW was there. But for years we have been asking questions about the population planning and you're saying that it's actually okay.

ANTHONY MANNING: At Northbourne, the planning that went into the permanent infrastructure was aware that we would need a 1,000-place at a point in time. What we didn't anticipate was the speed of growth of that suburb and the density of the occupants of that suburb. You are right; we planned for a 500-place pop-up school because that is what we had projected we would need as part of that project. We wanted to get that school established for day one, term one, knowing full well that the permanent infrastructure wouldn't be available to us but a pop-up school was appropriate. As that school was publicised that it was coming on line, we actually found a great many families wanted to access that, so we were able to increase that school exponentially. But again it was based on the population data we had at the time. Now what we are finding is that some of these areas are moving much more quickly than anybody had ever anticipated. Some of them are already in excess of their long-term growth projections and that's what we are now responding to. As we know, there are other schools being planned that will take the load off Northbourne in particular, so we are comfortable it will return to the 1,000 capacity that we have built.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand what you are saying about the new information. Is it your testimony that the information that has now been provided to you since 2019—that you've fixed the problems with the projections?

ANTHONY MANNING: To be clear, I think what the department of planning said was that the projections started in 2019. We started to see them and I think they even said in the testimony that it was yet to

be approved and signed off. So we have begun to see the additional data. It is much more granular; it is still at SA2 level, which is 15,000. That would include many primary schools, so it is not as simple as lining up an SA2 level with a school community group level. So there's still some complexity in understanding the SA2 level, understanding those projections and how they relate to individual schools, but it is a lot better than it was. We are getting a lot more granular information. I think we stand a much better chance of making sure we have got capacity where we need it. But it is still something we need to work on—more layers of data. The better the ePlanning data is available to us in the last couple of months—we are beginning to understand the efficacy and benefit from that as well. But all this will begin to add to our ability to more accurately project what's going to actually happen.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I clarify the story that you're telling us? It's either that the data is wrong—there's an issue with data, it's not granular enough and so your projections have been wrong—or you plan for a 1,000-person school but you build in a staged approach. You know that you're going to need 1,000 places but you choose to build a smaller school because Treasury won't approve it unless it's a larger project? Is that the reason or is it the data? It's one or the other, isn't it?

ANTHONY MANNING: No. It's not a story, for a start. The data that we get is a projection, and it's projected out over five years. The reality of what happens on the ground can be different, and it can be significantly different, particularly in those growth zones. So the projection may well be for 500 houses a year to be completed, and that's how the projection data works. What we might eventually see is 3,000 houses a year being put in place, which completely blows those projections out. So there are two different things. The data is a projection and a forecast that we're working our way to. We're trying to understand the depth of the information in that forecast so we can begin to understand the vagaries and the changes to it. We then make decisions about—yes, we might need a 1,000-place school over the long term, but the projection data says that for the next five or six years, we think a 500-place school is more than sufficient. We'll put in the background infrastructure for 1,000—so the hall, the admin spaces and all those other pieces—knowing full well that we can add a second stage of classrooms to it at the time, in part because there are a lot of pieces of infrastructure to deliver and it makes sense not to over-invest.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If you get it wrong, you put demountables in. That's basically the solution that you're saying.

ANTHONY MANNING: No, the point I'm trying to make is—

The Hon. WES FANG: That was not a question; that was an interjection.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There was a question mark afterwards.

The CHAIR: We will hear from Mr Manning.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Manning is trying to answer the question diligently. I think those sorts of interjections are disorderly.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It wasn't an interjection.

The CHAIR: Can we hear from Mr Manning, please?

ANTHONY MANNING: I think, Mr D'Adam, there's a reality that if I build a 1,000-place school and 500 places aren't used for five years and, as a consequence of that investment, I haven't invested in another school—that's the balance that we need to make. We make it on the best information we have available to us and we make it with the best of intentions. What we have seen through COVID and a whole range of other issues is an acceleration in some areas. When you look at the population projections at Leppington, we would expect to see more people there but they are not there. When you look at Gledswood and Northbourne, those developments have accelerated beyond what was projected to occur. That's the basis that we're working on.

It's hard. I don't envy the job of Planning at all. As I say, on a statewide basis, they can get it really very accurate. But, as you begin to break it down, we have no control over the number of houses a developer might choose to build in a year. We might know that the rezoning gives them 10,000 dwellings, and they might even give us a view as to how quickly those developments will move through. But, as you know from most of the developments, they sell the plots. Once they sell the plots, it's up to the individuals to get on and build them, and that can happen at a ferocious rate. As I say, in the period of gestation between committing to an infrastructure project, understanding the scope and scale of it, and then delivering it, a lot of things can change around that, and we've seen that in some of those volatile areas around population growth.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about the proposal for a new public school in Westmead? What's happening? Where is it?

