

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Tuesday 20 February 2024

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING, AND WESTERN SYDNEY

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:20.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

Dr Amanda Cohn

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Tania Mihailuk

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Bob Nanva

The Hon. Emily Suvaal

PRESENT

The Hon. Prue Car, *Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Apologies for the slight delay this morning. Welcome to the first hearing of the additional round of the Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquiry into budget estimates 2023-24. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, 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 and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today or watching us on the live webcast. My name is Abigail Boyd and I am the Chair of this Committee. I welcome Deputy Premier Prue Car and accompanying officials to this hearing.

Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Learning, and Western Sydney. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence that they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of those procedures.

I welcome our witnesses and thank them for making the time to give evidence today. Deputy Premier, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Those witnesses who appeared at the initial hearing before this Committee also do not need to be sworn. Witnesses who are appearing in a different capacity or who did not attend the initial round of hearings will now be sworn prior to giving evidence.

CORRECTED

Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Secretary, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES, Deputy Secretary, Public Schools, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr MARTIN GRAHAM, Deputy Secretary, Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr MARK BARRAKET, Acting Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms CHLOE READ, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr SHAUN RUMING, Chief People Officer, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr MARK GRANT, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Department of Education, sworn and examined

Ms SALLY BLACKADDER, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr PAUL TOWERS, Acting Chief Executive, School Infrastructure NSW, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session only, which runs from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. for morning tea. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break for afternoon tea at around 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, with 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will commence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning, Deputy Premier and officials. It is nice to see you all. I congratulate some of you who are in new roles since we were last here. It does not feel like that long ago since the last estimates hearings. I wish you all the best with those positions you find yourselves in. Minister, can you advise, as of this morning, how many school sites have had a positive detection for asbestos?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. Obviously this has been of great concern to all of us involved in education, both in the government sector in our public schools as well as the non-government sector. As of this morning the school sites with positive detections are, in no particular order, Domremy College at Five Dock, Liverpool West Public School—as we have given great detail of—Allambie Heights Public School, Penrith Christian College in Orchard Hills and St Luke's Catholic College in Marsden Park.

I'm happy to say that in our government system we've been working around the clock very diligently to ensure that we can either cordon off the contaminated areas or, in the Liverpool West case, we've picked up those staff and students and put them in another school for a couple of weeks while we remediate the site. In the non-government schools we have been working with our non-government partners to ensure that students and staff are safe. I believe St Luke's at Marsden Park is closed, a school I know and love very well. We continue to await some results for some schools that EPA has identified along the line may have used mulch from a company along the supply chain in question. We're right across this issue, of course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I will have a few more questions so there will be plenty of opportunity to put things on the record. In relation to Liverpool West Public School, when were you first made aware of the asbestos finding at that school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take on notice the particular date, because I do not want to get that wrong—for the benefit of the Committee. I would say, though, with Liverpool West that this has been a very disappointing situation that I am very proud that the Department of Education has turned into a situation where our children are learning. I was there at Gulyangarri yesterday afternoon talking to students and staff, who were able to be learning in a brand new school in a different location that we were able to stand up in less than a week—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: —to ensure that our children are still learning.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have very limited time and I have got quite a few questions that I want to ask.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's really important, I think, really important.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to agree with you on the record, I have no doubt—

Ms PRUE CAR: We're talking about asbestos.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —that that school community has done a good job—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You shouldn't be smiling at it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —to be able to support the students from Liverpool West. But I am after some more details about that particular school. Obviously it's a big decision to move students, as you've just talked about, and I know, Mr Dizdar, I think you were quoted in the media as saying that at Liverpool West it was a "millimetres long" piece of bonded asbestos that was found. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I was quoted in the media was that there was one sample, a single piece that had come back positive out of multiple samples that were taken.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How big was that piece?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd have to take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You didn't use the phrase "millimetres long"? That was reported quite widely. I'm just trying to understand.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't recall giving the exact specifications.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, thank you. That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: What I do recall is being advised by the EPA, who we'd work with, that out of several samples that were taken, one had returned positive, that it was a piece of bonded asbestos—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's all on the public record, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: —that the health risk was minimal and that it was a small piece. I don't recall saying in the media—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: —or describing the size of it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My question then to you is, the school originally closed, I understand, Deputy Premier, I think it was for two days and then there was advice on the Wednesday that the school would be open on the Thursday—this is all through media reporting—but obviously something shifted quite significantly in that period of time to move the students to the other school site. Mr Dizdar, you've just given evidence that—you said the EPA had said that it was low risk. I'm just trying to understand, what was the advice or the evidence to move everybody offsite, and how long will they be offsite for?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm happy to clear that up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

