REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

TEACHER SHORTAGES AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CORRECTED

At Rydges Norwest (Heritage Room), Norwest, New South Wales, on Thursday 2 February 2023

The Committee met at 10:45.

PRESENT

The Hon. Wes Fang (Acting Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Scott Farlow
The Hon. Courtney Houssos
The Hon. Aileen MacDonald

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome to the second and final public hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 3 inquiry into teacher shortages and education outcomes in New South Wales. I acknowledge the Dharug people, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who will be joining us today. Today the Committee will be hearing from representatives from the Hawkesbury Teachers Association, the Independent Education Union and the Marsden Park Public School P&C, as well as the NSW Department of Education. We will also hear from Ms Carla Wilshire and Ms Jocelyn Brewer.

Before we commence, I would like to make some brief comments about the procedure for today's hearing. Today's hearing 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, the House has authorised the filming, broadcasting and photography of Committee proceedings by representatives of media organisations from any position in the room and by any member of the public from any position in the audience. Any person filming or photographing proceedings must take responsibility for the properties of that material. This is detailed in the broadcasting resolution, a copy of which is available from the secretariat.

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 inquiry's terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily.

All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. Due to the short time frame for this inquiry, there is insufficient time for the usual questions on notice period. However, the Committee has resolved that witnesses can provide transcript corrections, clarifications to evidence and additional information within 24 hours of their receipt of the transcript. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they may do so through the Committee staff. With regard to the audibility of today's hearing, I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. Finally, would everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

Ms ROSCHELLE MORWOOD, President, Hawkesbury Teachers Association, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement if you'd like and, if so, if you could just keep it short and no more than a couple of minutes.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Sure. Currently I teach in the Hawkesbury region. I have been a teacher since 2012 in public schools only. My passion is for public education. I love working with students, and I've done so as a teacher and an assistant principal, and most recently as a librarian. I work in the Hawkesbury, which is an area that has gone through an awful lot over the past couple of years, much the same as everybody else with COVID but also with fires, floods and some more floods. I teach and live on Dharug and Gundungurra country, which I'm very proud of and hope that we can work in a very reconciliatory fashion. But I hope that I can give you some insight today about what it's like being a teacher in public schools and what has changed about the workload and how we're being affected by the teacher shortage on the ground level.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We might start where you just finished off, which is to give us an insight into what it's like to be a teacher today. You said that you've been a teacher for nearly a decade in our public schools. Do you think that it's getting better or is it getting worse?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: That's a really interesting question because every day I ask myself the same thing. When I started as a teacher, and when you're a baby teacher, there is a significant workload. You've got a lot to learn. You come fresh out of university. You've not been on your own with a class before, and you have to work it out with the support of your colleagues, sometimes with the help of students when they tell you that you've got something right or you didn't get something right. Every year after that first one I kept telling myself, "It's going to be easier this year because I'm more experienced. I know more. I've been doing this job. I'm good at this job. It should get easier." But it doesn't. I work more hours I think than I ever have. I feel like I'm always learning. I'm never getting a chance to stop that learning. Professional learning is ongoing as a teacher, and that's always going to be the case. But I feel like a lot of the time, as teaching pedagogy changes, as curriculum changes, we have to learn how to be a teacher all over again, and again, and again, so that learning hasn't been stopped and the workload keeps up with it.

Schools are always very busy places. We want them to be busy places because we want them to have everything that encompasses what we want out of a student. We've got to look at their social, behavioural and educational outcomes. It's not just a simple case of whether they can read and write and work their numeracy. It's making sure that they have the skills to become a good human as they grow up. My workload increased significantly, and I was working as an assistant principal in western Sydney, when my family circumstances changed dramatically and two fostered children came into my family. That wasn't possible to have two extra kids in my house and maintain my role as an assistant principal, so I did step down from that knowing that I knew how to be a teacher. I would just go back to being a teacher. As an assistant principal, you are a teacher; you're in the classroom all the time.

But even as a full-time teacher, I found that extraordinarily difficult, finding that balance between my home and my work where I could actually have time for my family as well, because our official hours from 8.30 to three o'clock is when we belong to the students, but then I still have to make sure that I get my programming done. I have to make sure that I get my annotations done. I have to make sure that I get the marking done, the reports done, the individual learning plans done, and that's all coming outside of work hours. You do get some release time during school hours, but it's two hours a week, and I could spend two hours a week just on one child's issue if I need to. It could have been a disruption on the playground that I need to deal with. I might need to test a student individually, and that's the time in which I can do it. I might need to make a parent phone call, and that can sometimes take 40 minutes. So two hours doesn't give me a whole lot of time to do anything in that administrative side, which has to be done. It's required. To be a teacher, you must be accountable for it as well, and we don't begrudge that at all because if you don't plan for your class, there's a real issue there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and you're talking about constantly learning and constantly striving. That's really what we want to encourage our kids to do. It's what we try to do in our professional lives as well. But do you get the sense that in addition to that kind of constant learning there has been an additional workload placed on top of you?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What has been the cause of that?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: With the introduction of the NCCD, the National Consistent Collection of Data on students with disability, there was a big shift in the kind of documentation that we had to carry. We had to have a lot more annotations and evidence of adjustments that we made for students. I adjust for students on the

fly all the time in class. If I know that a student's not quite making the outcome, they're not understanding me, I'll change the way I explain it to them or I'll change the question that I give to them. Sometimes that'll just be, grab a whiteboard and give them a new question written down in front of them. Let's try this one, or sit with them for a little bit or give some extension work to another child. They're all common practice adjustments for students. Or it could be I put a pencil grip on someone's pencil or I sit them in a different spot in the class so that they can see the board better. They all have to be documented, and to get to the level of being included on the NCCD, you have to have at least 10 weeks of evidence within your program showing what that adjustment is written down.

That was the first step, and then any student that you do have a degree of adjustment for, you have to create an individual education plan. Previously, individual education plans were looked after by our learning support team or external people would be drawn upon. I haven't seen them in a very long time. They don't really seem to exist anymore. We used to be able to bring in an expert. They'd come and spend some time in your classroom observing you, observing the student, how you work with them, what adjustments might suit them, and then help you write that plan and implement those adjustments.

In addition to having the plan, you also need to communicate that with the parents, so there's a separate meeting you need to make. You also have to have review meetings and then a resolution meeting at the end of the year, determine whether or not that plan has been effective, create some new goals, see whether they still need the plan. That's all new—and by "new" I mean it's obviously several years old but it's not something that I used to have to do. Even just that change created hours upon hours of documentation.

The same goes for things like collection of data. My school was involved in a program called the EA4S, Early Action for Success, which is a program that has stopped now. As part of that, we had to assess our students against a very large checklist called the learning progressions. We had literacy progressions and numeracy progressions, and they were quite large. They still do exist now and some schools are still definitely using them. It's kind of a way to make sure that you can see a child's progress from the start of the learning through to where we want to get them to be towards the end. But the checklist itself is extensive, and you don't have time while you're working with the students to be plotting that data onto the checklist. You might be able to have some paper on the fly. Some teachers had iPads; I wasn't one of those. The school that I was working with didn't have them anyway, so it meant that you would go home and sit there with their assessments.

Part of our teaching practice is to go through the assessments anyway and find out what the kids do and don't know. But then we had to marry up the assessments that we had based on the outcomes of the syllabus and then work out how did that translate into the progressions documents. Where do I need to take the data that the children have and say, "Okay, well, I know that these are the kids that can't subtract and trade over the decade"? I will take that information and then go over to my checklists and make sure that I put that in or put it straight into the computer, because there is a program that the department provides you to put all that in. It can be helpful, but it can also be challenging. You can see it over time but with not every student in every school doing the same progressions, because we didn't have time or other schools won't adopt it. You would want to see the student progress, but we never had that complete data. It's a lot of data that we're entering and not seeing that great a benefit from. I think it had some real merit; we just needed more time to do it—so things like that.

We have more burdens in workload because the curriculum has changed. When I first started teaching, I came in on what was the new curriculum then in 2012. While I was at uni, I had had the choice to work through assignments on the old curriculum or the new curriculum. I said, "Well, there's no way I'm looking at the old curriculum." We came in with the new curriculum and we had a lot of professional learning in my first couple of years about, "Okay, how do we implement the English one? Let's trial it through the year, let's see what we get and let's work together as staff." Teachers are really good at that; they collaborate very well. We have to; otherwise, we're never going to get through it all. The following year we started working on the maths one, and then we had geography and history and science as they rolled through—PDHPE. With each one we were like, "Okay, we'll get our heads around this one; we'll get our heads around this one; we'll get our heads around this one." This year we now have the mandatory English syllabus, and the maths syllabus coming through as well, to change the literacy and numeracy. That is, again, another challenge of taking our program and saying, "Well, is this still relevant? Is it not? Let's sit down and take some time."

The time allocated, really, to teachers to sit together within work hours is four days a year. That's what we get to have our professional learning, which is difficult because there is so much more professional learning we also have to do. The mandatory things I always used to have to do were child protection, which is fantastic, and we would have to do our CPR. But we've also got that code of conduct, fraud and corruption training. There is training for a new Indigenous component that's come through. We have got the world's longest list of training, to be honest. It's quite extensive. If that's our mandatory training when we have only got the four days in which to get through it, there isn't a lot of time left to do our professional learning. We do that outside of school hours, and we study at home.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is a bit of a basic question, and excuse my ignorance, but an individual learning plan only needs to be done for a child who has a learning difficulty or a special needs child. Is that right, or is it for all children?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Or they need extension, as well, so if they have a significant difference from the class. If you know you're making a significant adjustment and you think the parents need to be aware of it, if you know that they're quite limited—we use the A, B, C, D, E scale, so if we know that they're very likely going to get an E or they're already at an E level, we would involve the parents and create a plan. But the same goes if they're in that A or B level and you think they could push up to an A. We would create that plan to help make sure that we are documenting their extensions as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's very helpful, thank you. There are lots of different educational resources out there now, and I know AERO has been commissioning a lot. Have you used any of those kinds of resources? Have you found any of them to be helpful?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: A little bit. Part of it is having the time to go through it, which I don't really do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Would it be helpful, then, if the school said, "This is a good educational resource for you to use"?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Sometimes, absolutely. For my school at the moment, we've got a particular maths resource that we're very happy with and we're trying to implement across our school to make sure that our kids are really getting into hands-on mathematics learning—using dice, using counters, solving real-world problems in maths. We're quite enjoying it, but it is more time that we've had to find to take our teachers through that. As you're programming your units of work and you think about your students, the ones that are in front of you and the ones I might have this year are not the same as the kids that I had last year. What they already know is different. What they're going to need to know to get to the end point is the same, but how they get there might be different. I might have different behaviours in the class that I need to accommodate as well. Different personalities—that can make a big difference to my class.

Every time that I sit down and program a unit—so, for instance, if I'm sitting there doing a maths unit on whole number and I want to know where are the kids at and do they know their place value—I'll do a pre-assessment on that particular group of kids and then take it from there. I could pick up the program from last year and plonk it straight on, but it won't suit my new kids perfectly. I'll make sure I do a pre-assessment, find out where that particular cohort of students are at and then program accordingly. I might pick some bits from there, but I also might pick it from a whole bunch of other places and think, "This is a good activity that suits that part that they don't know. This is a good activity that this particular group might find fun." One year I had everything in my classroom basically rugby league themed, because that's what the cohort of kids that I was teaching—about the only thing they were interested in was football. I had to take whatever resources I had and completely change them to be football oriented.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I love your innovation and adaptation, and I think that's really important. One thing that I'm really interested in is finding a way to allow teachers time to teach and providing them with the resources so that it's then just about them focusing on the kids, on their learning and on their progression, rather than having to worry about the periphery.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Definitely, and this is something that I have brought along for all of you, if you would like a copy. This is what my typical weekly timetable would look like.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You're giving me flashbacks to the lockdown—watch out!

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: I know, it is a bit lockdown. But it's a bit of a juggling act when you're trying to fit everything into the day at school. We have a certain percentage of time that we have for each key learning area, but we've also got to get our school activities in. We'll have our little assemblies where we hand out our awards and we talk about school rules and values, and then we also have our sport time. We're trying to get 150 minutes of physical activity into the kids every week. That's mandated, so 150 minutes of teaching is straight out there on physical activity unless we can integrate it into something else. We might at the same time be doing maths work and multiplication drills while we're jumping, or anything that we can do to get the kids physical so we can meet our time requirements but also get them knowledge.

We've got to fit in all of—this particular year I had a group of kids that were really struggling with their sentence structure. In this term 4 we just nailed in on sentence structure quite a few times during the week, which in another cohort I wouldn't. You really have to create these timetables based on what your kids' needs are and what's going on in the school. My two hours of RFF are built in here. For my class that was first thing on Tuesday

morning and first thing Thursday morning, so another teacher would come in and teach my class during that time. It was fantastic that I got those two hours, but there's not a lot you can get done in two hours, particularly if you've had a duty on in the morning before that and a child's had an issue. Sometimes—kids are kids; they have squabbles on the playground. It might take you 15 or 20 minutes of class time to sort out these two children and why they were having an issue.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me an estimation of how much teaching time during a week you would lose to things like disruptive behaviour on the playground?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: How long is a piece of string? It depends on the kids and the space they have available. I've taught at a few schools and I've found that there are more issues in schools where there is less space. Sometimes you have to say to the kids, "Alright, we're going to go in and we're going to start our lesson," and you might have every single kid just sit down and drop everything and read—"For 10 minutes you guys are going to drop everything and read, but I can't teach you right now because I've got to deal with these two children who are still having a bit of a blue between each other. We need to sort that out before we can move on." It might be a case of sending the kids and saying, "Okay, I'd like you to come and sit with the teacher next door, and you come and sit here. In five minutes' time, once I've got the lesson going and everyone's on their work, I'm going to come back and get you so that we can deal with it." If you don't deal with it at the time, you've lost your opportunity and your teaching opportunity for the kids.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I want to go back to that point on the IEPs, where you said that often it's just the teacher and the parents developing that IEP without any support officer. I've got a lot of experience with IEPs with my own children. I know that it is during those processes, sitting with the learning support people, that we really hone into exactly how we get the most out of the individual child, and also how they are the least disruptive.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Absolutely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: For instance, if there's flapping behaviour or if a child is getting overwhelmed by noise, obviously there are tricks as to how you can address that. It concerns me that there's not that experienced person there who knows about children.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: It very much depends on the school. Most schools do have a learning support teacher; it depends on the size of the school. For the Hawkesbury, we have a lot of small schools that don't have their own learning support teachers. It's a very limited pool of people who you can draw upon from the Nirimba office, which is where we feed from, to come out to your school.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So these IEPs are being developed without SLSOs then and no kind of other—

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Usually, we wouldn't have an SLSO, unless they're someone who the child is very attached to or works very extensively with the child. But we also can't guarantee that one SLSO will be working with that student throughout the year or from year to year.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is a massive onus to put on a teacher, I can imagine, especially a graduate teacher who is coming in who has not had the experience of dealing with children who are a bit different.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Definitely. In the case of our learning support teacher—we do have a learning support teacher at my school—she spends more of her time with those beginning teachers and the teachers who haven't got as much experience with it so that they can get through that process. But you might have four or five in your class of 30 who need those plans, sometimes more. So getting through all the parent meetings that go with that takes a lot of time and scheduling and making sure that we can get them either before school, after school or during the day. Sometimes parents are willing to engage in that process, sometimes they're not. I'm very happy when they are because you learn so much more about the child and what strategies work for their parents at home that you can adapt into the classroom.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It strikes me—it's probably just obvious—that if you've got that specialist support at the beginning, where somebody is able to sit with the teacher, the child and the parents and say, "This is how you get the best out of this child," that would then save a lot of time in disruptions and all the rest of it that you get when someone isn't understood and having their behaviour managed properly.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Definitely, yes. Sometimes it comes from the other direction too, if the teacher has identified that there are things going on that the parents might not know about. So you also have to be trained in having those sensitive conversations with parents. They're not easy conversations sometimes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask about maintenance of accreditation—this 100 hours: 50 for the teacher identified, 50 for registered. Have you done your 50 hours of registered accredited hours?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Not on my current cycle. It is a five-year cycle, so I have gone through one already. I didn't find that too difficult because I was involved in something called the—it was basically a leadership initiative from the department. It was a very helpful leadership initiative. It was an aspiring leaders' program, and I got a lot of registered hours through that program. We do get our registered hours through registered courses, but there has been some confusion over the past 12 months about what's a registered course and what's not a registered course. There were changes about how courses could become registered. NESA did attempt to address that with a credit of registered hours to teachers, and there was a credit to teachers to recognise the learning effort we all had to go through during the COVID lockdowns.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How much was that? How many hours?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: I think it was about 20, but I would have to check that. With the accreditation cycle, in theory we have 100 hours that we have to gather and we have four staff development days. Those four staff development days do add up to 20 hours, which does come to your 100 hours over the five years. The difficulty is that if you're a part-time teacher, you might not be at every single one of those staff development days but you are still required to get your certain amount of hours. You can get extensions from NESA to your accreditation time if you are part-time, but it doesn't always marry up properly. The professional learning that you get at your school may not necessarily all be registered.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think that's where I'm getting to. In your recent experience, have the staff development days been dedicated to professional development that is registered?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: At the moment we're doing non-registered professional development more so. All of our mandatory stuff I'm hoping is registered, because the department has said that we need to do it and it's provided by the department.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This is the child protection and the code of conduct. None of that is registered; that's been established.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Then it becomes difficult because so much of your time is dedicated to the mandatory accreditation, the mandatory professional learning from the department. Some schools are very good and will very much seek out registered accreditation. If you are concerned about it, you go to your principal and say, "I'm short hours; I need help. What professional learning can I do?" That's problematic in itself because you're seeking professional learning not necessarily because you have a need in your classroom for your students but you have a need for your registration. So it's not necessarily the professional learning that you need, it's the professional learning that you have to get but it's what you can find.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have you found that you have to pay out of your own pocket for your professional learning to meet your hours?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: I haven't. I know other teachers who have. I've just been very lucky, I think, in that I volunteer for an awful lot of stuff.