ANTHONY MANNING: Are you referring to Westmead South?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Westmead South, that's right.

ANTHONY MANNING: We are working our way through a process where there is a piece of land that we have negotiated that will come to us. We're working our way through the final stages of the planning process, so that as that land becomes available we can get straight in and build the next school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Obviously there is the issue with a new Westmead public school being promised to alleviate the pressures on Westmead Public School. It's an enduring issue. When is that school actually going to be delivered?

ANTHONY MANNING: We are working through with the availability of land. The project is planned. The business case is—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have you acquired the land?

ANTHONY MANNING: We have signed an agreement with the landowner for the land to come to us, yes. We are finalising the details of the actual land transfer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How long will that take?

ANTHONY MANNING: I would like to think that by the end of the calendar year it will be done.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you outline the process for acquiring land for a new school in a greenfield site in a new development area?

ANTHONY MANNING: There are a number of processes. There is a VPA process where the department of planning, as part of a rezoning where they are involved, may well negotiate on our behalf for land to be made available to us. There is often a trigger for that land. It may relate to the number of plots they sell. We work with Planning pretty closely to make sure that the site we are likely to get is suitable for our use and make sure that the trigger levels are right so that, as it comes to us, it comes to us in the right space. That is one place we do it. We have some where developers will come and talk to us about what they are planning to do, interested to see whether we are interested in acquiring a site as part of their development in that space. From time to time we find that we have little provision, so we will often look at acquiring existing sites and as a last resort would move to a compulsory acquisition process, if we needed to, to identify land.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are your criteria? You said that you work closely with the department of planning. What are the criteria that you put on the site? Do you have a minimum size?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. Depending on the capacity we think the school will be, there would be an ideal hectare size. I couldn't tell you off the top of my head.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you take that on notice?

ANTHONY MANNING: I can provide that on notice. And we work with the department of planning. Ideally we want a regular shape and we would like it as flat as we can get it, but obviously that is not necessarily available to us.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Would the size be contingent on an estimate in terms of the number of enrolments for that school?

ANTHONY MANNING: Usually the acquisition is done as part of a rezoning where we know there might be 5,000 dwellings or 10,000 dwellings, so that will inform us as to whether we need one site for a primary school or two. We may need a high school in addition to that space, as well.

The CHAIR: So you have minimum standards in a document for what a VPA should deliver in terms of a school site?

ANTHONY MANNING: We have guidance that we work with Planning on, yes. Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Are they enforceable? If so, how did we end up with the Gledswood Hills problem where clearly the developer has given the leftover land that is sloping, leads on to the mosquito-infested drainage lake and is too small? Looking at what happened there, I think it is a complete—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Debacle.

The CHAIR: —debacle as to providing what you have mentioned earlier on, which was flat and of a sufficient size. Anyone who knows land development could see that the developer there got away with highway robbery.

ANTHONY MANNING: There isn't a great deal of flat land around there. If you wander through, it is all on a gradient.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Its name is "Hills", after all.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. There is not a great, square, absolutely flat piece of land. We usually work with the department of planning.

The CHAIR: What happened to your minimum standards? Why weren't they enforced?

ANTHONY MANNING: We will work with the department of planning. They will identify with the developer sites that are available to us that fit. We will then do an assessment on those and get a sense. If they are slightly smaller than our ideal size we might propose to put a three-storey structure in, rather than a two-storey structure, so that we can get the best value out of the land that we can. We will do that analysis with the department of planning before we settle on a final VPA.

The CHAIR: Can you provide, for the benefit of the Committee, the guidelines for what a VPA should deliver?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We have had a number of submissions, I am sure you are aware, around the disposal of the Western Sydney University site at Milperra. The community has been agitating around the site being utilised for a high school. We did an SO 52 on this issue. The department was consulted about whether there was need for a school in the area. In terms of the documents returned, it was pretty thin in terms of the analysis that was conducted by the department about future need. It struck me that perhaps there wasn't a very diligent or thorough process undertaken to assess whether that land actually could be utilised for a school infrastructure purpose. Do you have anything to say about the thoroughness of that process? I think in our visit you expressed concern about the cost of acquiring land. It's expensive in Sydney. The department should be planning on long horizons. What do you say about the thoroughness of that process—

ANTHONY MANNING: I would absolutely reject any assertion that it wasn't thorough. I think, from my own selection process, we will always look at the existing schools that we already have and our ability to expand those schools to meet any need, rather than immediately thinking we're going to throw in an additional school into the mix. That process was undertaken. As you know, we've made a commitment. There's a project about to start at Picnic Point to expand the capacity of that school as part of that issue.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's a long way from—

ANTHONY MANNING: The other thing we look at is, actually, the location of the land relevant to where we think that catchment area growth is going to be. We also look at a lot of the surrounding infrastructure. I don't know how well you know that area or that site. There is actually a freeway that really runs between where we think the majority of the growth issue will be and the school. What we've found on existing schools is that becomes a very difficult barrier for students and parents to get across. That's not ideally suited for a school to suit that catchment, simply because of the size and scale of that road. So the analysis was done to look at existing school sites, in the knowledge that we've got some quite big school sites available to us. We can expand the existing schools. That is a better strategy to do to ensure that we can meet the demand in that space.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is the purchase and management of school sites a discrete area of activity in the department's budget?