Ms PRUE CAR: I would say, this has been reported widely in the media that this is the course of events that—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I'm asking for the advice that you got, because you mentioned earlier that none of the other schools have had that.

Ms PRUE CAR: Sorry, Ms Mitchell, I'm answering the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like to know why you moved them offsite.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What was the rationale or the advice?

Ms PRUE CAR: In fairness, Chair, if I can say, when I'm attempting to answer a question in good faith to the Committee, I really just hope we don't go down the route of what happened at the last estimates hearing, when we were having constant interruptions when I'm actually really attempting to answer the question. I want the community to know exactly what happened at Liverpool West.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So do we.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're interrupting yourself now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you just answer the question? This is pretty serious.

The CHAIR: Order! Let's deal with this point early on. There will be an amount of give and take, and we don't want to stop that. But there needs to also be allowance for Hansard to be able to report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I redirect back to the question: What was the specific advice that you received and from whom that it was necessary to move students offsite for several weeks?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm about to answer that question, if you would just attempt to let me answer it. What actually happened, unfortunately, at Liverpool West—which I've said in the media and I'm happy to say again on the record here at budget estimates—unfortunately the contractor in question, instead of using soil in the garden beds, actually used the mulch in question as fill. As I said at the press conference, as I've said numerous times, which I will repeat verbatim today, we actually have so much mulch to remove from Liverpool West, that was spread throughout the school, that there was no other way to safely cordon that off for students and staff.

So we had to find, quickly, a way for those children to keep learning. We didn't want them to keep learning from home. We couldn't remove the amount of mulch that needed to be removed, because there was no soil. It was used as fill, which goes against what should be done. We had so much to remove—mulch that has to be removed by equipment. Some at the moment is being removed almost by—not by hand, but we have to get in there and get the mulch out, so it takes a number of weeks. As I've said, that's the answer and the answer remains today. I'm not sure what the secret is here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I want some more information.

Ms PRUE CAR: I've just given you all the information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have more questions, with respect, Deputy Premier. How many cubic metres of mulch need to be removed from the site?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice unless Mr Dizdar has the details.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does Mr Towers—does anyone know? Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I can help here. Chair, we gave, through me, advice to the Deputy Premier's office that it looked like it was going to be two days initially, and that was the advice that I had to give, that we could remove safely the asbestos—sorry, the mulch—and the sample in question as well. But what became apparent when our people started to undertake that work with EPA was exactly what the Deputy Premier said. Unfortunately, and this is part of an issue that we're working through with the contractor—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Mr Dizdar. I don't mean to interrupt you, but the Deputy Premier has already answered that. I asked, specifically, how many cubic metres of mulch do you envisage needs to be removed from that school? Mr Towers, do you know?

PAUL TOWERS: At this stage we don't have an exact figure. We're working through it, but a significant amount has been taken out and we're still working through.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you tell us how much has been removed so far?

PAUL TOWERS: I think there's a figure of the order of several thousand cubic metres, but I would have to take that on notice and come back to you and give you the exact figure. We're still working through it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you. Can I also ask, Deputy Premier—the EPA have said quite publicly that the bonded asbestos is low risk, particularly if it's offsite. Other schools have been able to isolate gardens and cordon off other areas. Did you receive advice from Health or EPA that you needed to close Liverpool West and move children offsite or was that a departmental decision?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll pass to Mr Dizdar on this, but I will say, because this is a very important question and I'm happy to answer this, of course, that our advice clearly was that it could not be cordoned off to keep children and staff away from an area where there was mulch all throughout the school and—this point is pertinent—an extreme amount of mulch was spread throughout the school. So we took one sample—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you get advice from the EPA? Were you briefed by the EPA?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll pass to Mr Dizdar on this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. With respect, Deputy Premier, I'm asking you.