The ACTING CHAIR: I want to explore some of what you said in the first answer you gave around what your work looks like. The first thing I would say is that when you become a foster parent to two children, that's an amazing thing. I think we all would say thank you to you for doing that because I think that's really important and not enough people do that. So on the first hand I would say congratulations, well done and thank you for that. When you were speaking about being an assistant principal and the family impact that it was having, particularly with having two more children coming into your family and your life, it meant that you moved from that more senior position into a teaching role to relieve some of that. I remember you said that afterwards that still had an impact on the difficulties that you were having with trying to make everything work, the home-life balance.

From one perspective I'm looking at that and thinking New South Wales education is such a large entity that it does allow people to transition between more demanding and less demanding roles when they have impacts on their personal circumstances, like having family coming in. So that provides that flexibility for people to have that movement. But, in the circumstances you had, where you were moving into just a teaching role from being assistant principal, what more would you have liked to have seen New South Wales education do to assist you in that circumstance? What would someone who was outside the education system, say, working in another role—perhaps another frontline role like nursing or in the private sector, say, working in a boutique location or a hospitality role—how would something that their employer would offer be different to what is expected of you in that circumstance?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: My circumstances were very different. You do have the opportunity within a department, particular now because there is such a teacher shortage, to move. When I first started teaching, getting a temporary contract was difficult, let alone getting a permanent job. The ultimate epitome of everything

you tried for was to get permanency. And it was competitive. If you wanted a temporary job, you would compete with other people. You would make sure you are the best. You would put in an expression of interest. You would make sure that you apply. You would fight to keep your job.

My school was cold-calling people the week before school started, down on the casual list, saying, "Are you available to teach this term? Are you available to teach? We have a class—we have no teacher. Are you available?" There's a lot more opportunity to move around because there are a lot more spaces at the moment. I was very lucky, in that sense, that it was timing, more than anything. Also that, for me, I didn't have to have that financial burden. I wasn't dependent on my assistant principal income, which is a very lucky and fortunate situation to be in. A lot of people don't have that. My hours went from—as an assistant principal I was working 12-hour days, plus more on weekends. If I got into school after seven o'clock in the morning, it was like, "Oh, Roschelle's late. Where is she? What's going on?" That's not ideal. Nobody should be working that hard.

In comparison to the private sector—and I have worked in the private sector before. I did have a life before being a teacher, which is very strange and distant now. When I left work and I got on the train to go home and I left the city, I left work. It was in the city, and I was on my way home. I left it all there. I didn't bring it with me. I didn't pull out my laptop when I got home unless it was for my own enjoyment—something I wanted to research, something I was studying, or I just wanted to watch some TV. I don't see, in teaching, that you get that opportunity to just leave your work at work and come home.

When you are preparing for your little people, even when you have a program document—I wonder if I have one here? We create our program documents with the best of intentions. Sometimes my program documents just have written on them, "That didn't work," and I have to go back that night and try again, and write a whole new lesson, because the one I wrote did not suit my students and it didn't work for us in the classroom. I learnt that was no good. It worked on last year's lot; it was no good for this year's lot. That night I will go home, I will create a whole new lesson, I will make sure I have the resources created for it. I will be cutting, there will be pasting, there will be laminating, there will be clipping things on the computer.

I want to make things as engaging as I can for my kids. There comes a point where you know that you can still do things to make it better—you have to cut yourself off and say, "This is at the good-enough point, because now I need sleep. I need to give my children dinner. I need to give them baths. They need bed. We need storytime." Sometimes I will go back to it after that, until I need to go to bed, because when is enough? When is a lesson good enough? That's a real question for all teachers. When is it enough, and when do we say, "This is the best that I can possibly put together for these kids," because that's what we want. We want to put together the best lessons we can, for the best learning possible for kids. I'd say it's very different from the private sector job I've had, because I don't just work there: I live being a teacher.

The ACTING CHAIR: I know, certainly, in some of the other roles I've had outside of the one that I have now, there are some where I've perhaps worked and then walked away and not thought about it until I've had to go back. I know that for many of us now there are other roles that we do that are much more immersive into our lives. I think we all have that challenge of where we cut it off and prioritise work and family time. What is the balance between the perfection that you clearly like to have—I can see it in the way that you articulate your responses—versus, like your question says, what is enough? How do you find that balance?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Trial and error. Experience. You get better at it as you go through being a teacher. I mean, there are still times now where I will be like, "Okay, I've got year 6 tomorrow. Last week's lesson didn't work. I've been straining my brain all week. I've just got nothing. All right, let's see." You might find some resources on the internet. You find some resources you've used before. You go through the library and find something new. The "enough" is when you feel like you're getting somewhere with the kids—when you feel like their learning is progressing. Sometimes that can be more challenging than other times. There are so many things going on in schools that are beyond the learning. I don't know if anybody has brought this to your attention, but a big problem for schools right now is vapes. We spend a lot of time—what would have been a literacy lesson, but we've had a vape issue in the past week, more than—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is this primary school?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Primary school—where several kids have brought vapes to school. Instead of doing a literacy lesson, we'll actually be having a lesson on smoking and vaping and the dangers of that, because the need for our students is actually more important for their wellbeing to be healthy and to understand that this is not a great thing to do, than for me to teach them about a particular text that I had planned. That's a real juggling act for everybody. There are times when I have actually abandoned my lesson and given my kids a lesson on the importance of sleep—what not having sleep does to our body—because the kids are coming to school so tired because they've been up gaming the night before.

Obviously, their parents may not know that they're gaming. Kids are very good at taking their devices to bed with them and waiting until their parents go to sleep. They tell us, which is wonderful, but like, "Okay, we might need to have a discussion with mum and dad." It means that we need to teach these children, as they get older, particularly as they get into year 5 and 6 and they are heading towards high school, that you have to be a bit more involved in regulating yourself and making sure you get sleep, or that you get water, or that you don't touch a vape.

The ACTING CHAIR: I think that's probably the impact you have on their lives—that you're obviously important to them and a role model, in effect. You are that person to them that they feel like they can share it with you. I think that's important, for the students to have that in their lives. That is important.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just on that, I think sometimes that there's criticism—and we heard some criticism yesterday from the Chair, who is not here today—about the idea of there being a lot of teachers' work being focused on things that are not strict academics and that somehow this is a waste of teachers' time. But if you're trying to get the best, academically, out of your children, then I guess you do need to talk about things like gaming and vapes and the amount of sleep.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: Absolutely—and it is actually part of the syllabus. It's in the PDHPE syllabus, teaching the kids about healthy living and healthy lifestyles. Smoking is identified within the syllabus as being an issue. Screen time is identified as an issue. They are not things that we're pulling out of nowhere. I guess the PDHPE syllabus actually has a lot of these life outcomes in it that don't get as much attention because we are very focused on literacy and numeracy—and we will try to find ways of incorporating literacy and numeracy into those lessons. You know, we might write a text about that particular thing. Obviously, that text will get marked, they'll get feedback, so we're using our skills, we're upskilling ourselves in those literacy outcomes, but the value of the health outcome is really important.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think we're too focused on literacy and numeracy in the system?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: I think literacy and numeracy are important, but we also need to have time for other things. I really value giving the kids time for drama and dance and music and creativity, because there's so much more that they can find to express themselves. We've got 13 years of school to get there. It's a long journey, and I like to tell teachers that it's not a sprint. We are here on a marathon, and we've got to get these kids right through the whole journey. At the end of that journey, they're expected to either head off into university or TAFE or some sort of other vocational education, or enter the workforce, and we want them to be complete humans when they get there. We don't want them to be partially formed humans. If you look at the values for public education, they very much are about the whole child.

The ACTING CHAIR: Ms MacDonald had a question. I was just going to allow her—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just ask a quick follow-up?

The ACTING CHAIR: What if I said no? Go on.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How many hours are mandated for art and music?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: It's the same as the geography/history components, the same as the PDH component and the same as science. In theory, we're trying to get them to about two hours a week. The only way to get that to happen is to integrate my subjects together. My timetable here—it's only got one hour a week. It's just Friday afternoon. So I'll have to take opportunities during English, when we're using a text, to maybe act out that text, or during geography and history to do some art work around that thing that we are studying. We have to put our subjects together in primary. It's not as clear-cut as, "This is your geography timecode or your geography teacher," as in a high school. The only way to get our hours is to kind of smoosh them all together. It's why we often work on percentage of time as opposed to "this many hours".

We have our lovely pie chart. I hope you've seen the pie chart of time breakdown. It's available through NESA and through the department website. But we do our very best to accommodate those times. Sometimes we might spend a term on one subject, but one term we will spend more time on creative arts and the next term we will spend more time on science so that we can get quality of time and decent projects done during that time. We average it out over the year sometimes.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I am sure everyone here today can recall, back when they went to school, a teacher that made a memorable impression. I am sure that you are doing that for the students whom you face today. I just wondered if you had had a chance—and you probably haven't—to read the report that was handed down into teacher shortages for last year? There were 20 recommendations. I wondered if any of those resonated with you, if you have had a chance to read them?

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: I have. For me, the teacher shortage is really personal for me at my school. We have been so short on teachers. The fact that we are cold-calling teachers on a list to please come and take a class is enormous. One of the things that I have found difficult is lowering the expectation for a complete teacher. At the moment we are now taking teachers who have not finished all of their pracs. They are university students coming into school. It is actually quite difficult because if you come as a teacher to school—a graduate who has finished—and you've been employed on a contract or permanently, you get beginning teacher time release and you get a school mentor and there is time for you and the mentor to work together. These university students are not allocated that same funding and they are coming in without that, but we have a burden to help them because they are not cooked, essentially; they are still going.

Our more experienced teachers in the school have to pick up that burden in helping them and making sure that they are okay. They don't have the experience of dealing with student behaviours. They don't have the experience of dealing with the curriculum. They need help from us. So that's more work that we take out of our own time and bring that over to the person because we want to work collegially. We have to support each other to make our school run. I think that teacher shortages are not just teacher shortages too. I also think they are school counsellor shortages for us as well. If we can get enough teachers in the system then we can train those to be school counsellors as well, but at the moment we are so short on teachers that I don't want any of my colleagues to say, "I am going to retrain as a school counsellor", because then I've lost another teacher—but I need school counsellors. It is really quite difficult. At my school, and in the entire team that my school sits in for school counsellors, which is different from our directorate, there is not one single school that has its actual allocation for school counsellors. So if teachers do that I'm scared.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You said you don't have time to switch off sometimes. I was wondering about your work-life balance. Also, you said it's not just a teacher shortage. What was the workplace culture like over the last 10 years? We see in other workplaces, there is a term called "quiet quitting", but we heard yesterday that there are more resignations than retirements, so it is bigger than just teacher shortages. There are a few different factors there.

ROSCHELLE MORWOOD: The workload is huge. It does burn you out if you keep going. I myself experienced hitting that point. I don't think teachers want to leave teaching. They are passionate about their students. But you have to make some big decisions. At my school we have a very good culture of supporting each other, but it doesn't mean that we are not very tired. Teachers support each other, work with each other and try to make sure that we can make it through, but for a lot of teachers it gets to the point where they can't keep pushing through. You don't want to give half a job. You want to give your full effort to these kids because when you are sitting in front of those kids you can't give half a job. I couldn't. Teachers are teachers because we have a moral obligation to them, so we can't give them half of anything.

One of the absolute hardest things about being a teacher at the moment is when we have to split our kids and not teach them. On any given day, if we can't find casual teachers—we've had COVID support teachers and we will put them on class. We have assistant principals for curriculum instruction. We will put them on class. Sometimes we have still run out of teachers, so we will have to split a class or two—or my principal has taken two or three classes in the library herself. We will split kids across the school. We will send three or four to that class, three or four to that class, until they are all split out, with a little workbook of sheets. When you are the teacher who they have come to, it is really hard because you want to make sure that they are looked after. You supervise them, you make sure that they are safe, but you can't provide them with any feedback on the work they have been given. You can't provide them with much guidance at all because you are busy worrying about the lesson and the kids that you have got here—the 30 of them sitting in front of you who are expecting you to help them with their content.

You are only one person and that was happening nearly every day at my school last year—and we were one of the lucky ones. One of the local high schools actually ended up having to borrow some of our staff just to cover minimal supervision. Five classes at once were in the quad in a high school. That is devastating for all of us because we know that during that time they do not get the opportunity to learn. They are denied learning; they are denied a teacher. They could have come from all different classes. Sometimes when they are teaching a year 5 and 6 class and there are some kindergarten kids right there, there is not much you can do to help them other than make sure that they are safe, they are looked after and they are occupied.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. As I mentioned in the opening statement, the Committee has resolved that there is insufficient time for supplementary questions. When we provide you with the transcript of evidence, if you could provide any clarifications within 24 hours that would be much appreciated.

(The witness withdrew.)

Mr DAVID TOWSON, NSW/ACT Branch Assistant Secretary, Independent Education Union, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witness. I invite you to make a short opening statement, if you'd like. If so, if you could keep it to no more than a couple of minutes that would be much appreciated.

DAVID TOWSON: Absolutely. I was a secondary school teacher for approximately 17 years and I am now in my nineteenth year of employment with the Independent Education Union. I know that you received evidence from the IEU secretary, Mark Northam, in 2022 and my fellow assistant secretary, Veronica Yewdall, yesterday in Camden. While welcoming the opportunity to represent the issues facing our members in non-government schools, and to spare this Committee from needless repetition, I will endeavour to keep my evidence specific to north-west Sydney. If you are interested, I organise in north-west New South Wales: Walcha, Wee Waa, Armidale, Tamworth, Moree—that area. That is my statement.

The ACTING CHAIR: I now invite questions from the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much, Mr Towson, for your appearance today. We did hear from one of your colleagues yesterday and we have heard from Mark previously as well. We are really interested to hear—this inquiry is really about getting an update about the teacher shortages and what's the status. I appreciate that I think we are at day five for teachers today. We're really interested to hear. This inquiry is really about getting an update about the teacher shortages and what the status is. I appreciate that it's day five, I think, that we're back for teachers today but I'd be interested to hear what's your feedback, particularly across the north-west of Sydney but also across the north-west region, in terms of the teacher shortages and the effects that it's having on our schools.

DAVID TOWSON: Thank you, Ms Houssos. There are 80 schools in the Parramatta diocese and then, of course, there are independent schools. It's hard to determine exactly how many vacancies exist in independent schools. They often advertise through employment agencies, but through the diocese of Parramatta they're currently advertising 58 jobs on their system website three days ago. That was the first day of school. It's much more than usual. There are 23 high school teaching jobs being advertised, eight primary school teaching jobs being advertised, 11 school administration jobs—teacher aides and the like—and 16 jobs at the Parramatta office—support staff and the like there.