ANTHONY MANNING: The purchase and management? Yes. We have funding to purchase sites as we need to. Then we will also, for some projects, include it in the budget provision for each individual project from an ETC perspective. We have an ability to acquire land, if you like, more of a medium to long term. Then we have the ability to acquire land at the time. Some of the arrangements—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Sorry. That wasn't actually my question. Is it a discrete area of activity? I'm aware that, in the past, there was a discrete kind of unit, in the department, that was buying multiple sites to make sure that you had options available in areas of development that were being unlocked. A big problem for the department was that developers would then put up a "new school being built here" sign, which would inflate the value of the land around it. Because you had multiple sites and you made a final selection, the sale of land, then, that was surplus was incredibly profitable. So, in the past, it's been an area where, by planning ahead, the department—it's more than self-funding. It's actually a profit centre for the department. So I just wanted to come up to speed with—is that system still operating?

ANTHONY MANNING: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Or has that hollow log been raided?

ANTHONY MANNING: We have a property team that is responsible for the acquisition and divestment of sites. But we do not buy multiple sites across the State, hoping to profit from the land where we may or may not put a school. We focus on the sites that we want to develop as schools and acquire those. So, no, that's not a practice. It hasn't been a practice for the duration of School Infrastructure.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can I just question that. You do have surplus sites available, where schools have not been built. Am I correct?

ANTHONY MANNING: We have a land bank available to us. Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The reason that land bank is available is because the department was keeping its options open by buying more sites than were necessary, as a prudent strategy to make sure that, depending on the way the development unfolded, you would have an appropriate site, a choice of sites that were available. It's very difficult, isn't it, to retrofit an entire school site into a new development?

ANTHONY MANNING: I am not aware of a strategy of buying more land than we need to hedge our bets in terms of whether a development might go.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So where do you think the land bank came from? Why does the department have a land bank?

ANTHONY MANNING: It would predate School Infrastructure. A lot of the land that we rely on, particularly in the growth zones, is through VPAs, so it is land that will come to us at a point in time. There has been a history where, as you say, developers have established a development and there hasn't been enough provision for schools and we have had to purchase land in the middle of that development to make that work. But that is not a practice that has occurred in the time of School Infrastructure. There are pieces of land that the department owns that I can only presume at a point in time we were expecting to deliver schools, but some of this land was acquired in the mid- to-late eighties and has never eventuated. There is one at Mollymook that we are looking at at the moment that I think was acquired in 1985. It has never been used and never been needed and we are looking at—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand, but that's the strategy that I am referring to. It not only gave options but also self-funded the whole site purchase.

ANTHONY MANNING: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It just seemed to be a sensible approach. When you talk about in the time of School Infrastructure, what period of time are you talking about?

ANTHONY MANNING: School Infrastructure is very nearly five years old.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Five years old.

ANTHONY MANNING: It is not a strategy. We would rely on—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is there an actual strategy for site purchasing?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I said before, we work with the department of planning around VPAs. We also work with Landcom around where they see developments, and us working with Landcom in concert to deliver things as part of that. So, we work with that. If we needed to for a long-term we would work with the Office of Strategic Lands to look at what land is available for us. Latterly we have also been working with NSW Health with our looking to either divest or redevelop for us to include schools as part of that process. But we certainly in the last five years have not had a—

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can I say, I think that is great that you are working with all of those people. But with respect, my question was is there an actual strategy riding these purchases? Because the past period that I am talking about was a self-funded strategy. But it sounds like you need new investment from the budget to purchase these sites, which sometimes turn out not to be adequate.

ANTHONY MANNING: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If one strategy is gone—and I appreciate that is ancient history and you sound like you are not aware of it—my question therefore is what is the strategy that you are operating by at the moment? Not who are you working with, what is the strategy for the strategic purchase of sites to make sure that the department has good options and adequate sites in areas being unlocked for development?

ANTHONY MANNING: We have a strategic land acquisition agenda. We will understand rezonings that provide us with opportunities to acquire land as part of that process. We will fundamentally work with the department of planning. We will work with the population data. We will understand where we think the next wave of developments will occur and we will get in as part of that, either as part of the rezoning exercise with the department of planning or, if needs be, with individual developers directly to acquire the land that we need. But it is very much informed by the rezoning that is happening and the dwelling forecasts that the department of planning are giving us.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Does the strategic acquisition program have a strategy?