CORRECTED

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can ask Mr Dizdar this afternoon.

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

MURAT DIZDAR: I was the one providing advice to the Minister's office, so I'm happy to help.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Dizdar. I need to hear the point of order.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to know what the Deputy Premier knew.

The CHAIR: Order! Now that a point of order has been taken, I need to hear it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: With regard to your previous ruling around this, witnesses should be treated with courtesy at all times, and that includes not speaking over the top of witnesses when they're attempting to answer a question.

The CHAIR: In relation to the point of order, again, there is give and take involved here. There is the right for the member to redirect a witness if they're not answering the question, but we do need to also allow questions to be answered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will redirect. Deputy Premier, you just said in your answer that the advice received was that moving the children offsite was what was necessary. Who gave you—not Mr Dizdar or the department but you, as the Deputy Premier—that advice?

Ms PRUE CAR: Clearly, Ms Mitchell, as you know, because once upon a time you were also the Minister for education—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to know who gave you the advice.

Ms PRUE CAR: My department gave me the advice that in order to keep—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you spoken to the EPA? Have you been briefed by the EPA directly?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm attempting to answer these questions in all seriousness.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not hard.

Ms PRUE CAR: My department—the EPA have also briefed me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: There is no secret here. You're not going to get some gotcha out of this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just trying to get information.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are being so transparent with the people of New South Wales, because we are extremely concerned—so concerned that, where we cannot cordon off the contaminated mulch, we have moved one school site to another.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not sure what you're trying to get at here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When do you expect those children to be back on the school site? How long do you think—

Ms PRUE CAR: As we've said publicly—and I'll say it here again—we expect those children to be back at Liverpool West when we have testing that shows it is safe for the children to go back.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking for a time frame. Do you think it will be a week, a month, the end of term?

Ms PRUE CAR: It could be a number of weeks. That's what I've said and that's what I'm saying here again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't have any updated—you haven't, with respect, spoken about this publicly for a while.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: The extent of mulch, Ms Mitchell, that we have to—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So a week, two weeks, three weeks, four?

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, we're talking about children's education, and I don't really want—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand, but surely you've got some kind of indication. I can ask Mr Towers. How long do you think the work on the site is going to take, just a ballpark figure?

PAUL TOWERS: I'm happy to assist the Committee, if that helps.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Deputy Premier should know.

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, Ms Mitchell, once again, I'm attempting to answer these questions. I keep getting interrupted. It's quite an unedifying experience, like it was last time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How long, Deputy Premier?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have been so transparent with the people of New South Wales. The parents of Liverpool West are getting—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How long?

Ms PRUE CAR: The parents of Liverpool West that are impacted by this are being constantly updated by the ClassDojo, as well as—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking you now in a public hearing. It is not a difficult question.

Ms PRUE CAR: And I'm giving the answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So a few weeks. Do you think by the end of March? You must be working towards some kind of date to have children back on the school site safely.

Ms PRUE CAR: When we have clearance that the mulch has been removed and that it is safe, we will communicate with the parents who are impacted straightaway.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. So you're not quite sure. Thank you. Can I ask, you mentioned transparency.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, and this hasn't been in any of your media commentary, there's quite an extensive amount of construction work happening at that site, isn't there—at Liverpool West?

Ms PRUE CAR: At Liverpool West? I'd have to take that on notice about what's happening onsite at Liverpool West.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, is that correct?

PAUL TOWERS: The school itself is complete.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Last year there was quite of a lot of work happening on the school site, wasn't there, for the new building?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

PAUL TOWERS: It was being constructed last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was there also, last year, a removal of an old building on that site?