I've spoken to a principal member of a large secondary school in the Parramatta diocese who, following conversations with his colleagues, believes that there are more like 200 teaching jobs not filled across the diocese. He described his Christmas break as one of constant recruitment, trying to fill the gaps in his school. He said other principals were experiencing the same. He told me that over the last few years he's been unable to provide the support for beginning teachers that is negotiated in our work practices agreement. They're not getting the release time, early career teachers, nor are their supervisors or mentors. Now that's quite an admission for a principal to make, but we understand that that's the case. We hear from our members. Once in the Parramatta diocese they provide release in—or they should provide release in—years 1 and 2 of a teacher's career and it's not happening. They don't have the resources to do so.

Similarly, the provision of professional development is being hampered, so these beginning teachers are not being supported into the profession and we're at risk of failing them and losing them. He did mention also—he said this is not an answer to the teacher shortage crisis; we've always had teachers come from overseas and many Australian teachers go and teach overseas—that while we're out there recruiting from overseas and agencies are recruiting, they can't start their process for accreditation until they land in New South Wales. Getting your Working With Children Check and NESA accreditation—to be able to be employed could take up to 28 days, and he said, that could be streamlined to help fill some gaps. On the question of incentives, he said that north-west Sydney is not particularly attractive in terms of recruiting people. He said that in regional and rural parts of New South Wales, there are big financial incentives, but they don't offer them here in north-west Sydney, and he said, "If we're not on the coast and we don't offer incentives, we're in a tight patch here in north-west Sydney."

He also mentioned—and I've heard this from other schools too—that first and second year out are teaching senior classes. That didn't happen in my day of teaching. You sort of had to earn your stripes before you could take a senior class. You've got to think some of these teachers have not become accredited and they're already teaching senior classes. Some of them—and they're second and third year teachers or in their second and third year of teaching—are appointed as coordinators without really the experience, again. So it's a lot being put on top of these beginning teachers. I'm sure you've heard that so many teachers are teaching outside their subject areas. Traditionally, chemistry, maths and TAS have for a long time been hard to staff, but in an area where we're decrying skills shortages, TAS remains critically undersupplied. There are some areas where there was once a glut and they can't attract applicants—for example, PDHPE. We were advised not to study PDHPE because there

were that many teachers and now there are that many vacancies existing in that area, and English too. There was never a shortage of English teachers in the past.

I did a quick search of Seek last night. I typed in "teacher" and "Parramatta and western suburbs" as the region that I could select. I only got to page 6; there were 20 pages with 398 jobs being advertised. Again, this is the first week of the school year. That might not be unusual towards the end of term 3 or at the beginning of term 4, but it is not normal at the beginning of a school year. A lot of those jobs—and I don't think it's within the terms of reference of this Committee—were in early childhood centres, but we represent early childhood teachers and it's obviously a critical part of the whole approach to education, so it's a broader issue with respect to teacher shortages in that area.

Of some of the independent schools in this area, William Clarke College at Kellyville had a PDHPE job on their website; Richard Johnson Anglican at Oakhurst is advertising for a primary teacher, a PDHPE teacher and three teacher aides; Norwest Christian College at Riverstone is advertising for a HSIE teacher with an immediate start; Tyndale Christian School in Blacktown is also advertising for a HSIE teacher and a PDHPE teacher; Our Lady of Mercy school in North Parramatta—a Catholic independent school—is advertising for a permanent and part-time religious education teacher as well as a deputy principal. These are good schools. Our members at these schools would say they're great schools and many of those will pay higher salaries than they do in the department and in Catholic systemic schools, so it's a problem. It would not be so extraordinary except for the fact that it's the beginning of the school year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. I really appreciate the time that you've taken, Mr Towson, to give us that update and to have those conversations. That's really helpful for us. We certainly heard from Angelo Gavrielatos yesterday about how, in his experience, this is the worst that he's ever seen and that it's getting worse, and that it's not getting better. Particularly the examples you gave us of English and PE—that's important. I have to say I'd be interested in your experience across north-western Sydney and then the north-west region. Teacher shortages are something that we used to think might happen in a rural and regional area—particularly in remote parts of the State like that—but now they are actually happening across large parts of Sydney. Is that your experience?

DAVID TOWSON: Yes, and specifically in the north-west. I don't think anyone would be surprised that it's hard to staff places in remote places like Walgett and Mungindi and the like. The diocese of Armidale, the Catholic diocese up there—they have 24 schools and they are doing, I think, a good job. They tell me that they'd rather have the problem of being overstaffed at the moment than understaffed. So, from our perspective, our members up there are being offered permanent appointments to make sure that they can attract people there. But those areas, as I said, have often struggled to attract people. But what is extraordinary, in towns such as Tamworth and Armidale, is that it is getting more difficult to staff those schools in rather desirable country towns.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, absolutely, and this is certainly not where it was historically. I know we heard from your colleague Veronica yesterday about the early teacher support, which is a fantastic idea—certainly something that this Committee has talked a lot about, the need for more support for early teachers—but I would be really concerned about the fact that they're not actually able to get that. That admission, from a principal, is fairly telling. I wanted to ask you about—you kind of touched on it—how teacher shortages really do make life difficult for teachers but they're having a really significant impact on students. You talked about how the early teachers teaching HSC subjects is a big step up for a new graduate. What is your experience of things like minimal supervision or merged classes or things like that across the schools that you look after?

DAVID TOWSON: Well, last year we were fielding calls throughout the year from everywhere that that was happening. I think at the moment, given that it's the start of the year, teachers usually go back, like excited schoolchildren sometimes, with anticipation that the year's going to start well. From the members I'm hearing from, there is a sense of foreboding, a sense that what's going to happen when we come up into the flu season again when there are no casual teachers available. They've moved NAPLAN forward. There's a sense of "do we have time to do what we would ordinarily do in terms of preparing for NAPLAN?" So they're obviously very concerned for their students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have just one final question, and that's again from what Angelo spoke about yesterday—the fact that in the public sector, resignations are outstripping retirements. While we used to think that we had this kind of demographic issue approaching at some point in the future, what we're actually seeing is teachers who are leaving the teaching profession in greater numbers than those who are retiring. Is that your experience in the independent sector as well?

DAVID TOWSON: It's hard to find evidence, but that's certainly what we're hearing anecdotally—people looking forward to bringing forward their retirement. Up in the north-west, I should also point—and if I could just go back to the other thing concerning teachers at the moment, which is that there is a new national curriculum

coming in. The time frame to implement that is very tight. That's on top of all these other pressures, so that's a concern. Up in the north-west, people are looking across the border at moving to Queensland where teachers have been offered pay increases of 4 per cent, 4 per cent then 3 per cent. We're approaching nothing like that, and my colleagues up in the Queensland branch of our union will say that's a great start. On top of that, they've been offered a cost-of-living allowance—on top of the 4 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent—of up to 3 per cent per annum. The money is there in Queensland, and my colleagues up there are saying they still need to address the other side of the point, which is teacher workloads. No jurisdiction is adequately addressing that as far as we can tell. It's a problem nationwide.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wouldn't miss an opportunity to plug NSW Labor's policy—

The ACTING CHAIR: But we won't do that because that would be—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —that we will reduce the average workload by several hours, but I think my time is up.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just copying the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government policy.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much, Mr Towson. I'll just pass to my colleague.

The ACTING CHAIR: We're not going to politicise this.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If I could come back to this question around TAS. Why is it that TAS is such a difficult area to staff?

DAVID TOWSON: It's a good question. I think people who have TAS skills are in high demand in building and industry, and they can earn a lot more money outside of the classroom. That would be my guess, but I haven't researched into it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the independent sector, are they able to offer incentives that are over and above what's available in the Catholic and the State systems of trying to attract these skills into those schools?

DAVID TOWSON: Independent schools have at their disposal the ability. They do pay above, but independent schools don't have some of the supports that systemic schools do and the department does. They do not have a work practices agreement regulating employment. But, by and large, they will pay above, and it's really up to them whether they offer further incentives. We know that there are some certainly being offered—we're hearing about it—but they're at the discretion of the individual employer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think my colleague sort of touched on this. Is it your experience that the composition of the teaching workforce in the independent sector is starting to get younger and less experienced? Or do you think the balance has pretty much remained the same?

DAVID TOWSON: I think the general average age of the teacher continues to climb. We're not attracting as many people in the profession. I can't say that there is a noticeable increase in the number of young teachers.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We are talking a lot about teachers and, obviously, as the previous witness said, when we're talking about shortages, we're actually talking about shortages across a bunch of different types of roles within schools. What does it look like in terms of the supports given to particularly children with disability within the independent sector? Is there also a shortage of SLSOs and people who can actually guide IEPs and the rest of it?

DAVID TOWSON: Good question. There are a lot of shortages everywhere, and we represent both teachers and support staff. Again, in Armidale the diocese up there is trying to re-train teacher aides to become teachers due to the teacher crisis, but of course then that's a domino effect that we'd need more teacher aides and skilled teacher aides. In terms of supporting kids with learning difficulties, they're critical, particularly in primary school. You'd note that the teachers and the teacher aides work very well together in addressing student needs.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that a shortage of funding for those positions or a shortage of being able to fill those positions?

DAVID TOWSON: Being able to fill those positions.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you think that the reason for there being fewer people available for those positions is similar to the rest of the school workforce? Is it the same sorts of issues? We're hearing a lot about workload issues and curriculum changes and those sorts of issues when it comes to teachers. Is it the same sorts of things for support staff or is there something else going on?

DAVID TOWSON: I'll have to take that on notice. I can't think of anything specific. There are staff shortages, and when you look at the advertisements, they're needing people to fill holes everywhere. But why that is the case for support staff, I'm not sure. There are different pressures. They are working hard. One group of members called me from school up in the Armidale diocese. This was only yesterday. They are being asked to do playground duties where in the past they hadn't done it, and that's because they don't have sufficient teachers who are already up to their full loads. There's a certain level of anxiety. Not all of them are comfortable in doing that. They haven't received any training. We have an agreement with the diocese that they are to be trained to do it on a voluntary basis. A lot of them would be happy to do it if they know what the procedures are for an incident in the playground, for example. But you can't just tell someone to go and be on playground duty and expect that they're going to be perfectly comfortable and know what to do in the event that there's an issue.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. I'm looking at this issue through a couple of lenses, and I'm listening to the evidence that's being presented, and I'm also applying a view of what would people outside of the teaching profession see and hear when they see the evidence that's being presented. I think everybody who has worked in any position or role in recent times, especially through what we've experienced in the last couple of years with the pandemic, understands that there have been changes or adaptions to the way that roles have been worked and the way that employers have asked their employees to adapt.

In some ways, I think everybody has had to have a level of flexibility in the way that they approach their role. Do you think that that has been unreasonable that employers have sought that flexibility, i.e., people being asked to do playground duty when they may not have done it before? If the employer is prepared to assist with the training or the information that's required, isn't it really incumbent on people to understand that there is sometimes that flexibility required in our roles? It's certainly expected of people in the private sector in other positions away from teaching. Isn't it sort of reasonable here?

DAVID TOWSON: I know for a fact that our members are extraordinarily flexible in answering their needs. They're not resistant to change, and the support staff I referred to are prepared to do it, but they want to know, "What is the chain of command here if there's an incident?" No-one is objecting to doing it; they're doing it every day. They're doing extra and beyond. The changing nature of the job has happened everywhere. I can tell you that I finished teaching in 2004. My daughter completed her HSC two years ago. I remember her talking to me on a Sunday saying that the teacher had just emailed her a response to an essay that she'd written. I said, "When?" And she said, "Today." As a parent, I was absolutely grateful that the teacher is giving up their Sundays to work with my daughter. As a unionist, I was absolutely horrified. Where is the work-life balance for these people? There's a class of 20-odd people that they might be responding to back and forth over the course of the weekend. There certainly are flexibilities, and people have picked up and run with those, but it's burning people out. The point I was making is not to oppose change; it's that people need to be supported when there is a change.

The ACTING CHAIR: I'll resist the urge to dive in on the unionist versus parent issue, because I think that would be too easy for me. I'll park that one. But the idea that playground duty is a complex and difficult re-tasking of somebody, which is the way that I interpreted your answer when you first highlighted it as an issue—in reality, I suspect it is probably not that difficult a task.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Have you ever done it?

The ACTING CHAIR: When you're talking about chain of command, I would think that's pretty simple. If not, it can certainly be answered within about two or three seconds by asking somebody who is in the role. I suspect that there would be things like the appropriateness of flowcharts of what would happen in an event, which I'm sure are available. In reality, is there a need for those teacher aides to call you and discuss the issue with you and then have that to-and-fro? Isn't that making what is a really simple yes-or-no answer—"Can you do this, and here is the information"—much more complex? I said I wouldn't touch it, but isn't that that unionised sort of mentality that goes over the top of what is, in effect, quite a simple task?

DAVID TOWSON: I don't know if it's as simple as you might be presuming.

The ACTING CHAIR: But is it as hard as you presume it to be?

DAVID TOWSON: I'd say, under the terms of our agreements made with the employers, there is an obligation on the employer to consult when there's a significant change. That's all we're asking for—that these people be given the confidence and the skills in order to do their job. That's what they're asking for. There's also an industrial implication here, depending on where they're classified on the pay scale. They can only be required to do it if they're paid at level 4. If they're not being paid that, they should not be being asked to do tasks above their pay grade. They have not asked me for intervention; they asked for advice, and they're going to speak to their principal about it. It's not an issue. It's certainly a wise thing, I think, for people to contact their union and know the parameters of their role and what supports they might get in that role. Yes, it's not a task that's beyond them,

but they need to have the confidence and the skills in order to complete that task. They deserve the respect and their entitlement to be consulted on those things.

The ACTING CHAIR: I don't think anyone is denying that they deserve the respect or would not thank them for the work. I just think there needs to be some level of common sense applied to a lot of this stuff, and that just sounded to me like it's a much more complex scenario than it really needs to be.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to come back to your comment about the email on the Sunday. I think Mr Gavrielatos yesterday flagged the idea about the right to switch off, and I wanted to see what your views were about that idea that we should be taking a stronger regulatory approach to enabling employees basically not to be contacted over the weekend. The follow-on from that is: How do we stop teachers from working in their own time? There's a culture there; there's the moral commitment to their students that drives teachers to go above and beyond and basically allow their private time to be consumed by their work. How do we get around that cultural problem and the "right to switch off" question?

DAVID TOWSON: I think you're correct; it is a cultural problem. There are agreements made with the employers, and most of them have sensible email policies. There is no obligation and there's no requirement for teachers to respond on the weekends, but there's an expectation from parents. If one teacher is doing it but my child's in the other class where the teacher is not responding to emails on the weekend, I want that teacher who is. That's part of the cultural thing. I think it's something that teachers have to address themselves, along with their principals, and ensure that expectations are not unreasonable. They do need to reclaim some of their time back; that's correct. But it's not a requirement, and I'm not blaming the employers by any stretch in respect of that. It's just one of those things that has changed as technology has changed and expectations have increased.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today. As you may have heard, we've got such a short time frame for this inquiry that there is insufficient time for us to put supplementary questions to you. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript, and we ask that you provide any clarifications to us within 24 hours so that we can turn around our report at the end of this. Thank you for appearing today, and we will now break for lunch.

DAVID TOWSON: Thanks, Mr Fang. Thanks, Committee.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms LIBBY CLARKE, Vice-President, Marsden Park Public School P&C, affirmed and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement, if you'd like. I ask you to keep it to no more than a couple of minutes.

LIBBY CLARKE: I have three boys. They have just started year 5, year 2 and my youngest starts kindy tomorrow. I don't know whether I'm happy or sad about that. I am also the daughter of a retired primary school principal, so I've grown up hearing all about how the department is run and this, that, and the other. I've been involved with the P&C since my oldest was in kindergarten. It was a very small school, so there weren't a lot of options. So I know a little about how things are handled, as much as the P&C—a parent—is allowed to know. At my last appearance, when I talked about the review into school infrastructure, I was very passionate about that and I had firsthand information. My appearance today is mainly just completely from a parent's perspective. I obviously know the issues that there. I don't have solutions, but my evidence today is purely just a parent's opinion.