ANTHONY MANNING: I think I have just articulated the strategy. But it is fundamentally not a strategy to buy multiple sites that we profit from.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand what it is not, but if it is a strategic land purchasing approach, I am just asking if you can give us the strategy that they are using for their strategic purposes. I am assuming a strategic investment has a strategy behind it. Is that a document that you may be able to make available to the Committee?

ANTHONY MANNING: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Manning, thank you for being with us during our site visits as well. The Committee certainly appreciated your insights. Not to speak out of school, but one of the things I remember you mentioning to us on the site visits was the pre School Infrastructure days, that you didn't really have those structures in place to effectively build the number of new schools and upgrade the schools that are being worked on at the moment. Can you outline to the Committee some of the changes that have come into place with School Infrastructure and the change in approach that School Infrastructure now takes?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, definitely. Thank you for the question. I think the Auditor-General's report identifies that in the years preceding School Infrastructure the capital that flowed through the department and the number of projects that were delivered, from a major projects perspective, were small. You could probably count them on one hand. That had been something for years and years. In fact, in the late 2000s there was an injection that was all delivered through PPPs because there was no capability to drive that across the organisation. School Infrastructure itself is modelled on Health Infrastructure. Health Infrastructure was established to deliver the health program and School Infrastructure was effectively designed as part of that program. It was an opportunity for us to develop an area of expertise around project delivery, the focus being away from simply administering contracts to actually developing an expertise in-house as to what a good school looks like, how to go about delivering it, what does good maintenance look like and how to drive those aspects.

School Infrastructure essentially was designed to be an expert climb in that space, and drive a program. Knowing full well that there were going to be multiple projects, we needed to build a supply chain. If you looked at the number of architects that are involved in designing schools, preschool infrastructure is a pretty small number. The number of builders that had experience in building schools, again, was a pretty small number. We needed to scale up pretty quickly to deliver the program of works that we had ahead of us. It was really about taking the existing capability, making sure people understood that we were the client and we were driving outcomes, and then building a supply chain around it to do that. And building the experience as we went to make sure that we—not many schools have been delivered over the last 20 years. Where are we going to get the experienced project directors and project managers to manage it? How do we make sure that we do not fall into the holes that otherwise we might have done? Where do we keep the learning and how do we drive that forward?

An example is the Chair's questions earlier around the work with the Teachers Federation for standardising a classroom, was work that hadn't been done. We didn't have that scale of investment to work our way through. The population growth coming again. The idea of how do we take a standard process and how do we speed it up? How do we find ways to condense it, so that we can be more responsive and more reactive? It wasn't just a major capital works challenge as part of the major capital works. We also found a significant increase in investment in maintenance. There was a big push into building that capability and expertise and unlocking what was already there so that we could make sure that we could respond to those things as that expectation grew, and we could continue to deliver that. It has been an interesting journey over the last four or five years. The first couple of years was really getting a sense of the size and scale of the challenge, what needed to happen to the organisation to make it work and then building that organisation pretty quickly. That has been in the midst of what has been a big push across all of New South Wales around infrastructure and making sure that we have the skills and capabilities.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I take it from what we have seen there are a few different categories, for my mind at least, as to some of the challenges that are faced. Of course we have the new growth areas. Some of the problems that we have seen on our site visits are that the projection is not necessarily lining up for new housing projections, as you have got maybe two families living in the house. The rise of granny flats in areas gives you a larger population than otherwise would have been expected from the development footprint. That is one challenge, from what we have seen, which the department has met by building new schools in and around other developing areas to accommodate for that. We have also got the challenge of schools—as we have seen more today from witnesses—in areas that are largely developed but going through a redevelopment. There is not the land available to build new schools. If you are doing a new school building project you have the interruption of the schools that currently exist. It is not as easy to do a knockdown rebuild when it comes to a school community. What are some of the things you can do in those areas to try and provide continuing education but also look for new sites that potentially could be on much smaller footprints?

ANTHONY MANNING: There are projects like Fort Street Public School where we have utilised the pop-up school that was installed for the Ultimo school program, to actually enable us to empty the school so there is no disruption whatsoever to the learning for the kids at that school. We have the site entirely to ourselves. It's a very small site and absolutely would not lend itself to both construction and educating primary school children. We have used that model a few times where we have had to take a decision to decant an entire school for the period of the redevelopment, and that has been a really effective way to do that.