PAUL TOWERS: I'd have to take that on notice. I believe there may have been some facilities that were removed, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy to assist and I'm happy to table. I actually have a works notification from 4 April last year. I'll give a copy to the secretariat so that you can see it, Deputy Premier. It very clearly says that last year there was site remediation works happening for the removal of Mainsbridge House and that there was asbestos removal onsite between April and May of last year. Are you aware of that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice. But as I was saying, Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You are not aware or you are?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to take that on notice about that particular case, because this is a very serious issue you're raising.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not—maybe, unlike yourself, I'm not in the business of making political hay with something that's to do with the safety of children.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I'm trying to get information, with respect, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I'm not going down that rabbit hole that you want me to go down.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, I'm trying to—

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm attempting to answer this question. I'm sorry, Chair. This is very serious.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you can take on notice whether or not you knew that there was asbestos removal onsite last year?

Ms PRUE CAR: I really want to make a point that I think it's very clear that the Government has been put in an extremely difficult position because of the supply chain in question—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just going to redirect you back.

Ms PRUE CAR: —with the provision of recycled mulch.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking about what happened on that school site last year.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand you're trying to draw a bow where there may be one—I'm not sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I am trying to seek information, Deputy Premier.

The CHAIR: Order! Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. There are copies that should be available to others. So the site remediation works, the notice that went out on 4 April last year, indicates:

... asbestos containing materials located within Mainsbridge House. Removal of these materials will take place from 11 April and will finish in May.

That's a School Infrastructure document. That, Deputy Premier, you would agree, indicates that there was asbestos on that school site last year that was removed?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it is written in black and white in front of you, from the department.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers? I'm happy to provide you with a copy of that as well.

PAUL TOWERS: I don't have a copy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. I've got—

PAUL TOWERS: But the fact there may be asbestos in the school would be—if it's there, it would be right—asbestos is prevalent in schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry. It's hard to you hear in the microphone.

PAUL TOWERS: Can you hear me now?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's much better. Thank you.

PAUL TOWERS: The answer to your question is, yes, there was a previous school there. It has been removed. And there may well have been asbestos in there. If there is asbestos in there, it would have been removed in accordance—or guidelines, practices in accordance with the EPA requirements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have there been any conversations within School Infrastructure in the last week or two since the mulch issue about this removal and any potential concerns about the source of that asbestos?

PAUL TOWERS: I'm not aware of any concerns about the removal of that building in relation to asbestos.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously you're only new into the role as relieving, and I appreciate that. There has been no concern raised, no-one has raised with you the idea that asbestos was also removed off that site from last year? That hasn't come up in any conversations or discussions with the builders, looking at the supply chain—has that been part of the discussion in the last week or two?

PAUL TOWERS: I'm not aware of it being a part of the discussion because the focus has been on the imported mulch which contained the fragment that was referred to earlier.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you be sure that this asbestos removal last year isn't the source of where you found asbestos in the garden beds?

PAUL TOWERS: I can't provide assurance at this stage because we have not considered that. At this stage—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been testing anywhere else onsite for asbestos or just in the mulch?

PAUL TOWERS: The testing has been focused on the mulch where the fragment was found.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you be looking at other areas? There's obviously been a lot of soil removal. With a new build there's a lot of construction and new things coming onsite. Will you be testing beyond just the mulch to be assured that this isn't from another source?

PAUL TOWERS: At this stage the mulch is widespread. It will cover the area where the facilities would have existed, so the testing has been focused on the mulch at this stage and not others.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said the mulch covers the area where those facilities had been removed, so it's possible that the asbestos found in the mulch at Liverpool West has actually come from the construction work. Is it possible?

PAUL TOWERS: I can't answer that because we haven't looked into that. We've looked at the mulch, and the mulch has been the source of the contamination. The contamination was in the mulch.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, does that concern you, that this actually could be asbestos that's been on the school site for some period of time?