The ACTING CHAIR: So we can get some of that evidence, I will invite questions now from the Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You did give us great evidence last time, so thank you so much. This inquiry is into teacher shortages but also their impact on students and education outcomes. You're obviously right in the heart of the north-west here in a part that's having huge amounts of population growth. What is your experience both as a parent and in the P&C? Are there enough teachers and are teacher shortages impacting your kids' education?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, I truly believe the teacher shortages are impacting my boys. My oldest is 10 and my second child is just about to turn seven. They are at very, very opposite ends of the scale when it comes to everything. My nine-year-old has some learning difficulties. He has dyscalculia, which I'd never heard of prior to that. It's dyslexia for maths, basically. He also has some receptive and expressive language delay, so he has intense tutoring to help him with this. He's at that end of the scale where he has learning support and things like that, whereas my seven-year-old doesn't try very hard but he's very bright, which is very unfair. So they are at opposite ends of the scale in the fact that one of my children needs a lot of support, a lot of extra help, and my middle one needs someone to push him. I don't know what the situation is at all the schools, but when our school doesn't have enough teachers—and we are a small school—the classes are split. They have what's called their "split book". From what I've been told by teacher friends, it's referred to as "busy work". It's spreadsheets, colouring in—simple tasks that they can do. When I say "unsupervised"—yes, there is a teacher there. There's nobody carrying on, throwing chairs and whatever—the teacher is teaching their class. But also with a small school, my year 5 student, he might be split to a kindergarten class. You just don't know. It's where they can fit them.

It's a wasted day. They come home and I say, "What did you do today?" "We just worked in our split book." They didn't get anything out of the day. They almost would've been better to have the day off and I'll take them somewhere educational and give them a lesson myself. I work, so that's not going to happen. But what I'm saying is it is a waste of a day. So when I've got somebody wanting to push my seven-year-old to be the best he can, that's frustrating. But, especially my oldest son, he tries so hard and he just doesn't get there, and a wasted day for him is a real impact. He can't work through some of the sheets they give him; he does need that extra help. He probably sits there very quietly so he doesn't draw attention to himself and looks like he's doing work and gets nothing out of the day. So it is a wasted day.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I hadn't heard of these before, these split books, but it actually came up at our hearing yesterday from other parents. It seems to show that split classes and splitting up kids to other classes because they can't find teachers is so entrenched that they actually have a specific workbook or a specific program.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, they had to put a program in place. It would be ideal to split them. My middle son, Andrew—I should use their names. The 1-2 composite classes that they have at the school are quite small, so he can be split to a 1-2 class and just follow on with the work. But, obviously, last year the 3-4 composites were full, so he was split to a grade outside of his own. He was put in the lower grades but he's not doing their work, so he was just working out of the book. We all went to school. I remember when we were at school, when you had a substitute teacher, sometimes they didn't have control of the class like the normal teacher. We all went to school; we all know what I'm talking about. These teachers have control of the class but the children aren't getting any academic benefit out of it at all.

I have three friends who are high school teachers. Personally, I'm only speaking from the primary school perspective; that's what I'm exposed to. My high school friends have said that year 11 and 12 classes go

unsupervised. A teacher goes in and says, "You've got no-one today. Do whatever," and they go unsupervised. I know they're getting towards being adults, but they're also teenagers and teenagers don't make the best decisions. My friends also say that they have to teach outside of their subject that they typically teach. Again, all of this is detrimental to the students. If you've got somebody teaching you something that they don't know anything about, you're not getting the best help. That's just a sidenote of the high schools. Like I said, my focus is primary school, and they have to be supervised. You can't leave children 12 and under unsupervised. But it's just as bad in the high school system, from what I'm told.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And it means that the focus of the day goes from learning and education support to supervision, or babysitting, which is very different.

LIBBY CLARKE: Just about supervision, yes. There is no academic benefit to a split day at all.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We just had a teacher here before us before showing us how full the timetable is and how difficult it is to squeeze everything in. It shows us how much each child is losing each day that they miss out on that really valuable learning time.

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely, yes. My oldest often brings home a lot of his work. His teacher and I work quite closely and he brings home a lot of his work to show me. The amount of work he can put together in a week—I can't keep it all. But one day and you miss the key focus of the maths and the English. But, also, at a younger age, all the other subjects—the PE, the geography, the history—it's all just as important. They've got to learn it. You know what it's like when your child has a day off sick and they've got to catch up. All these children are catching up when they have a split day.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: One of the points that was made by a parent yesterday was that the department has quite a strict attendance policy and they will send you a letter if you miss more than one day per fortnight, talking about what the cumulative effect of that is on your schooling. But what we're actually seeing is the reverse, which is that the teachers can't be supplied. So it's obviously having an impact on students.

LIBBY CLARKE: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's really helpful. Thank you. I will pass to my colleagues.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How frequently do you think the classes are being split?

LIBBY CLARKE: I would say, coming out of COVID, it was quite often. But it's a different world now. You get the tiniest of sniffle before COVID—and we would all be the same; we all work—you'd work through it. You'd be sitting next to someone who had a full-blown cold. Now you can't do it. So teachers are having more time off because you can't be seen at school blowing your nose constantly because everybody thinks, "COVID". So I would say it's a lot more now post-COVID. I couldn't really put a finger on it. It depends on the teacher as well. In your office, like teachers, certain people are prone to having more time off than others. In a month I would say my kids would've one to two split days—maybe a little bit more here, maybe a little bit less there, but on average.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about information from the school? How transparent is the school—

LIBBY CLARKE: I don't know anything about it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —with the parent body about how frequently this is occurring? They don't notify parents when the classes are split?

LIBBY CLARKE: No. I pick my kids up from school—"How was your day? "We were split to class such and such." "Did you learn anything today?" "I did my split book."

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The school is not bringing the parent body into its confidence in terms of the difficulties that they're trying to manage—

LIBBY CLARKE: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —and explaining what's going on, why they've had to make these decisions or why they've chosen to take one approach over another in terms of managing absences?

LIBBY CLARKE: Not that I recall. There may have been something very early in the piece, but I can't recall there ever being any advice about what their policy, if you like, was on teachers not being there.

The ACTING CHAIR: In that case, if you were to be given information, what is it, as a parent, you would expect the school would provide to you around that, and how would that change your approach?

LIBBY CLARKE: Look, if I received a notification through our school app at 7.30, 8.00 in the morning that one of my boys' teachers wasn't available and the class was going to be split, I don't know what I would do about it. I'm not going to take the day off work and keep them home. I don't think it would make a difference to me if they notified me that their teacher wasn't going to be there, honestly. I think, for a lot of parents, it probably wouldn't make a difference.

The ACTING CHAIR: I think that was sort of the point I was getting to.

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes, and you're right, and that's probably why they don't do it—because there's nothing I can do about it.

The ACTING CHAIR: There's no detrimental impact, really, whether—

LIBBY CLARKE: As a parent?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes.

LIBBY CLARKE: No. I know that when I drop them off at school, whatever teacher they have—be it their teacher or another teacher—they are safe. Are they learning? Perhaps not. But they are safe, and that's what you want for your children.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I'm curious as to what parents, as a whole, think is going on. From our perspective, we're looking at this very much from policy and what's going on in terms of the drivers of teacher shortages and what the solutions are. But, from a parent's perspective, what do you think most parents think the problem is? When they hear that there are not teachers for their kids' classes, are they blaming the school or the Government or the teachers? What do you think?

LIBBY CLARKE: I don't know. One of my boys has quite a young teacher. My oldest son had her, her first year out. She is fantastic. When they do activities at the school—the Easter hat parade, that kind of thing—she is the life of the party. She runs the whole thing. She is fantastic. I'm gathering that she is about to take some considerable time off this year. I don't know whether it's burnout, only being in the job for a few years. I wonder if the young teachers that want to go into teaching—what I've heard some of them say is it's not what they expected. They think they're going to go into a class full of 30 lovely children and they're going to teach, and then you get that one child that unfortunately can disrupt the entire class, and they spend so much of their time dealing with issues with children. My understanding is there's a lot of administrative work, these days. I think they're not enjoying their teaching as much.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And then, on top of that, do you think that they are getting the blame from parents and the community, or do you think that that blame is going more towards—

LIBBY CLARKE: Our community—and, again, just my school—is very supportive of our teachers. They are wonderful. The children—apart from the split days—don't go without. We have all the Easter hat parades, the Christmas concerts—all that kind of stuff. But we also have a very high staff turnover. Teachers come and go, change schools, leave teaching altogether. As a parent, I don't know what it's like. You can assume, being a government employee, are they are earning enough money? Nobody is earning enough money, but, you know, it could be that. If you're looking for solutions, I mean, you can pay someone as much as you want but if they don't enjoy their job, they're not going to stick at it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you have any sense of how many teachers in the school are permanent or how many are temporary?

LIBBY CLARKE: I have a very vague idea. We have very limited permanent teachers. We have a lot of teachers that are on—I don't know the correct wording, but—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Temporary contracts.

LIBBY CLARKE: —temporary-type teachers. We have very few permanent teachers. I don't know why that is. At the P&C meetings we are generally advised, "Oh, a permanent position has been awarded to this teacher." I'll sit there and say, "I didn't know they weren't permanent." I don't know enough about that to comment on it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there, perhaps as a result of the staffing issue, a sense that teachers are a bit frazzled—that they are feeling pressured, under stress? Is that a sense that you get?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. If you're going back to the temporary thing, job stability is a big thing for everybody. If they know their position is temporary, and the school loses five students to the local Catholic school or something like that, their position could be gone. That would force them to perhaps look around for a permanent position, so, yes, that goes to job stability. I know the one thing that, as a parent—and it's awkward to say, because

I feel silly saying it, but teacher's aides are so, so helpful, because, going back to talking about my older son that has his learning difficulties, if he doesn't understand a task and he has to ask the teacher a question, and she has to take time away from the class to specifically explain it to him in a way he understands, or if you have a child with behavioural issues, they take away from the class.

The teacher's aide can step in, help those teachers with that, and then they can continue teaching the class. I know that those issues—children with learning support needs and children with behavioural issues—really take a toll on teachers. They really, really take a toll. More support for the teachers—be it a teacher's aide or another way. I think every teacher would appreciate an extra set of hands in their classroom.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Do you think that parents have high expectations of teaching staff, so that they're not allowed to switch off?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. I mean, everybody should have high expectations of their teacher. I think there is a sliding scale. One of my boys, one year, had a teacher whose heart wasn't in it, and I begrudgingly complained to the school. There was nothing they could do about it—it was during COVID. But I have described that year of my child's education as a waste of time. She didn't have her heart in it, and it showed.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: At the commencement of the school year, would a teacher set out expectations, or is that a parent-teacher interview situation? How do you know what the role of the educator is? You're working full-time, so you don't want to be sort of doing that role as well. How do you know what the teacher expects?

LIBBY CLARKE: The way our school does it is the children are in their classes from last year for this first week, and then next week—waiting on new enrolments et cetera, because we are in, obviously, a high-growth area. People are moving into houses every five minutes. They go into their new classes next week. Parents are just as interested as children to hear who the teacher is going to be because, you know, you have the teachers that you'd like. We do a "meet the teacher" afternoon. We just have an afternoon tea. The P&C run it. We run an afternoon tea after school one afternoon that you can just go and put a face to the name of your teacher. But it's a five minute chat, face-to-face, standing up. It's nothing official.

Our school doesn't host parent-teacher interviews until the end of term 2, unless—of course, I obviously work a lot closer with my older son's teacher, with his learning difficulties. The option is there if you want to work very closely with the teacher. If your child doesn't need that, you're not really going to get a face-to-face until reports go out at the end of term 2. There is no fact sheet, information sheet, anything put out as to what the teacher is planning or expecting for the first or second semester.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you think you should get something like that?

LIBBY CLARKE: Perhaps in high school. I don't know if it would be as effective in primary school. For instance, my kindergarten son—they're going to learn to count to 30; they're going to learn all the sounds of the alphabet. I mean, it's quite obvious for his age. But then I worry, with my older one, at what age is he going to get to homework where I sit there and go, "I can't help with that"? Google will be my best friend.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Google. Yes, absolutely.

LIBBY CLARKE: Perhaps, but if he's going to be learning something that I don't know a lot about, I'm not going to go and study it. I don't have the time for that. I'll deal with it when that time comes around. Putting out an information sheet, or whatever you'd like to call it, about what the expectations are for the year—I don't know as to what benefit that would be. I mean, that's my personal opinion. Other parents may be very interested to see what it is. I just can't think what I would do with that information.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just today, I think we've had a range of views from the witnesses that we've had. We've heard from people that are in the teaching profession right now, we've heard from union representatives, and now we've got the parent perspective. I think what has really struck me about the evidence today is that so far there have been a range of expectations about the teaching profession depending on the point of view from which you come to it. I think the most stark one, for myself anyway, was when the union rep indicated that they got an email from their teacher on Sunday. He said that as a parent it was pleasing to know that the teacher had focused on his child. At the time, when he had his union cap on, he was saying that that person should not be working.

LIBBY CLARKE: That is their day off.

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes. How do you think we find that balance for teachers? Clearly you have a great deal of interest in your children's education. The difficulties that one child might have that another child doesn't is dependent on how closely you work with your teacher. How do we find and how does the department

find that balance for their staff, where parents are involved but not overly involved? How do we find a way for them to engage but not burn out?

LIBBY CLARKE: I think parents have a responsibility for their children's education as well. I have friends and people I know who, through COVID, when I said, "I barely got any work done today; I was homeschooling all day," would say, "I didn't do it." I sat there and went, "You didn't do it?" They were like, "No, we didn't do any of it." That's not on the teacher; that's on the parent. The parents have a responsibility. My boys wouldn't do their homework if I didn't tell them to do it 10 times. I think there is a—

The ACTING CHAIR: Only 10?

LIBBY CLARKE: I may have raised my voice the last few times. But yes, there is a responsibility on parents. It shouldn't be wholly on the teacher or the educator who is responsible for your child's education. I think teachers should be entitled to their weekend. The stigma that teachers work from nine to three—I have defended that until I'm blue in the face a thousand times. I saw the hours my dad worked as a teacher, as a deputy, as a principal. Nine to three—never. He would leave before the sun came up and get home after the sun went down. I think your teachers should be available to be spoken to via email later in the evening. They have got to understand that parents work. But I think the weekends should be their time—the same as a lot of us who work the Monday to Friday schedule.

The ACTING CHAIR: Obviously you are employed, as you said. You work, so you can't always take time off. Do you mind if I ask what it is that you do? Has your role changed through COVID? Have you had to work outside of hours or work from home and those sorts of things? How have you adapted personally? How did you find that as a parent, with the moving of the way schooling was, from in class to in person at home and then back to in class?

LIBBY CLARKE: I work in the construction industry. I am a project coordinator. We work very closely with Sydney Water, so it is Sydney Water infrastructure that I deal with. During COVID, construction was classified as essential work. It was incredibly busy because everybody knew that the construction shutdown was looming and they wanted everything done now, now, now. I was very lucky in the fact that my parents live within walking distance to my house. I called one of the hotlines and, on compassionate grounds, I asked if my dad could homeschool my children because he speaks to them like a teacher and I did not have the time. I was working 10- or 12-hour days sometimes.

Coming out of COVID, I have to say that relaxed. We went back to the office and things did go back to normal. I do only work Monday to Thursday. On Friday I have responsibilities with my mum and I also have responsibilities at the school. Anything the P&C organises at the school, myself and my colleague on the P&C, we don't work Fridays, so it happens then. I am in the school grounds on Fridays a lot more than the average parent. Being on the P&C, you are privy to a small amount of more information than the average parent. I am sorry, I have lost my train of thought.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You are busy.

LIBBY CLARKE: There is that.

The ACTING CHAIR: I guess what I was asking was, having worked from home for a period of time during COVID and then being back in the office, have you found that you have still had to at some points bring work home with you? How has that interacted with working from home in the evenings and then having children doing schoolwork at the time? Has that engagement been difficult?

LIBBY CLARKE: Yes. We realised during COVID how flexible we could be working from home. We didn't work from home prior to COVID. Now I work from home one day a week, so I'm only in the office three days. I'm lucky that my job is very flexible. When things change, like my boys' after-school activities, I can start earlier so I can finish earlier to attend things like that. COVID has made it a lot more flexible. But also, once we were invited back into schools even for something as simple as an assembly, let alone some kind of concert, yes, I am very lucky in the fact that I can attend most things. Because we were kept out of the loop of our children's education for so long, seeing them progress and be back in the school—I like to be able to be there to see that.