I think in terms of disruption, even during construction phases, we have done a lot of work with our supply chain contractors in particular and we have some contractors who are really responsive now to schools and the needs of schools—things like the HSC and those sorts of things. We are really hardwiring that into our delivery program so we make sure that we aren't making a massive amount of noise on school sites during those sorts of periods and those sorts of processes. We are working really closely with principals, relying heavily on the experience of the asset management teams who are in and out of schools everyday to make sure that actually the programs are fully recognised that we are operating in an existing school and all the issues that go with that, all the kids that are interested in the school but the health and safety issues that go with that, and then in some cases providing opportunities for those kids who are interested in construction to actually get an insight into the school build process and how that process works. That continues to be a challenge.

We continue to work really effectively with principals, and the vast majority of our principals are very happy to see the School Infrastructure teams because they know that they will end up with something much better than they started with on the way out. We also work with School Performance on the new projects to bring principals into the process relatively early so they have a really good run-up to make sure that the school can operate day one term one as we intended to. They can build their teaching staff as part of that process as well. Then we work really closely with schools post-build to make sure that what we have built them is working in the way that we had intended it to. There are a lot of foibles in the way that designs come together, and when you actually see a school being used in anger, so to speak, you see how they actually operate it and that sometimes changes some of the aspects that we actually deliver. We can get in and tweak those things and make them work really well really successfully for the principal.

There are a lot of lessons we have learned in how we complete and handover and commission a school, how we are trying to leave as small a number of defects as we possibly can once it moves into operation and how we actually then begin to manage that process. We have a hypercare team where, with a builder, for the first two to four weeks of a brand-new school, everybody will be on site on the basis that there are teething issues that will begin to appear. At the slightest problem with the school, we will get in and fix it straight away so we can get comfortable that all those aspects are working for us. The opening of the new Meadowbank school at the beginning of the last term was part of that. The hypercare team was installed to make sure that any slight wrinkle that occurred we could resolve and get on with it as quickly as possible. There are a number of challenges with working on existing school sites and the complexities that go with that, particularly where we are planning major rebuilds. Sometimes, to be honest—

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Manning, we are starting to run out of time. Could you streamline your answers as much as possible?

ANTHONY MANNING: Sure. The only other thing I was going to talk about really was the balance of staging school projects and actually decanting schools. Murwillumbah is one where we have done a lot of work around how we might stage the development at Murwillumbah and actually worked with the school. We delayed the start of the project so the school can actually all move off to the Wollumbin school and we have the entire site available to us. We think that is a far more effective way for us to deliver and the for the school to experience that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Can I just ask one question on this because it was sort of leading into my next question? This stage one, stage two and sometimes stage three project, I know we have seen from some of our visits, like Gledswood Hills for instance, where stage one was at capacity I think within six months or the like and then stage two has been committed to and is happening now. Is there value, perhaps, in not having a staged approach and just having it all done at once? What is the drawback with that?

ANTHONY MANNING: There is a balance between how quickly we expect the second stage of the infrastructure to be used. If, as we see with some schools, it sits there for four or five years and not be used, it represents capital that we are tying up. Given the capital is finite, it actually prevents me using it in another school where we could make more of a difference. It is something we need to continually test and measure and make sure that building in two or three stages is the right thing to do, but it is a difficult balance.

The Hon. WES FANG: Obviously the prefabrication of schools has been rolled out by the New South Wales Government. How is that going to be used in the future to alleviate some of these problems with the staging that Mr Farlow has just spoken about?

ANTHONY MANNING: The modern method of construction really takes—the primary schools that we have delivered in six months are a volumetric modular approach. They come as big components and are shipped in, and almost overnight we can begin to build. We are moving to a philosophy around kit-of-parts, so that every school is designed with a standard kit of components that is predetermined. We can begin to build a model where those components are already in storage, ready to be used. They can come out to sites as individual components or they can come out as composites, which means that the design process is much shorter because we are not creating new components and new things. We have the supply chain ready to go, so I don't have long delays for procurement around those individual components. My contractors get practice at putting the same thing together over and over again. We see that as a massive opportunity.

This is really where the shared idea around standardising the classroom space is. The less they are bespoke, the more we can rely on a standard set of kit. Some of the sustainability benefits from that are really quite incredible. At the Meadowbank school—the primary school and high school—we have begun to test some of that thinking. A lot of the components we have prefabricated, including internal walls. We found that wastage, when compared to other projects, was down by a factor of 10. Plasterboard waste on other projects had been 40 tonnes—it was four. Again, I am not buying the material, I am not spending time cutting it to size and I am not spending time and money throwing it away. That is a strategy really to drive—and we think probably 75 per cent of the portfolio will lend itself to that. It also allows me to build subsequent stages incrementally. The idea is that we could build the first 500 with the admin space and then, over time, deliver four classroom pods that effectively could go in in a four-week window and begin to grow schools exactly as the master plan had intended and exactly to the design that we need to do. It's simply a matter of pulling the roof off and sticking another level on top and away we go.