The ACTING CHAIR: I think you said a little bit earlier that you thought it was reasonable that a teacher would be available on the weeknight of a school day to perhaps engage with parents, to engage with emails and questions around their child's learning. Do you think that is a pretty standard expectation of parents across New South Wales—that there be some level of engagement? Because we are all busier these days, we don't always have time to go and pick up our children from the school gate and have those conversations that sometimes just happen organically when those pick-ups and drop-offs would happen.

LIBBY CLARKE: I think that, yes, the teacher should—you can't expect a response from your child's teacher between the hours of nine and three. If I emailed the school about something for one of my kids, I cannot expect the teacher to respond between nine and three. They are supervising, they are teaching and they are planning. But after three o'clock, if I need to speak to a teacher I would really hope that I would get—you don't contact the school unless it is something pressing. I would hope that that afternoon the teacher would contact me, be it via email or phone call, because you don't often contact the school unless it is something pressing that you want to speak to them about now, whether it is something that has happened to your child, whether it is something that they have come home upset about. Whatever the fact is, you want to get to the bottom of it. Yes, I think after hours, after three o'clock, is the time. But then teachers also need to understand that I can answer my mobile at work—that is fine—but if I were a nurse or something like that, where I did not have access to a phone, then there would need to be a little bit more flexibility. Yes, I think teachers need to understand that parents work as well.

The ACTING CHAIR: Do you think it is reasonable—I guess I am trying to cite examples that you have actually given as evidence at the moment—where a teacher's heart is not in it, and I think those were the words you used around one teacher, that parents be able to provide that feedback to the school and that you are able to outline to the school what your expectations are? Do you think that's a reasonable position that parents would have for the people who are in charge of their children's education?

LIBBY CLARKE: Look, there are always going to be personality clashes between people. If you have a teacher and a parent, perhaps they are just not going to get along. It wasn't that. This situation that I am referring to—our complaints were taken seriously by the school, but it was a very unique situation. It was during COVID and there really was not much we could do about it. If this happened now, I would ask for my child to be moved out of the class, but my child wasn't the only one whose parents were complaining. Like I said, it was a unique situation. Sometimes teachers and children just don't get along. Lots of kids dislike their teacher because they make them do work, but sometimes not every teacher is going to mesh with every child, and there needs to be flexibility to move them around. I haven't experienced that with my children but I know of people who have.

The ACTING CHAIR: I am trying to work out—I am bracketing the point—where the extremes are on this argument and where is the reasonable centre. Where parents are perhaps applying undue pressure and unreasonable expectations on a teacher, what do you think the appropriate response to that is and from whom should that response come?

LIBBY CLARKE: I know that when I met with my son's teacher about his learning difficulties, it's not one-on-one parents versus teacher. I had the principal, I had the assistant principal and I had, obviously, the teacher—and the AP for years 3 to 6 at the time. When it's a panel, if you like, of people—and, obviously, a parent can take an advocate for them, an extra person—it's not he said/she said, one-on-one, if there's an argument over something. I felt that my concerns and everything with my eldest were—I was heard. But I know some other parents have had issues and not just my school but friends with children at multitudes of schools. If they don't like a response the teacher gives, you do have avenues. There are assistant principals and deputy principals; you can go down the line. If you don't like what your principal's got to say, you can always find your way to the director. So there are levels of hierarchy you can go through if you don't like what you've heard.

But sometimes it's just as much the parents problem as it is the teachers. Sometimes the parents are unreasonable as well and that puts a lot of stress on the teacher. I know of an incident many years ago with my dad where there was an extremely unreasonable parent that sued the Department of Education and got thrown out. He was told to get out and stop carrying on, but the stress that put—my mum and I thought my dad was going to have a heart attack; he was that stressed about this situation. So I really do think parents can put undue stress on teachers. It's not always the teacher's fault. Sometimes the parents have unrealistic expectations of what the teacher should be doing. They spend this many hours a day with your child. If your child is struggling, perhaps you should help them in the time you have with them in the evening. So I don't always put the blame on teachers, like a lot of people do.

The ACTING CHAIR: Interesting insights. Ms Clarke, thank you so much for appearing today. Because of the time frame for this inquiry, we are unable to put supplementary questions to you, so when you're provided with a copy of the transcript we ask that you let us know within 24 hours if you have any clarifying points about the transcript. We would appreciate that. Thank you very much for appearing today.

LIBBY CLARKE: Sure. Thank you for listening. I look forward to hearing all about it.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms JOCELYN BREWER, Child Psychologist, Former Teacher and School Counsellor, and Associate with the Centre for Digital Wellbeing, affirmed and examined

Ms CARLA WILSHIRE, Chief Executive Officer, Social Policy Group, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: Would either or both of you like to start with an opening statement? If so, I'd ask you give to that no more than a couple of minutes.

JOCELYN BREWER: I can go first, if you would like. I do have one I have prepared.

The ACTING CHAIR: Excellent.

JOCELYN BREWER: About this time 20 years ago, after completing a one-year Dip. Ed., I started teaching social sciences at Chester Hill High School in Sydney's south-west. Last February I walked very unceremoniously out of Chester Hill High School for the last time. During these last 19 years I taught six different subjects over five years; created and co-ordinated the State's largest debating program; and completed a scholarship to retrain to become a school counsellor in which I did an honours thesis exploring gaming addiction in year 10 boys. I became a registered psychologist and won a Premier's teaching scholarship to explore digital wellbeing and media literacy. I had a baby, who is now in year 1 at her local primary school. I created and administered a Facebook group for nearly 700 school counsellors and completed a master's, finally, investigating smartphone addiction in a group of year 7 kids across public schools.

When I started, two out of 30 kids would have had dial-up at their home to access the internet. Now we would find that in a class of 30, we'd probably find maybe two didn't have a smartphone, probably because it'd either been confiscated or lost or, you know, was broken. I chose to resign from the department when I was not permitted to work as a school counsellor part-time. I think my resignation made me the sixty-ninth vacancy across the State—a figure that I think is reported to have gone up to about 106 by the middle of the year; however, that doesn't include those on extended leave. The implication of this chronic shortage, I'm sure, is not lost on the room in terms of the impact on youth mental health in the wake of the pandemic.

My request to work part time was basically made so that I could continue my work in cyber-psychology and developing education programs to both prevent and treat digital disorders. It's the expertise that I obviously hold in this area now. That is the reason I've been invited here today as an adviser to the Centre for Digital Wellbeing. I could talk about these issues all day, as you can tell, but I'm grateful for the opportunity and look forward to answering your questions.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Wilshire, do you have an opening statement as well?

CARLA WILSHIRE: I'll just keep mine very brief. We run the Centre for Digital Wellbeing, which really brings together expertise and experts from across Australia and also internationally looking at issues such as youth mental health and wellbeing in an era of digitalisation but also looking at issues around mobile phone technology and its impact on young people, including mental health. We've got a particular interest, I think, in the use of technology in schools. Some of the issues that we particularly focus on are around the impact in terms of student wellbeing, classroom culture and performance and its impact in terms of school refusal. Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you both for making time to appear today. Our inquiry is about teacher shortages and also about the impact on student outcomes and wellbeing, so I think both of you are very well equipped to talk about that. Ms Brewer, can you just start by talking about the impact of the vacancies in the counsellor positions on students?

JOCELYN BREWER: Yes. It basically means that you have a dually qualified teacher and psychologist that is simply not there. I walked out and there was that gap. It means that things like suicide assessment, really coordinating some of those individual learning programs, doing the actual learning assessments—IQ tests and things like that—aren't being completed because there's simply not anyone there. Often we might refer to things like headspace for long-term therapy. I didn't do a lot of long-term therapy because I simply didn't have time to do that. It was really a triage system where we're relying then on outsourcing to other psychologists—me, for instance. I now do some of that work because there is simply no-one there. There are student support officers, who can do some of the, I guess, groundwork and the foundational work. But in terms of being well placed, we have head teachers of wellbeing who often are on that head teacher level, but have no formal qualifications in mental health. They're usually year advisers who are those people who love their job and really want to support but they don't necessarily have any of those skills to deal with high-level stuff that counsellors end up dealing with, with executive principals and directors.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You said you made a request to work part-time and that was refused. On what grounds was that refused?

JOCELYN BREWER: I believe there's a directive coming from the DELs to get more school counsellors back to full-time. I have no understanding of why. My base school, Chester Hil High School, which had, I think, 12 vacancies, was making sure that everyone was working full-time. It was my base school; I needed to be there for three days. I was requesting to work three days. I had actually received that leave without pay from all of my previous principals. It was just at this time that it was knocked back. I explained why I wanted to do it. It's something that no-one else really is doing, and the department itself, despite me being in the department for so long and chipping away at this, wasn't really giving me that space to actually lead digital wellbeing or talk about those issues.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It just seems ridiculous that in this day and age when there is such a shortage of school counsellors and you are wanting to work part-time, a little bit of something is better than nothing at all. But we can take this up with the next department witnesses.

JOCELYN BREWER: I'm one of many, and we can talk about at length another time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. I just wanted to ask you quickly. There has been a lot of talk about the ratio of school counsellors to students. What was your experience of the ratio?

JOCELYN BREWER: It's 21 years since The Vinson inquiry when they actually suggested one to 500. My experience is working in somewhere like Chester Hill High, which is probably 1,300 students these days and there's one full-time equivalent counsellor. What we saw a couple of years ago under Ms Berejiklian was we wanted to have one full-time equivalent in every high school. If I'm in a high school of 1,300 but I actually used to be in a high school of 600, which high school would I like to work at, given the mental load of the kind of work that I do day in, day out where I'm dealing with suicidality, which sometimes is just kids talking about, "What is life? What happens when you die?" It's sometimes somebody really, absolutely considering ending their life right now. Even from my experience of talking to my counsellor colleagues, many want to work part-time just for the space that they need to be able to do their job well when they're there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's processing a lot for you as well as an individual, right? That's part of the problem.

JOCELYN BREWER: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask you then, because we've got limited time—we could probably talk about this all afternoon, about the links to smartphone and gaming addiction that you've done research in. What are the levels of smartphone and gaming addiction that we're seeing in our kids at school?

JOCELYN BREWER: Smartphones I guess we'd look at quite separately to games. Gaming generally—we'd see 1 per cent to 3 per cent of most populations meeting criteria for really the pointy end of addiction, clinical addiction where we would use that A word for addiction, as opposed to being at risk of problematic use or pathological use where we see there are a lot more people who might sort of start having vulnerabilities to not going to school, for instance. Some of the school refusal issues we see are maybe linked to post-pandemic getting back to school and then getting back off games. So while there's 1 per cent to 3 per cent, there is probably 10 per cent to 15 per cent that are at risk.

Smartphones are slightly different in that really a phone is kind of—an analogy that people love to go with with technology is drugs. I would see that device as being more like a syringe, and it's whether or not you're giving yourself a vaccination, you're a diabetic using insulin or you're mainlining heroin. That's the difference in what we're talking about kids using smartphones for and I guess is the nuance of the issue around why it's so complex. Restricting some access and putting a container around literally your phone to help you be able to concentrate in schools is really important. They're very different issues, I guess, even though you can game on your mobile.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of course. Sorry, I shouldn't have confused the two. You're exactly right; they are separate.

JOCELYN BREWER: This is one of the issues with when we talk about technology. It's such a broad thing. It's like which device, doing what thing with what cognition? Even something like Instagram, using the example of the Australian of the Year where we could be following people like her and some hashtags that actually then trick the algorithm into giving us what I would call digitally nutritious content, rather than kind of consuming a highly processed feed literally—there's many food analogies here that we can use—that is like junk food.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How important do you think it is to make sure that kids don't have that distraction from a smartphone or from a device when they are actually in the classroom?

JOCELYN BREWER: These days it's incredibly important because that's one of the key skills. Concentration, your executive functioning skills are one of the key skills that put us ahead of AI. When creating the AI, there's a big conversation about ChatGPT, which is a natural language program that everyone's up in arms about with plagiarism and things like that at the moment, and our response has been to ban that, as opposed to, say, what critical skills do we have as humans and what higher order thinking do we need to do to be smarter than the bot. We need to protect our executive function skills, which include focus, concentration, activation—doing the tricky stuff rather than gratifying immediate needs. But alongside that, I think it's really important that we teach those critical and creative thinking skills, which are in the Australian curriculum. Critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, personal and social capability—these are things in the Australian curriculum. In New South Wales, we call them slightly different things. They're already there waiting for us to teach.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Part of preparing our children for the rest of the world and the rest of their lives is teaching them to restrict their own behaviour in a certain way.

JOCELYN BREWER: Self-regulation and self-control.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: From what you're saying, it's really important that they know when it's appropriate to have a phone, when it's appropriate to use it.

JOCELYN BREWER: Absolutely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In terms of whether or not children should be able to bring phones to school at all, do you have a view on that, or is it just really within class time that it needs to be limited?

JOCELYN BREWER: I think that goes to a much broader issue in society of our freedom to choose what we buy and what we give our kids, so I sort of sometimes jokingly, sometimes not jokingly, say maybe the answer to this is actually restricting parents from buying their children mobile phones until they are 14 or 13 or whatever the age is there. That's obviously impossible, and parents choose to have phones or even smart watches for their children for a variety of reasons, usually to do with safety, even though crime statistics would say our society is much safer than it was when I was growing up. We had safety houses everywhere that freaked me out and I had a mental map of what to do in stranger danger situations.

The socio-cultural issues that sit behind this are really what drive some of the choices around consumers to buy the technology in the first place, and I think we need to look at that—things like the development of high-density housing along railway lines where there are not extra playgrounds, basketball courts, swimming pools, libraries or community centres. What else are we giving young people to do really? We say, "Don't go on your phone," but also, "Sorry we forgot to build you a park or we forgot to plan for those needs." We see even in primary schools, Summer Hill Public School has to roster kids onto green spaces because there's a trick around that urban planning stuff.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Back to the question. For instance, my daughter is in year 8. She can take her phone with her. The school has policy: You don't use it during class time. But at lunch she might pull it out and send me a thing saying, "My maths assignment went well. By the way, I'm going to hang out at so and so's place this afternoon." And that's it. What's the view of being able to use it responsibly in that way?

JOCELYN BREWER: This comes back to, how many different ways do we use technology? While your daughter's doing that, there are other kids who are doing maybe less—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, sure.

JOCELYN BREWER: And how do we police that, I guess, or how do we share—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Or teach self-regulation around it.

JOCELYN BREWER: —but teach self-regulation. If I was on my phone right now, there would be a whole bunch of judgement that we came at that with because "What am I actually doing?" The guess with young people is you're on social media and you're wasting your time, as opposed to "I'm talking to mum" or "I'm lining this up" or I'm saying I left my stuff on the train, which was me once upon a time.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Or I'm writing notes down of thoughts in my head that are actually quite useful.

JOCELYN BREWER: Yes. I've had young people get in trouble because they were livestreaming their lesson, and they were livestreaming their lesson to a kid that was at home with COVID. I guess it's difficult to look at what we are doing, and how we can separate the kids who are doing more digitally nutritious things from kids who are doing things that do involve risk. How do some of the restrictions and responsible use policies actually put that container around and have some consistency for schools? I just think of it from the perspective

of principals. How do we actually come up with what are the rules? If they're sort of given a broad guideline for how to do that, that's helpful to principals without having to recreate the wheel.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But if the goal is responsible usage and preparing children to be able to go out into the world and to be able—

JOCELYN BREWER: Then we need to teach those skills, absolutely.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So is the answer to ban the phones from the schools, or to instead teach responsible usage?

JOCELYN BREWER: I think it needs to be both at this point. The analogy I use here is building pool fences. We fence all of our pools; there are rules around building pool fences. We also teach swimming lessons. We teach those skills: How do you dive into the digital waters and swim? The problem here, and where there's a limitation, is can we fence the ocean of the internet and the way that we use all of technology all of the time? An investment in supporting responsible use while teaching digital literacy and media literacy—they need to go hand in hand, like pool fences and swimming lessons.

The ACTING CHAIR: I want to provide Ms Wilshire with the opportunity to perhaps provide some input into the debate here. We've certainly had the opportunity here to hear the questions of the Committee but also to hear Ms Brewer's views on those questions. I'm just curious if you might have some views yourself. Is it fair to say that there would be uniformity amongst the experts in this area, or are there perhaps a number of views? What might those views be, if they are different?

CARLA WILSHIRE: I don't think you ever get uniformity of views on an entire body of research but, at the same time, I think there is a general consensus that has emerged amongst experts. That is that to a degree it is important that we protect the space for young people to develop skill sets around attention, but also social development and the skill sets around socialisation. Pointing to that point around playground time, to some extent the impact of technology in terms of playground—and there is an emerging evidence base on this—is that it can have quite a detrimental effect in terms of young people learning how to socialise, eye contact, negotiating skills. That sort of free play time is really critical to later social skills that are important for the workplace and for life.

The ACTING CHAIR: Ms Boyd's point was around teaching students to be responsible and self-managed as opposed to the more draconian banning of something. For educators at school, how do we find that balance between teaching people to be self-reliant but also regulating what they're doing, if it does exist at all?

CARLA WILSHIRE: I think that's a fantastic question, and I think it has to start very early. In a lot of countries that we've looked at overseas, really even in kindergarten, you're starting to introduce a relationship to technology where you're talking to people about how to have a healthy relationship. That's not necessarily the same as introducing a device. I think you can often delay the process of device usage but at the same time really provide these skill sets that people need to be able to use technology and to consider the use of technology. I think Ms Brewer talked about the way in which the Australian curriculum provides key points around that, as it stands, and particularly around the ethics of the use of digital technology, but also looking at critical digital information skills and research, as well as considerations around privacy and data privacy. That's certainly an area that needs to be looked into as well. A lot of young people aren't necessarily conscious of the amount of content that they're putting online that is personal markers and information. Introducing that as early as we can into the curriculum and providing those sorts of skill sets, I think, are critical.

The ACTING CHAIR: What I've discovered in my time looking at issues on any number of topics is that where somebody advocates for a position like you are, Ms Brewer, on things like mobile phones et cetera, there's never really a perfect solution. There are always going to be downsides to doing something. In your experience, what would be the downside of banning mobile phones in schools?

JOCELYN BREWER: Again, I don't want to be pedantic about semantics. But when we talk about bans, even that language, for me—we're talking about how do we set up that ban. How do we put that in place, and do young people have some buy-in to what that looks like? My research has shown that most young people are like, "Yes, please put some boundaries in place. We really like rules; we really like having a clear idea of what is allowed and not allowed so we can follow along."

The ACTING CHAIR: You didn't meet my younger self, obviously.

JOCELYN BREWER: And the kids that I like working with are the kids who are going to break those bans—the kids who are going to find ways around the electromagnetic pouches by buying the unlocker on Amazon and charging for those to be unlocked at lunchtime. They're the kinds of kids who I want to have a voice on some of these issues, because they're the ones we want to work with to see where are those vulnerabilities and how do

we shape their self-regulation and their self-control. Your question was what is the case against a ban. Again, I don't think anyone in this area would call for a free-for-all—let's have TikTok instead of trigonometry. We're not there but, when it comes to banning something, it's really the process by which we go along with that. Are we really doing effective stakeholder engagement? Some of the questions that I've seen put to parents about, "Would you like a smartphone ban?"—it's like, "Would you like a pay rise?" Who's going to say no to that? Would you like your kids' phones to be restricted so they can learn while we teach them all the skills they need to be an effective global citizen in the future that is coming at us thick and fast? Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, that's not what the question is. Yes, I want my children to not be looking at their phones during a lesson, but I do want them to be able to look at those phones between lessons or at lunch, if that's what they are wanting to do, in a responsible way. That's not the same question.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have an understanding about this, because I think we both have children that have learning difficulties and with some social issues. I think we come from a different perspective as parents, where that connection with our child is actually sometimes the very thing that makes our child a better learner during the time they are in school.

JOCELYN BREWER: Absolutely.

The ACTING CHAIR: I guess where I'm trying to go with this—instead of doing the long read, I'll just come straight out. Obviously I'm aware that you have provided the Opposition some views and some advice in relation to the mobile phone ban.

JOCELYN BREWER: I have spoken about the fact that we need to do more research.

The ACTING CHAIR: They've cited you in a lot of their releases, and I've just been having a look at that. They're using your views around mobile phone bans, and they've been promoting them online.

JOCELYN BREWER: I would just correct that—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Point of order: Ms Brewer has just shown she has extensive knowledge in this area. She is an independent expert that has been invited to appear before the Committee. If you've got a specific question for her then you can ask a specific question.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think the Acting Chair was getting to that; I think he was providing some context.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't think you necessarily need to colour her independent credentials, despite the fact that NSW Labor may be citing those credentials in our policy work.

JOCELYN BREWER: To clarify, my connection to that was what do I think about an announcement of around $2.5 million to do better research to look at what we need to do to make bans effective. I think that however I get cited on the internet, if you go beyond that, you'll find a lot of other things that I've said about smartphone bans and what we need to do because of the nuances of the fact that your child needing to contact you to check in is a lifeline. Other parents in different contexts are checking in about a variety of things that are what I would call less important. How we define that is, I guess, one of the things that I find confusing, especially I'm thinking about a playground teacher who is trying to do their job and enforce whatever rules. Even without statewide bans currently, there are schools that use those pouches and do all variety of things, so it's really hard for a teacher to know how to do some of those things consistently. Like everything, it needs a very individualised approach to things, where that responsible use and teaching those skills and individualising things is really important. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Picking up on that—

The ACTING CHAIR: Before we do that, I am going to address the point of order that Ms Boyd has taken. I accept that I hadn't had the chance to ask the question. Obviously, as the Chair, I seek to be impartial. I wasn't seeking to colour your evidence with impartiality.

JOCELYN BREWER: Sure. I'm happy to clarify my position here.

The ACTING CHAIR: Obviously the topic of mobile phones being banned or not banned has been part of the campaign that is currently before us with the election approaching. However, always as Chair, no matter which inquiry or what I'm doing, when I'm sitting in the chair in charge of an inquiry, I act impartially. What I was seeking to do was inquire as to the advice and around the policy because partly I'm also looking at differences between the two views that are being progressed as we approach the election. I was seeking to find out what you had provided by way of advice, because they are citing you.

JOCELYN BREWER: Sure.

The ACTING CHAIR: But, also, the question was to be if we are banning something, how would we do that? Obviously, you've said—

JOCELYN BREWER: I have a webinar that you can attend where I outline exactly some of the things you need to consider.

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes. So that's the first thing. But also, when we talk about banning things as a government or an opposition, or any time, one of the first arguments that is always put up is that when we ban something, we're just banning the people who follow the rules, who do the right thing, from doing the right thing, and those who are going to do the wrong thing are going to do it regardless and they'll find a way around it. With that in mind, these things are achievable. How do we make sure that—as Ms Boyd and I indicated—we're not harming those who are going to do the right thing, and would do the right thing, by banning something—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So governments should never ban anything?

The ACTING CHAIR: —and then those who would do the wrong thing would actually still get around it?

JOCELYN BREWER: Absolutely. That's where the complexity of how you set that up, how you put consequences in place for that—so what's the consequence? I'm working with schools in South Australia at the moment about how they implement what the State Government has put into place, because they're, like, "They haven't told us really how to do it." Well, here are my suggestions. I would put to you, then, why has ChatGPT been banned in New South Wales schools if we shouldn't ban things? Where is the conversation around ethical use and how to think better than the AI in all of those things? There is, I guess, a conflict here, or a tension here, between you're indicating we shouldn't ban smartphones but currently—

The ACTING CHAIR: I'm not progressing a view.

JOCELYN BREWER: There's a tension between should we ban this or should we ban that? ChatGPT can't be accessed, but there are kids who are going to have their VPN, who have enough data and who are doing what they need to do.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just on that, when you look at the South Australian university approach, which is very much, "People are going to use it. We need to teach them to use it responsibly, but also to be able to disclose to us when they have used it. This is something they're going to have in the workplace. This is a life skill they need to have."

JOCELYN BREWER: That's right, yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I would say that banning ChatGPT in primary schools, sure, but perhaps there's room for some sort of nuance.

The ACTING CHAIR: Is it fair to glean from that answer that it's actually a much more complex and multilayered, multifaceted policy and solution?

JOCELYN BREWER: Absolutely.

The ACTING CHAIR: It's not something that could be really distilled down to, "We're banning mobile phones in schools."

CARLA WILSHIRE: I think it's also important that sometimes the language that we use focuses our attention on one thing over another thing. I think we're focusing on whether or not we should ban mobile phones, and I think equally important is what we should protect in terms of the spaces for young people and the spaces for positive relationships between students and teachers to form, for classrooms to be effective, and for in-classroom performance to be able to run uninterrupted and to be able to improve. And, also, how do we protect the space for young people in terms of a world of cyberbullying et cetera in order to reduce anxiety and increase rates of school attendance. I think we're focusing a lot on what does a ban mean, and I think we also need to focus on how do we protect the space for young people to learn free of interference from pieces of technology that might come into that space continually. I think you raise a really important point around medical exceptions, particularly around neurodiversity. That, again, goes to how do you implement something in a nuanced way? I think that's a really, really critical point because for children who do have neurodiversity, technology can actually be a significant enabling factor. So I wanted to acknowledge that as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: As part of your research, have you asked children what they think? I always find, particularly with neurodivergent children, you ask them, "What will help you focus?" or, "What would help you do whatever?" and they're very good at telling you exactly what would help.

JOCELYN BREWER: Yes. All my research has been student led.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What are the children telling you they need?

JOCELYN BREWER: Young people—year 7 and year 10 kids. I do quantitative rather than qualitative studies because of the level that I was at, so there wasn't a lot of space for them to tell me a lot of things. But, generally, they know that their parents don't really understand their online worlds and they usually know how to shift their behaviours so it looks like they're doing the right thing a lot of the time. A lot of my research was around parental styles, so what kind of parent do you have in terms of how do they manage your technology use? And then the relationship between—basically parents who didn't trust their kids were more prone to have difficulties with using their smartphone and proneness to smartphone addiction than kids who had more firm but fair parents and things like that. It's a very small sample. It is a master's research, so it's not like it's translatable.

The other thing my master's found was that kids who had higher levels of self-control were less prone to have problems using and managing their phone. So self-control isn't just about, "I cannot do this now." It's actually about, "I cannot do this now because I have something better that I'm trying to work towards." Really giving kids that sense of their future, a hopeful future, and a future that they have efficacy and autonomy and control over is pretty—the young people who I work with often tell me that they feel kind of bleak about where the world is at. Again, that's a clinical population, so slightly different. So it's all complex.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What have they told you specifically about the idea of having their phones restricted during school time?

JOCELYN BREWER: Sixty-seven per cent of the kids at a school that I did some research at said that they were okay with restrictions on their phones if they had a say and if it was fairly implemented. And 67 per cent also told me that one of the reasons that they were using their phones was to text their parents back. So there's a whole conversation there around communication during the day and what different kids need.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So restrictions but not a ban.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We heard yesterday from Angelo Gavrielatos from the Teachers Federation that it was a response that teachers actually had a differing opinion on when it came to the ban on mobile phones in schools. Some teachers were incredibly supportive, some were not supportive, and probably for the divergent views that you've outlined today. I asked him whether it is something that should be done on a school basis, where the principal would, for instance, enact it. His response was that there needed to be some statewide guidance. But picking up on your comments there about the 67 per cent of students who want a say, and the issues that have been raised by Ms Boyd and Mr Fang with respect to individual students, do you think this is something that should be led by the school level, where there's sort of better understanding of the students and the cohorts and, potentially, the activities that may be part of it?

JOCELYN BREWER: My approach there, I think, would be to honour, yes, that teachers and educational leaders know their schools better than anyone else, and that there are different models for implementing responsible use or bans, or whatever you want to call it, across multiple devices as well. I just want to point out that Snapchat, which was probably the second most popular social media platform, is now available on a desktop, so you don't need your phone to actually access it. Passing notes these days is literally Google Docs. All of those distractions can happen on multiple devices. I think having some responsible-use guidelines, and a kind of clear overlay of how you would put those into place for schools to then choose what parts they actually take up, would be useful. That basically echoes exactly what the smartphone review in 2018 said.

If we go back and look at that research, which I was initially a part of but then was removed from because I wasn't seen as independent because I worked for the department, even though I was on maternity leave—I wasn't allowed to be a part of that review. That review basically sums things up in terms of restrictions or containers around use can be useful if we honour what schools need to do and we support them with putting that into place. Again, I'm interested in the equality between not just spending tens of thousands of dollars on electromagnetic pouches, but also investing in those skills—social and soft skills—that young people need to be able to control their use, behave ethically in online spaces and call out some of the things that happen in those spaces that are unhealthy and unhelpful.

The ACTING CHAIR: In a binary selection where you've got what you've just outlined as a solution and a statewide ban, would it be fair to say that you prefer that former position—the one you've just outlined?

JOCELYN BREWER: If there was such a thing as a binary situation—and I think we're playing with hypotheticals when we're talking about anything in this world being binary. I think it's complex. We've all agreed that it's complex and that it's a dance between taking some control and putting some—again, we get into semantics—limitations around that, aligned with the other things that keep us human in a tech-saturated world. We have immersive technologies coming our way—Web 3.0, the internet of tomorrow that, again, we're not really talking about here. That's another big issue, as well as what young people go home to.

Whatever container you put around school, whether you're absolutely blanket banning it—I know principals who will lock phones away for the entirety of the term, and they brag about that—versus different things, we still need to consider what home environment young people go back to, and that digital wild west, and the support that parents then need. They are absolutely overwhelmed around how to deal with the conflict around how to let young people access their friends and have that competence, control and connection in their online spaces, and give them those healthy boundaries. Health, in itself, is quite moralistic. What's healthy for my child is probably very different to what's healthy for yours, and our values might be completely different. Again, how we engage parents to be interested in this and get them out of their own overwhelm—I think most adults, whether they are teachers or parents, are super overwhelmed by "Where do we start?"

The ACTING CHAIR: If I was to rephrase it, then—not a binary situation. But you are not in support of a complete ban; you're in support of a more—

JOCELYN BREWER: I don't—

The ACTING CHAIR: —I guess, nuanced approach.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: She's given you an answer.

JOCELYN BREWER: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask you how well you think screen and phone control is currently done in schools. How well do you think we are going at the moment?

JOCELYN BREWER: Honestly, I am not in schools enough these days. I haven't really been full time in schools for a chunk of years. I have lots of people who I know—I sit on all different sides of this conversation, and it really depends on the school and the teacher. If I am a drama teacher who is really on top of the memes on TikTok and really wants to engage young people in the spaces they play in, then I'm not going to have some of those concerns of a, let's say, more mature maths teacher, where the utility of some technology just isn't there. I'm just going to keep saying it's very nuanced and we need to look at this on a much more humanistic kind of level, where the research is pre-registered, it's replicable, we stop self-reporting things like time online as just that metric and really look at the utility, or what we are calling the "screenome", like the genome—the way that different people use technology—because that's really key.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You mentioned briefly the South Australian experience. Do you mind sharing with us about what's happened in South Australia, and what their experience is at the moment with their introduction?

JOCELYN BREWER: My understanding is that a ban was announced by the Premier, and that is in place starting this year, but it's expected to be in place by semester two. The schools that I'm working with, we're kind of doing a staged approach where we are doing some stakeholder engagement and looking at the edges of what goes wrong with some of those blanket ways of approaching it, and then building in the digital wellbeing and social and emotional skills so that they're ready for that environment from semester two.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think you touched upon the challenges as well in terms of the directions of what happens if you breach the policy and what the consequences are.

JOCELYN BREWER: One of the things for the school that I am working with is "Well, what are the consequences?", and they're not sure. My response was, "Go and ask the kids who get in trouble for this stuff and let's set that up with them so that they're informing what kind of things do go wrong and what are the excuses or reasons given."

CARLA WILSHIRE: I think one of the things that South Australia is looking at really closely at the moment, and I think is probably a lesson for all States to start to look at and see how they implement it, is what do they do in terms of preparing kids for a positive relationship with technology. Alongside limitations of mobile phone use, they really are looking at an augmented program around digital wellbeing and trying to look at how they integrate that into a curriculum. I think that will be critical.

The ACTING CHAIR: It certainly sounds more complex than a slogan, anyway.

JOCELYN BREWER: Early education is another thing we haven't even spoken about. That's kind of where it starts.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Because we are talking about teacher shortages as well, I'm interested in the use of mobile phones or other types of digital distractions in class as a product of not having a teacher who is able to pay attention, necessarily, because they are so stretched or it's not their class or not the thing they normally teach.