Again, this is all stuff that is entirely traditional from a delivery perspective; we are just doing it in a different way. It enables us to focus on our manufacturing capability here in New South Wales to make sure we can turn these things around. We know that we can work with timber frame, concrete frame or steel frame, depending on where we go. We have the flexibility of up to three storeys to make that work. As I said before, we can still tailor the buildings to suit the architecture that they sit in. So it is an exciting opportunity for us, and the volume is key to that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Fantastic.

The CHAIR: Can I ask about the distressing example we had—I know we are going there next week, but do you have a solution for Gillieston Public School? I have to say, it was very sad and sobering for the Committee to see parents crying in desperation as to the dreadful situation they have there. At a minimum, shouldn't the school be quickly connected to the sewerage and also have an effective boundary fence instead of chicken wire?

ANTHONY MANNING: Gillieston is a really good example of a school that up until very recently has been a rural school. You can see—and we will see as we go around—the development beginning to move around the school. There is still quite a lot more development yet to happen as part of that process. But it does give us an opportunity to begin to grow that school and then look at permanent growth for that school, which is what they will need into the future. It is one of the projects that the team has been looking at in terms of capacity.

The CHAIR: Rather than looking at it, do you have solutions coming quickly? It seems like it is a desperate situation.

ANTHONY MANNING: We are able to respond—I will be with you on that day to have a look at it. It is a nice little school. You can see the history of it. I think 1858 was the year the first teacher was appointed to

that school. It is on a septic tank, partly because it is rural. There is an opportunity for us to connect to the drain as it exists, but at this stage that would require us to pump the sewage out from the school and into the drain. As the rest of the housing development comes through, there is a sewer line planned, under gravity, that we can feed to. We are looking, at the moment, at the difference between the cost of what could be \$250,000 or \$300,000 and the recurrent impact of continuing to pump sewage up and into a drain, as opposed to waiting for the rest of it to flow through, where we can begin to put in a much cheaper and a much more long-term, safer solution. The septic tank that we have—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, did you just say that the solution is going to cost \$300,000?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. If we have to put a pump in to pump sewage uphill into an existing drain, yes, absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Once off, \$300,000?

ANTHONY MANNING: Plus all the recurrent costs of maintaining the pump and all the—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How much are the current recurrent costs?

ANTHONY MANNING: It's emptying a septic tank once a week. I'll have that information when we go there, but very minimal compared to that, and the risk of the pump breaking down and all the issues that go with it. We have plans to do that, and the school has increased the pumping out of the septic tanks. It was once a fortnight; it's now once a week. You'll hear from the school that a lot of the issues have gone as part of pumping the tank out more often.

The CHAIR: We'll have a look at that.

ANTHONY MANNING: We do have options, but we need to have a look at what's the best value for money.

The CHAIR: Just to get it on the record, how does School Infrastructure respond to the comment of the Auditor-General that you focus too much on delivering existing projects, election commitments and other Government announcements and not enough on an evidence-based cost-benefit analysis framework for school infrastructure?

ANTHONY MANNING: The Audit Office report focused on 2017-18 where, as you may remember, we had a significant commitment for Government to move projects through. The cost-benefit analysis stuff is something that we have been working on with Treasury to continue to refine that process. We have a good process with Treasury, and we will continue to develop that out so we can get the best cost-benefit analysis that we can. The Audit Office called that issue out and we're working our way through that. But the process now is very different; the business case is, and I think the Audit Office also called it out. The process improvement since that original time is significant.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think earlier you suggested that the department wasn't selling land for profit. What, then, is being done at the site that the department owns at Lidcombe South? There's a proposal for rezoning and subdividing an education site. That's with Cumberland council for consultation, and it's mentioned in their submission.

ANTHONY MANNING: I'd have to take that specific example on notice, but I know that we're looking at school infrastructure in that space and looking to reserve and retain land for the purposes that we need it for.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The whole site could be used for a school, but you're only reserving a small portion. It is intended the rest of the land will be sold for private dwellings.

ANTHONY MANNING: But my understanding is we're retaining sufficient land in order to make sure we can still deliver a school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How big is the school?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I say, I don't have that data at hand.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If you get it wrong in terms of your projections for growth in demand, where's the capacity to fix the issue once the land has been alienated from the Crown?

The Hon. WES FANG: They don't get things wrong.

ANTHONY MANNING: Happy to take that specific issue on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: On notice, can you advise what the estimated enrolments for the school site will be and when that school is likely to come online? How far off is the school?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I said, I'll take that specific example on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We've done a number of SO52s, one of which uncovered a document that showed that a number of schools were rated by your department as being in critical need, serious need or urgent need. What do each of those criteria mean?