In your research, did you get any kind of feedback from students as to why they might be using—was there any connection, do you think, with teacher shortages, or not?

JOCELYN BREWER: Not so much. I mean, the reasons kids are looking at their phones are things like there's no clock on the wall anymore because it doesn't work; I'm taking a photo of the stuff on the board because I don't have time to write it down, or the teacher said to take a photo of this; I'm googling something that the firewall won't let me access even though it's kind of legit and it's related to year 8 geography, or whatever it is. Yes, they're texting their friends and saying where they're going to meet up, or all of those other things as well, which kind of then lends to a whole other piece here, which is kind of the amount of information that we're consuming—and that we're all consuming. Some people call it "infobesity". It's just from the moment we wake up, to the moment we go to bed, we are consuming data. Whether it's quality data or not, it's a huge volume compared to previous generations. That has potential links to a range of things: mental fog, anxiety, all those kinds of things.

CARLA WILSHIRE: Can I just interject and say, as well, just in some of the survey work that we have done with teachers, teachers have indicated that mobile phones are sometimes used because they are stretched and they are not able to properly prepare and so, to some extent, they rely on technology. Secondly, they've also indicated that parents texting children during class time, and children responding in real time to complain about the teachers and then subsequently causing parents to then phone them, is a significant stress in terms of teachers' wellbeing and has led to an attrition. Those things do occasionally pop up in teacher surveys and consultations as well.

The ACTING CHAIR: Unfortunately we are out of time. I have found this quite fascinating.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Very interesting.

The ACTING CHAIR: I have really enjoyed this session. I thank both of you for appearing before us today and providing your insights to the Committee. Unfortunately, because of the time frames of the Committee, we are not able to provide you with questions on notice or supplementary questions. But we ask that when you are provided with the transcript of today's hearing, please let us know within 24 hours of that provision if you have any corrections so that we can get the report out. Thank you very much for appearing today.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Deputy Secretary, School Performance (South), NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr SHAUN RUMING, Chief People Officer, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Ms LEANNE NIXON, Deputy Secretary, School Performance (North), NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

The ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome our last set of witnesses for today. You are all practised witnesses. Do you have three separate opening statements or just one? If so, who might be giving it and please keep it to no more than a couple of minutes.

SHAUN RUMING: That will be me, Chair. We have an introduction that is more than a few minutes, so if I could table that at the end that would be good and then I will give a summary of that.

The ACTING CHAIR: That would be appreciated, especially for Hansard.

SHAUN RUMING: Thank you, Chair. I would like to acknowledge the Dharug people, who are the traditional custodians of the land. I also recognise that we are in the first week of school. We want to wish all the best to our students coming back for the year 2023 and to the dedicated teachers, principals and staff who are looking after all of their learning through the school year. Let me start by acknowledging the significant number of the Committee's recommendations from the last inquiry late last year that reflect existing policy and work underway in the department. I also acknowledge that the Government has not finalised and submitted its final response to that, which I believe is due next week. That will be forthcoming. While there are always more things to do, it has been good to see progress since the last inquiry.

The Committee previously examined the Teacher Supply Strategy, and I am happy to provide an update, as requested. The strategy is a 10-year program that sits in addition to existing recruitment programs and efforts and responds to a challenge that is being experienced nationally and globally. To date, we have had more than 460 people participate across our Teacher Supply Strategy initiatives. This includes almost 250 teachers who are teaching in the New South Wales public education system for the first time or who have relocated to rural, regional or remote areas, and more than 210 people who are already in or are in the beginning of the process of training to be teachers. As a result of the interventions and progress to date, current modelling shows improved outlooks for teacher supply, with a surplus forecast at a macro level past 2027.

Many of the strategies and initiatives feature in *The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*, which provides strong validation for our approach in New South Wales. A number of teacher supply initiatives are performing better than expected. For example, the Grow Your Own program is significantly oversubscribed to the original targets that were set and shared with the Committee. I am pleased to say the initiative to recruit teachers from overseas, which has been behind schedule, is building momentum. We have 12 teachers in classrooms as of today, five more starting soon, more than 20 at the offer stage and more than 500 qualified applicants have been shortlisted. Over the past five years the department has permanently filled, on average, more than 6,000 teaching roles each year, with a record 8,600 teaching positions filled in the year 2022.

In the year 2021 the New South Wales public school student-to-teacher ratio continued a falling trend, and we expect that to continue when we crunch the data for 2022. We are also acutely aware that there remain specific supply challenges in particular subjects and geographical areas, particularly in secondary settings across New South Wales in rural and remote areas. That's why we have made these focus areas for targeted interventions and initiatives under the strategy. What I have been hearing when I have been out in schools are some of the challenges that relate to supply in specific subjects and geographical areas and others that relate to the acute impacts over the last few years of COVID. The Committee should be aware that 2022 sick leave figures were up over 52 per cent compared to 2021, and over 38,700 school-based staff told us that they had COVID during the school year. Those teachers did the right thing by staying at home, and I thank the schools for managing that operational complexity in very difficult circumstances.

There are some significant developments worth bringing to the Committee's attention. We have implemented the Priority Recruitment Support initiative, which has resulted in 450 permanent appointments in schools that have had a significant number of teacher vacancies and that have been very challenging to fill historically. The Rewarding Excellence in Teacher reform will see the creation of new in-classroom teaching roles at significantly higher rates of pay. The temporary workforce transition project, which some people call "temporary to perm", aims to transition more than 15,000 temporary teachers and school-based staff to permanent employment. We are excited to get started on that project. Supported by the NSW Productivity Commission, the New South Wales Government recently announced that it would provide a new one-year Masters pathway. Under

the Quality Time Program, we've been working to reduce admin time so that teachers can focus on teaching and do what they do best. We still have more work to do here.

We have been acutely focused on supporting every New South Wales student's mental health and wellbeing, especially those who have experienced multiple natural disasters, on top of COVID. We have 2,000 non-teaching roles to support students' wellbeing and mental health on the ground. Since starting in the chief people officer role late last November, I have seen firsthand the care, skill and application of our teachers, principals and their staffs. They have a lot to be proud of. I feel we are privileged and proud to work alongside them. We will continue to work hard in supporting our teaching workforce and enhancing the education system because of two fundamental truths: excellence in teaching and teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes; and teaching is a rewarding career that vitally contributes to our lives, our students' lives, the community and New South Wales. Thank you. I would like to open up to the Committee for some questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Ruming, I don't know if you saw the testimony from the previous witness who talked about the pressure on school counsellors, particularly that they work full-time only. Are you aware of an official directive that requires school counsellors to work full-time?

SHAUN RUMING: No, I am not, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide us with an undertaking today that you will go back and investigate whether, if there are school counsellors who want to work part-time, that can be enabled?

SHAUN RUMING: I am happy to go and have a look at that. I think we would have part-time, job share—many different forms of workforce management right across the department and in schools. I think, if anything, over the last two years, through COVID, we have all learned to be a lot more nimble and agile and we would welcome flexibility across the department. I would be happy to.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is fair to say local school managers don't like part-time work, isn't it?

SHAUN RUMING: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I said it's fair to say that local school managers, principals, don't like part-time work. It makes their job harder. It creates more complexity in terms of the staffing arrangements at schools. Is that a fair statement?

LEANNE NIXON: I'm happy to comment on that. That's not my experience. There is the odd occasion where operationally it won't work for a school but my experience in schools, as a principal but as a teacher at the schools I visit, is that part time is well accepted; job-share is well accepted. It works well for families; it works well for schools. There are occasions where the continuity and the pieces that that doesn't work, but certainly I think that the data we have in our schools about the number of point-whatever of FTEs that people are employed in—as Mr Ruming said, the last couple of years in COVID have certainly taught us about being nimble and flexible. So I wouldn't characterise that that's not popular in schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Ruming, I just want to move on. We've got really limited time this afternoon. How many vacancies are in New South Wales schools? How many vacancies for permanent positions are in schools as at today's date?

SHAUN RUMING: As of 30 January, it was 2,168.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry?

SHAUN RUMING: Two thousand one hundred and sixty-eight, 66 per cent of which were teachers and the balance of that was exec staff and SAS staff.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I think the federation told us yesterday a figure of 3,300, so that's about a 1,200 reduction since then?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes. The team's been working really hard since that data point, which was November. I mean, historically November is the time that principals start to think about enrolments for the following year, requirements for how many teachers they're going to need. That's when the department gets notified. We start advertising those jobs, working really hard to fill them, so November is probably the peak point, I suppose, when we start to learn about that. And then, as we work with principals, we reduce those numbers as we work towards day one, term 1. So, that's down on the year before, in terms of total numbers.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Okay.

SHAUN RUMING: We were 2,200, around about, the year before, so it is a reduction year on year. But I had heard that 3,300 number. That was a point in time in November.

The ACTING CHAIR: How many schools do we have across the State?

MURAT DIZDAR: Just over 2,200, Chair.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Your data shows that there were approximately 2,200 on 30 January 2022. That was the highest in the decade, though, wasn't it?

SHAUN RUMING: The number for 2022, this time last year, was 2,269, just to give you that number, and that was higher than 2021. I asked the same question, actually, of the team as to how we jumped to 2,269 from the year before. So, just for context for the Committee, back in 2018 we had 1,727 permanent vacancies. In 2019 we had 1,572. In 2020 we had 1,306, and in 2021 it was effectively stable at 1,314. What that was telling me when I looked at the data when I first arrived late last year was that we had successfully reduced permanent teaching vacancies as we got to January of each year and then I believe it was August of 2021, Chair, where we introduced 1,500 AP, C&I roles, so I think there were 2,600 actual bodies and positions. But FTE-wise, it was 1,500.

So, the number jumped back up because a lot of those folks that took those roles were existing teachers within the system. So, the recruitment team, as they filled those roles as a commitment to educational outcomes, have been busily over the last 18 months to two years trying to fill those positions. So, it was the right decision to have that extra curriculum cover and support in the schools, but what it did mean is that a lot of those positions were occupied by existing teachers in the system, so we've been going back to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Mr Ruming, we've got really limited time so I'm going to ask you: How many schools have a vacant position? There are 2,200-odd schools. How many schools have a vacant position?

SHAUN RUMING: Let me just grab that figure for you. I don't have that figure right in front of me, unless Mr Dizdar can help.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might be able to help the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: Seventy per cent of our schools—70 per cent of 2,200—have zero or one vacancy at the start of the school year, which for our students, as you know, Ms Houssos, was on Tuesday. We still have about 140 schools to return—our western division schools. As you'd be aware, Ms Houssos, school development days for them are on Friday this week, Monday next week; we're looking forward to welcoming you kids back there Tuesday. But 70 per cent of the system has zero or one vacancy.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, and what about two to five?

MURAT DIZDAR: We would have to take—we would have to come back to you with that breakdown.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have a really short time frame for this inquiry. Would you be able to see if someone could come back to you?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll certainly do our best and if we can't get it to you today what we'll do is—I think I heard you, Chair, say when the *Hansard* comes out—we could maybe include it there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yesterday Mr Petersen indicated that, in terms of the assessment of the vacancies, you don't count those positions where you've got someone effectively substantively seconded to another position and that position effectively sits vacant. But it's not reflected in those figures. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: The instance that you've described there, Mr D'Adam, is where there's a permanent employee who owns a role in that school who's taken up a temporary role in the system elsewhere—so that temporary role might be for a year 2 to 3. They own that role. That role back at that school is owned by them. So of course—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But if no-one's in that position—

MURAT DIZDAR: If you allow me to finish—

MURAT DIZDAR: Of course, that then is not a vacancy because it's owned by someone who will return to that school. It's then incumbent on the leadership of that school to try and backfill that role, and the way that that role is backfilled is for a temporary appointment: if that's a one-year secondment with a one-year temporary

appointment, if it's a two-year secondment with a two-year temporary appointment. But it'd be incumbent on us to hold that role because it's owned by that individual.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So, in the information you provide, are you talking about permanent vacancies, or all vacancies?

MURAT DIZDAR: When I said to you 70 per cent of schools have zero to one vacancy, that's a vacancy that we need to fill, either through central staffing or through recruitment through local selection.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: A permanent vacancy?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're permanent vacancies.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So, it's not reflective in the actual state of vacancies, is it, because if a position's to be filled with a temporary, you're not counting that. But, for the kids at that school, they still have a teacher in front of their class, do they?

MURAT DIZDAR: No. I mean I think I'm saying to you accurately, and to the Committee, that these are permanent vacancies. Of course, there'll always be temporary and short-term vacancies. They range from day-to-day sick leave to secondments like you referenced, Mr D'Adam—a staff member who's been given a clear opportunity in the organisation who takes up a temporary secondment, maybe to the State office, maybe to the curriculum directorate, as an example—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Dizdar, with respect, this is the debate that we've had in the House. We've had a lot.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a temporary vacancy.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have really limited time this afternoon.

MURAT DIZDAR: So it's temporarily filled.

The ACTING CHAIR: Don't talk over the top of the witness.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have very limited time this afternoon. Mr Dizdar or Mr Ruming, whoever should answer this: What proportion of teachers are teaching out-of-field in secondary schools—out-of-area, out-of-specialist training?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to assist Mr Ruming there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Our data in the department shows that nationally in Australia across jurisdiction we have the lowest out-of-area teaching.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and what's that figure?

MURAT DIZDAR: I believe that figure is 21 per cent of our teachers.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So one in five teachers is teaching out of the area that they were trained in?

MURAT DIZDAR: Well, let me answer the question you asked.

The ACTING CHAIR: Please let the witness answer.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get to that and then you might ask me another question. But, you asked about the figure and I told you that it's 21 per cent. It's the lowest in the country and out of field does not mean that there isn't a qualified teacher in front of those students. Also, what I find in my operational experience is that there are teachers in the system who put their hands up and want to be trained, in subject areas they were not tertiary-qualified for, to be able to be qualified to teach those subjects. So, let me give you a real example.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Mr Dizdar, you've given the answer.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's important to the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You gave me the comparison.

The ACTING CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Let's listen to Mr Dizdar's example. I think the example's important.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think the example's really important.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. We've literally got 20 minutes.

The ACTING CHAIR: I understand that. However, Mr Dizdar is trying to provide an answer and I will allow him to complete his answer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: He's trying to spin. He is trying to spin.

The ACTING CHAIR: Order! I won't have reflections like that of the witness, please. Mr Dizdar, you have the call.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I'd like to go to some misconception that sometimes happens that I find with out of field. We've got teachers who self-nominate, particularly in the secondary settings, to be trained in other subject areas because they want to be able to teach other subjects.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I take that point, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've had economics teachers put their hands up to teach mathematics.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand your point.

The ACTING CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Dizdar, where was the data that you were basing that figure on, that we have the lowest in the country? Where was that data collected from?

MURAT DIZDAR: The 21 per cent figure I gave you is the departmental figure, and so that—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The comparison that we're the lowest in the country, where did that data come from?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's the advice that I've got from our department. We would've compared that to what other jurisdictions have.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can, when *Hansard* comes back, tell us where that came from. CESE conducted a teacher survey mid-last year that included questions about the impact of shortages on New South Wales public schools. What were the results of that survey?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure of the survey you're referring to.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: CESE conducted a teacher survey in the middle of last year. You would be aware of that?

MURAT DIZDAR: We conducted an assessment of the impact of COVID. Have you got the report there? Do you want to quote the report or name the report?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It included the impact of shortages on New South Wales public schools.

MURAT DIZDAR: It would be good if you could name the report. CESE have conducted a number of surveys, a number of studies over the last three years through the period of COVID. I could go to the check-in assessment reports that they've conducted.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's the 2022 CESE teacher survey.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you aware of that one?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it in front of me. Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, but what were the results of the survey? Are you aware of the results of that survey?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the details in front of me. Is there a specific question around this?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm asking if you're aware of the results of the survey?

The ACTING CHAIR: Have you got a copy to provide Mr Dizdar?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't have a copy of it. I can't print.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have one in front of me.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's not my question. My question is are you aware of the results of the survey?

MURAT DIZDAR: If I've got the right report, yes, I would have read it at the time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, right. Will you commit to providing a copy of those results?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, if you can name it and we'll get it on record in *Hansard*—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's the 2022 teacher survey conducted by CESE.

MURAT DIZDAR: I will go back into the organisation and see where that report is at. We normally release and publish all our CESE reports, so I'll go and find out and we'll make sure in *Hansard* we capture that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We've been told that the data checks won't be completed until late March. It's nine months after the survey was done. Can you explain why there has been such a delay?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go back, like I said, find out where they're at with the report of the study. My experience with all of our CESE studies and all of our CESE reports and all of our CESE surveys is that we've made publicly available reports. I don't think that that won't be the case in this instance, but let me go back and find out and on *Hansard* let's put down the detail of when that would be released.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Ruming, what percentage of permanent teachers in their first five years of teaching left in 2022?

SHAUN RUMING: Let me just find that for you. I believe it was just over 10 per cent.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So 10 per cent in their first five years. How many resignations and retirements were there in 2022?

SHAUN RUMING: We're crunching the data for 2022 right now, so when schools come back we obviously connect with those to make sure that our data is up to speed and accurate. In the 2021 figures, it was 2.2 per cent for resignations and 2.2 per cent for retirements.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When will you have the resignations and the retirements data?

SHAUN RUMING: I've been told in the first quarter.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you won't have that for another couple of months?

SHAUN RUMING: Another couple of weeks because we're in February.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many additional teachers do New South Wales public schools need each year to 2030?

SHAUN RUMING: Let me just grab that figure for you. I have the supply and demand numbers up until 2026, so I'd have to take it on notice to 2030 and provide it back to the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you want to provide me to 2026, then?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, sure. Demand for 2023 is 71,021; supply is 84,199. In 2024 it's 71,546, and supply is 83,131. For 2025 it's 72,164 and supply is 82,065. And for 2026 demand is 72,704; supply is 81,013.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask you about the recruitment of school counsellors. There was an election commitment that this Government made. Can you tell us how many school counsellors have been recruited over the last four years?

LEANNE NIXON: I am happy to help out with that question, if that's okay, Ms Houssos?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. I'm relaxed about who provides answers as long as we get answers.

LEANNE NIXON: An additional 100 school counsellors have been put in place. The allocation of those will be finished—that's for high schools—by June 2023. They've increased from 790 in 2015 to 1,249 in January 2023. As of 10 January 2023, 92.9 per cent of these positions are filled; 325 scholarships have been awarded since 2016 to support graduates in these roles.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask for a clarification on the data that was provided on the supply and demand. Was that headcount figures or was that FTE?

SHAUN RUMING: The demand is FTE and the supply is headcount figures. Maybe another way of saying that—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Isn't that oranges and apples, then?

SHAUN RUMING: That is my understanding.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Can I go back then to the numbers of teacher shortages. The number you gave us before, the 2,200-ish—

SHAUN RUMING: It was 2,168.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I haven't been part of these discussions before about how we're getting these figures, so if we could perhaps just look at it from, I guess, a layperson's perspective. What we want to know is how many additional teachers need to be recruited to fill the needs of every New South Wales school. I think we all know what we're talking about, so I don't care that this job was there and they've gone off and done something else and now we need another teacher for it. What is the figure when we're looking at how many positions need to be filled in order for us to have a fully functioning school in each of our schools in New South Wales?

MURAT DIZDAR: When I gave those examples I was only responding to Mr D'Adam's question around the secondment. Like we indicated through Mr Ruming, there are 2,200 schools in the system. At 30 January, the vacancy rate is 2,168 positions. They are 2,168 positions that we need to recruit a qualified teacher for, whether that's in a primary school or whether that's in a secondary school with a particular subject.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And you could be recruiting them on either a permanent or temporary basis?

MURAT DIZDAR: They are permanent vacancies that we're recruiting for.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay, but I'm still talking about the ones where there's not a permanent space available because that had been seconded, but there's still a space available; there's still a class without a teacher. When we include those as well, what number do we get?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're temporary recruitments. We'd have to take that number on notice. The number we've got in front of us that we've given to the Committee are permanent recruitments.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You can understand, though, if you're trying to assess whether or not your schools are functioning properly, then the number that you really need is how many actual gaps there are in terms of vacancies. It doesn't matter what you call it.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Boyd, I fully understand your line of questioning. It's a good line of questioning. The operational requirements of a school go to permanent vacancy as well as what you might need by temporary and casual vacancy as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So why aren't you giving us that information? If you understand where we want to get to—you clearly understand where we want to get to in terms of the numbers that we need. You don't want to give us that information. Why?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, Mr Dizdar said he'll take it on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: Not at all. I said we'll go back and see what we've got by way of that figure. It's quite a complex situation, Mr D'Adam, which you'd respect and appreciate, because that casual and temporary workforce range from a daily basis to a yearly basis, so it's a very difficult figure to nail down. I know the keenness for that figure; I've been in the principal's seat. I understand what Ms Abigail Boyd is asking of us as a department. It goes to the operational requirements. The permanent vacancy figure is one that's a lot easier to attain. The figure around also including temp and casual is a very difficult figure to nail down across the system because of the variance that occurs each and every day through the operational requirements of a school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But you've been running our school system for decades. You should know.

The ACTING CHAIR: Order! Before I pass to Mr Farlow, I just want to clarify something for my own mind. When Ms Boyd was asking about all vacancies, permanent and temporary, that number would vary from day to day because "temporary" also includes perhaps someone who is on a sick day or unable to come to work for whatever reason.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The ACTING CHAIR: So the temporary number would vary on a day-to-day basis.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could I just finish my question, sorry?

The ACTING CHAIR: Sure, sorry, and then I'll go to Mr Farlow.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The ones that you're referring to who are on this secondment are presumably on secondment for a set period of time?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So you know what that number is. Of course there are going to be fluctuations, but we would have an idea, wouldn't we? How many people are in that program?

MURAT DIZDAR: And that's why I said let me take that and go back and see what we've got. That program of secondment—again, that's complex, if you want me to unpack it. There are secondments that are three months, six months, 12 months, two years, up to three years. That's why it relates to short-term coverage and longer-term coverage. I also want to make this clear, Chair, to the Committee: That figure of 2,168 that we are permanently recruiting for across 2,200 schools does not mean that there is not a qualified teacher in that school filling that gap. We're undertaking a permanent recruitment, Mr Chair, and there is a temporary or casual backfill in that position while we undertake the recruitment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Not necessarily. There might be.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just one last thing—

MURAT DIZDAR: No—

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for the clarification. I'll let Ms Boyd finish her question, because she's been so patient.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Again, I want to use non-bureaucratic language. If I'm having a dinner party for six people, and I have a table with six chairs but have lent a couple of those chairs out, and someone asks me, "How many chairs do you have?", I don't say six. I had six, but I've got these two that are somewhere else. I say four, and I need to know that because I'm about to have a dinner party. You have an entire school system, and you need to have all of those seats filled with teachers in order to be running those schools effectively, and yet you can't tell me right now how many teachers we are missing.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't agree with the premise. I wish schools were as easy as a dinner party. They're not; they are complex operations. Again, let me repeat: Across 2,200 schools, 2,168 permanent vacancies that we're working on that are backfilled—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Which is a meaningless number for us because it's not actually telling us how many—

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't concur that it's a meaningless number. It's a very important number for us.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's not a metric that you would rely on, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a number that we're working to fill in our schools in a permanent capacity. While we're doing that, there is a temporary or a casual teacher in place.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You can't actually say that, Mr Dizdar. That's not correct.

The ACTING CHAIR: Order! Mr Farlow.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Actually, I'll pick up on that point. Mr Dizdar, how many of those 2,168 vacancies are actually covered at the moment by a temporary or a casual?

MURAT DIZDAR: This goes to Mr D'Adam's comment. We work with our Directors Educational Leadership, as you know, Mr Farlow, in groups of 20 looking after schools. We go back into that school with that principal and say, "While that permanent vacancy is there, have you got cover? How can we help you? Have you got a temp? Have you got a casual?" We have that across each school, and we could summate that as well. That's why we're confident when we say those gaps are temporarily or casually filled while we're recruiting.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But if that was the case, Mr Dizdar, then we would have no split classes, would we? But we've had a number of witnesses come into this inquiry telling us about split classes, because you're not able to fill those positions with a temporary or a casual every day.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to answer on that, but that's another topic. I'm saying to you, on the permanent recruitment vacancies, how they're covered. I'm happy to cover split classes. Split classes—as you heard from parents, like I heard—are far from ideal, far from optimal. But it occurs when a teacher calls in sick, a teacher is absent on short notice, and we're not able to cover that operationally with a casual on that day. I commend schools for what they do when confronted with that operational circumstance, because they still owe

a duty of care to those children. They still look for the learning continuity opportunity. If that's a kindergarten class, for example, and that teacher has called in sick and cannot be replaced at short notice, then we look at how to cover that class. It may mean that those 20 kids are split across other kindergarten classes or early stage 1 classes, so we can continue to provide both duty of care and also their teaching and learning requirements.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That's a system failure, isn't it, Mr Dizdar?

The ACTING CHAIR: Mr Farlow, have you finished your questions?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, I haven't finished my questions. I might go back to Mr Ruming. In your opening statement you talked about the Teacher Supply Strategy and what I would categorise as the initial green shoots in terms of how that is working and how there is an expectation now that there'll be a surplus by 2027. You said some of the programs were performing better than anticipated. Will you outline what some of those might be, and where we can potentially see some more teachers coming into our system through those programs?

SHAUN RUMING: I appreciate the question. Grow Your Own, I think, is a great example of oversubscription and positive early momentum. I think the original target for that program was 100. That target is now 500, given the regional response, which is terrific.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That's very good.

MURAT DIZDAR: Very.

SHAUN RUMING: We are very excited about that, because it's local people in local areas. That was always one of the goals—to try and uncover if that was a potential source for those regions. That one's going quite well. Even though it's had a very slow start, the Recruitment Beyond NSW, the 500 applications that are serious applications—I think at one point we had 11,000 expressions of interest, but that doesn't always necessarily filter through to serious applications. We have 500 that we're reviewing at the moment, and we've got 12 that have commenced, five that are—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And these are the overseas applications?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, if you include Queensland as overseas. We had one Queenslander come in. But, no, they've come from a variety of different countries such as Singapore—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I thought Queensland was part of New South Wales when it came to State of Origin.

SHAUN RUMING: Well, it depends on who you ask. Singapore, South Africa, the UK, Fiji, Zimbabwe—I think there's some great diversity amongst the first 12 and then the next five that are coming in—23 that are at offer stage.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: For those 500 shortlisted applicants or expressions of interest, what's the time frame for those to actually be in jurisdiction, ready to go?

SHAUN RUMING: I'd probably have to come back on notice with specific timing, and the recruitment team is working through those 500 applications as we speak. I would imagine that we will have a fairly good indication of how fast we can progress with them during 2023.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We've asked about the current vacancies. One of the areas that the Teachers Federation outlined to us yesterday to ask on as well was in terms of geographic issues with those vacancies. We've heard more and more that there might have been expected problems in terms of vacancies in regional areas for a long time, but that's now potentially come to western Sydney as well. With respect to those vacancies, are there any hotspots that we should be aware of, where there might be more vacancies than expected?

SHAUN RUMING: I might pass to Mr Dizdar to talk specifically about those schools—those areas.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd have to take that and come back through *Hansard* around the exact specifics by way of numbers. That would be difficult to give.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: But there are no particular areas that you can outline to the Committee that you've seen, or unexpected vacancies?

MURAT DIZDAR: Why it's not easy to directly give an unequivocal answer is because, predominantly, some of the struggle used to be rural, regional and remote, but we've had in play across the last six months priority recruitment teams—a great initiative under Mr Ruming's leadership where he's cordoned off HR teams to work on what were hotspots. We've had great effect and impact in personally case managing, with the principal, those sites. What was some complex geography has been vastly improved by way of recruitment over the last six

months. I know of cases of 10, 12 positions in rural and regional schools being filled. This goes to the flexibility around the incentive packages that have been available, greater flexibility about what we might put in play there. That's why I hesitate to give you exact numbers—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Of course.

MURAT DIZDAR: —because it used to be a predominant rural, regional and remote hotspot problem, and a lot of that has, gratefully, been able to be tackled through this priority recruitment team.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Good news.

LEANNE NIXON: One of the other areas potentially is the Hawkesbury, where I know they struggle to get casuals, for example.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We heard some evidence on that this morning.

LEANNE NIXON: One of the initiatives there is to have a casual supplementation, where hubs have been put in place for an extra staff member for five schools who can be deployed locally. That's been a really productive outcome, so all credit to the People Group and its responsiveness to this over the last few months and over the last 12 months. As I think Mr Ruming said, COVID has taught us to be more agile around these spaces. So there are some good initiatives that address the fact that nationally we have shortages in a whole range of areas, and that poses challenges.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I take it with that figure as well that you had a 52 per cent increase in sick leave, and that's something the department is going to have to work with more and more?

LEANNE NIXON: When you see sick leave up 60 per cent in our 90,000 teachers in one year from 2019—they're incredible figures and they put stress on our system. The conversation about split classes that I know you've heard about over the last couple of days—none of us are stepping away from that, that during COVID that was one of the ways we had to manage, given that illness. We start the year, as Mr Dizdar said, very confident that our schools have got pieces in place to ensure that classes are covered for week one, day one and term 1.

SHAUN RUMING: If I could add quickly on the Priority Recruitment Support initiative. Since that team got organised and put together last year, we've had 450 permanent appointments through that program. Schools don't necessarily stay on that; they'll come on or they'll come off. The principals who we've been working with have been very positive around the additional support in those harder recruitment areas, but they might get to a point where their baseline staffing is to a point where they're not a priority school anymore because we've been able to successfully work with them. So schools come on and off that list, so I wouldn't want the Committee to think that they're on the naughty list or anything like that. They reach out, we see the numbers with them and then we work towards filling those gaps.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask about the temporary to permanent proposal. The initial announcement was 10,000. I think that's been subsequently upped to 15,000. The language is quite interesting. You say you're going to offer permanent roles but that doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to shift the total number, or the numbers, significantly. How many temporaries have been converted to permanent today?

SHAUN RUMING: We've had a number of staff go from casual to temporary, temporary to permanent, casual to permanent. I'd have to take that question on notice to come back to you, although what I can say—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You've got a target, so presumably you've got a baseline?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How many off the baseline have you converted from temporary to permanent today?

SHAUN RUMING: The temporary to permanent project, or initiative, is starting in term 1. Specific to those 10,000 or 11,000 teachers and 4,000 support staff, the first contracts will be given out mid-term 1. We've set a deadline of 2023. We don't think this should drag into 2024. We are working closely, and we've had a number of meetings, with the Federation on the execution of that program. I would suspect that every day there are teachers who are moving from temporary to permanent. But, specific to that initiative, those first contracts will be handed out during term 1.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So "no-one has been converted yet" is the answer.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just add, Mr D'Adam, why we said "offer" is that it will be incumbent on the person, whether they want to take up permanent offer that's before them. Like Mr Ruming said, we're working

with stakeholders, including the NSW Teachers Federation, to nail down the details. We'll be going out in term 1—

SHAUN RUMING: Correct.

MURAT DIZDAR: —to what is a workforce of somewhere between 11,000 and 15,000 to give them that offer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How many of those are teachers and how many of those are support staff?

SHAUN RUMING: We believe it's around 11,000 teachers and around 4,000 support staff. That project kicked off last year in terms of us getting ready and putting the right staff in place to do it. It's not as simple as printing off 15,000 contracts and turning up to a school. We've got technology behind the scenes. We've had to build a workforce that's able to execute this particular project and program. So we've been doing that behind the scenes in November, December and January, and we anticipate being able to hand out the first set of contracts as we roll out across the year and be concluded by the end of 2023.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just clarify one other thing, Chair, for Mr D'Adam? Those figures we gave earlier on demand and supply across the years—they were both FTE, across demand and supply.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They're both FTE? They're not headcount?

MURAT DIZDAR: Remember when you said, "That's not apples and apples"? They're both FTE.

SHAUN RUMING: They're both FTE. And the other correction I would like to make is I mentioned SAS staff before in the 2,168. SAS staff are not included in the vacancy figures of 2,168.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for those clarifications. Thank you for your appearance today. As was mentioned earlier, the Committee has resolved that we have insufficient time for supplementary questions, so if you could please provide any additional evidence or information within 24 hours of your receipt of the transcript of the hearing today, that would be very much appreciated.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 15:07.