ANTHONY MANNING: They're a function for us to look at the work that we need to do to bring an investment decision to Government—so beginning to look at where we see capacity issues are coming, where we think that sits and the work that we need to do. Some of them will be classified because we know we don't have sites yet, and so we need internally to get our skates on and get land identified so that when we're in a position to need those schools, we can have done the work in order to go to Government for an investment decision. A lot of that refers to the urgency of the pre-planning work that we need to do to shape advice to Government around the investments that need to be made.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What's the criteria for something being put in as a band 1 critical need?

ANTHONY MANNING: I think, from memory, it's where we're expecting to see capacity needs in the next four or five years.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the next four or five years you will need it. Do you think Box Hill and Norwest will not be needed for another four to five years?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, it's within the next four to five years. I think, from memory, that document is a snapshot in time. The work we do as part of the pre-planning is then to get a sense of whether, actually, a new school is the solution or whether there are existing facilities that can assist us with that, and then what do we need to do to establish a new facility. In some of those places we may have land available through a VPA, or we may need to acquire land directly and need to get that process underway. If we are then to advise government about an infrastructure investment for a school, I need to do it on the back of understanding what site I've got, what intricacies go with that, so traffic issues and a range of other bits and pieces. It gives us a sense of the urgency that we need to move but then to provide advice to government around investment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When it is rejected, as these six were, does that mean that the work stops?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, it means that the pre-planning work continues from our perspective. We need to continue to firm up the strategy and make sure that we can provide government with advice about what that investment looks like.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are saying that the Government has rejected the proposal that you've made or the Government is rejecting the fact there is a critical need—

ANTHONY MANNING: I'm not saying the Government is rejecting anything at all. I'm saying that's a process for us to do the pre-planning work that we need to do to inform Treasury and the like about the investments that we need. For those projects there's a fair amount of work for us to do to make sure we've got the right scope and the right budget to go to government for.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When this says, "Band 1 critical need" what's the basis for making that assessment?

ANTHONY MANNING: It'll be a look at the population projection and where we think those population projections are beginning to go beyond the capacity of the infrastructure we have to serve that. So there are catchment boundary pieces that we can do. There are existing schools that we can upgrade. There may be existing schools that are under-utilised and then we can bring that on stream or there may be land that we need to acquire in order to put an investment together. So that gives us an indication of the work that we need to do to get it onto Government's radar from an investment perspective.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Does every project get a banned rating?

ANTHONY MANNING: No. We just look at kind of what we think is projected over the next four or five years because some land acquisition can be quite a lengthy process. We need to get a sense of where that's at and where our challenges are. Some we'll have land available for and some we won't have land immediately available for and that begins to inform the teams what aspect of work we need to start.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay this is just purely informing yourselves internally? My understanding was that this was a document that was put forward by School Infrastructure NSW saying, "These are the projects that should be funded" and the Government rejected them.

ANTHONY MANNING: The document gives us an indication of what we need. We would provide that to government so that they are clear about what we think the investment strategy needs to be. But it doesn't mean they would have business cases prepared ready to go for government to make those investment decisions. That's a process that we roll through. The planning process really is that long-term look at where we see population projection, where we see that we are beginning to see a gap in the supply and the demand, what we already have on hand that we can do to resolve that and some of that might actually ameliorate it in the short or medium term but from the long-term perspective we still need to deliver something. That gives us a sense of the urgency for any land acquisition. We would then do the planning work around what do we think the capital investment would need to be in that space, making sure that we're getting the most efficient route of that. That then gives us an ability to provide advice already to government as part of a budget process about what commitments need to be made by government at a point in time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I ask you about the new primary school in the Tallawong precinct which again was the subject of an SO52. In one of the documents that was provided to us—and I am happy to give you a copy if you need it—the Assistant Project Director, Infrastructure Delivery stated:

The budget breakdown states an overrun under construction of \$500k even though in reality it is closer to \$7M ... I can simply get rid of this by decreasing the estimate under construction by the required amount to flush the budget and FEC as well as increasing estimate in other areas where there is a surplus (consultant and authorities).

Can you explain why this kind of fiddling with the budget is occurring within your organisation?

ANTHONY MANNING: The conversation between individuals in the organisation, I can't comment on. We're a big organisation. We've got a range of people who have various views. But the budget process, and any amendment to the budget process, can only be done by me. Certainly none of that conversation got to me in terms of a request to amend budgets or move any money around. Budgets that we give our projects are the budgets we work through. The project management system we have allows them to manage those budgets. Where they forecast an overrun, I am the only one that has delegation to authorise an overrun. We'd sit down with our project team and understand what we think that overrun is about and why, and what we can do as part of our process to make sure we don't have an overrun. With a project like Tallawong, there are some complexities around the delivery of the enabling infrastructure for that site. If you're familiar with that site, there are no roads to it, there are no services to it, and there's no sewerage to it, or any of those bits and pieces. So that's a process that we're working through with Landcom, because they own the adjacent sites, and we see that being developed out as a single piece. That's a piece of work we need to work our way through. There may genuinely be a contribution we need to make to those roads, and that's something that we'll work our way through as part of the portfolio.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Part of the solution, supposedly, to the demountables that are all over Schofields public and Riverbank public is the construction of Tallawong. Another quote from the senior project director of strategic development states:

It's obvious that the planning people have planned nothing. Site constraints have not been established at any time. The site doesn't really look suitable for the purpose.

ANTHONY MANNING: You have one individual's view; it's not the organisation's view. It's certainly inaccurate that Planning have done nothing, because we have spent a lot of time with Landcom working out how the site functions, how it works and how that enabling infrastructure would be delivered. We're confident about how that site would develop out. I cannot account for one individual's view in an email between colleagues, but I can assure you that only I have the ability to amend the budget for Tallawong.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You can provide this on notice, but what is the current expenditure?

ANTHONY MANNING: I would have to tell you on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that an overrun? Have you authorised an overrun?

ANTHONY MANNING: I can deal with that. I haven't authorised an overrun.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The assistant project director of infrastructure delivery says:

The cost manager has internally advised to keep the FEC to the \$60M or whatever the design reflects at the moment... no point including the off-site infrastructure as this will just take us well over budget.

So you're saying that there is currently no planned expenditure on offsite infrastructure?

ANTHONY MANNING: We quite often have expenditure on offsite infrastructure. There was an old methodology that offsite infrastructure didn't get included in the ETC for projects, but that's not a practice we operate. The ETC for projects includes any offsite infrastructure. Quite often we'll deliver roads for councils and a whole range of other things as part of a school. Anything that's beyond our site boundary is referred to as "offsite

infrastructure". Quite often it will be electrical connections, sewer connections or road intersection upgrade things. They are all included in the ETC. In the old practice they were separately included as part of minor works, but they are now all included within the ETC and accounted for in the final estimate cost.

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, I note the time.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There's another minute to go.

The Hon. WES FANG: I know, but I think the Chair might have some things he needs to address.

The CHAIR: Is there one last question to Mr Manning?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have one last question. I have many more, but I will limit them to one. I want to ask you about the new primary school for South Nowra and Worrigee. There was an election commitment made for a new school in the region, but the business case adviser says there is no population-driven service need. Is that accurate?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, that's not accurate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They also say:

The project team seeks to capture economic and financial benefits of divesting existing schools in the business case.

ANTHONY MANNING: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What existing schools are you investigating for divestment?

ANTHONY MANNING: I don't know. I would have to come back to you on notice. But there is no school to divest.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask a question on notice, if possible? There is a range of issues raised in the Concord High School P&C submission. Can we get a detailed response on what's being done to address the specific issues? There are issues with toilet blocks—

ANTHONY MANNING: We've met with the P&C—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: On notice—

The Hon. WES FANG: I suggest that it's a very broad question that runs the risk of an answer being provided on notice that does not quite cover the detail that you want. It's probably a question that you can put on notice to Mr Manning for a response later. You can address the points you want to. You can't just say, "Can you address this submission?", because the submission is how many pages. Any number of points could need to be covered.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If there are subsequent questions that I have after the response, I will put them on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: You can put them on—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There is a whole range of very specific issues—

The Hon. WES FANG: And I think you should detail them to Mr Manning instead of just asking him to respond—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is not up to you to tell me how to ask my questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: Well, I am raising a point of order. I am saying that I don't think it is appropriate to ask a question that is as broad-ranging as, "Can you address this submission?"

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Cite the standing order that says I can't ask that question.

The CHAIR: It has gone on notice. You are entitled to ask the question for the agency to address—

The Hon. WES FANG: I would say procedural fairness, actually, because I think it is procedurally fair to ask specifics.

The CHAIR: Order! I think it is entirely appropriate to ask the agency to address as best it can the issues in the submission. If the member is unhappy with the response, he can ask in greater detail. Given we inspected the site and we have had a pretty good relationship in trying to solve problems, I do not think it is unreasonable to do that. Furthermore on notice, Mr Manning, could you report back to us on the different cost-benefit options for that sewerage solution at Gillieston? Thanks. That will help us next week, as well, when we are up there. We

are out of time. Thanks again, Mr Manning, for your comprehensive assistance to the Committee. Mr Downie, you had an easier afternoon. Mr Manning, you owe him a beer.

ANTHONY MANNING: I owe Glenn more beers than I can count, to be fair, in terms of Glenn's role in the organisation.

The CHAIR: We have some documents that have been formally tabled: a performance audit and the visit recap. Thanks again for your assistance and your time this afternoon.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:18.