Ms PRUE CAR: At the moment, what concerns me is removing contaminated mulch at Liverpool West Public School, which I've communicated with the community—with the parents, with the staff, with the teachers, with the general community—that we are hard at work, diligently doing this. It's clearly an issue across the community—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can just redirect you, Deputy Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: —that the supplier in question has put the people of New South Wales right in the middle of.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Deputy Premier, you said you would take on notice this particular notification work. Now that you are aware that there was asbestos removed off that school site last year as part of the construction works—and we've heard evidence from Mr Towers that you can't be sure that that's not the source of it—what will you do? Will you commence further testing at that site? Will you go back and look at other suppliers or other sources that could potentially be the reason why you've got this contaminant at Liverpool West? Now you're aware of it, what are you going to do about it?

Ms PRUE CAR: Of course, Ms Mitchell, we will look into ensuring that the removal of that building in question was done safely, which I trust it was. I have taken it on notice—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you removing more than mulch? Is any topsoil being removed as part of the work that's happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have taken it on notice and my advice is—and you well know, I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell, that this is why we take things on notice. I do not want to give the wrong information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine, Deputy Premier, but this is really alarming, because if this removal happened in April last year—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not pretending not to be concerned about this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —you might have had 12 months worth of asbestos contamination at this school that you didn't know about. You haven't talked about that publicly, not once.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Unlike yourself, I am just not in the business of scaring young children and their families.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This isn't scaring.

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm saying is—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is factual information from your own agency.

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution is about courtesy to the witness. A document has been tabled, an issue has been raised and the Minister has taken it on notice, as she is entitled to do. I ask that some courtesy be extended to the witness and that the procedural fairness resolution be upheld.

The CHAIR: I think when we are talking about discussions between a Minister and a member there is a little bit more latitude given in relation to the tone of the conversation. However, I am very concerned about Hansard not being able to record what's being said because you're both talking at the same time. If we could just calm it down a bit.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, can I direct to you? In terms of the work happening on that site at the moment, is it only the mulch being removed or is there more soil or other materials being removed as part of that process?

PAUL TOWERS: The mulch is removed and if the mulch is contaminated then the substrate below it will be removed as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you look at aerial photos of that school site, you can see the garden beds where the mulch is. Is the removal only contained to those garden beds or are there other areas of that school site where we are going to have removal of soil and other matters?

PAUL TOWERS: At the moment, my understanding is that it is contained to where the mulch exists. If there are any other areas that might be of concern or may be considered to be contaminated, they will be tended to as well. The work is guided by a qualified hygienist.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How will you determine if there are other areas that need to be removed? Will you be testing other areas beyond the mulch and those garden beds?

PAUL TOWERS: We would rely upon the expert advice of a hygienist.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Given that obviously there are now concerns about the fact that this mulch could have been there for up to 12 months, will you ask that independent adviser to test other areas of the school site to determine if there are any positive samples elsewhere?

PAUL TOWERS: If there's a reason why the hygienist believes there are other areas requiring testing, we will follow that advice and guidance.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will come back to this.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I will ask you a couple of very brief questions this morning. I want to bring to your attention, and I'm sure you are aware, that there is currently legislation before this House that will enable children to change their registered sex on their birth certificate. It will also enable children to conceal those changes from their parents. Do you support this?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know if that is an answer that is relevant to my role as the Minister for Education and Early Learning.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's very relevant because you're the chief Minister that has carriage over children's schools in New South Wales, so your view is quite relevant.

Ms PRUE CAR: Of course, I am the Minister that has carriage over schools. I don't know if that's relevant to the budget estimates hearing today, Ms Mihailuk.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, are you going to answer the question?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you support children changing their sex on their birth certificate and not telling their parents?

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, paragraph 9 of the procedural fairness resolution is on relevance. This inquiry goes into the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund and other related matters from the budget papers. I'm not sure that this line of questioning fits within those terms of reference.

The CHAIR: In relation to the point of order, I ask the member to point at least to the bit of legislative responsibility that the Minister has that's relevant, if that's a bill that's going to—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: To the point of order: The Minister has carriage over schools and all the conduct relating to public schools in New South Wales. There will be an issue, should children be able to change their sex on their birth certificate, that has a profound impact on schools. In fact, I will be asking further questions in relation to that to her deputy secretary and staff here, because it will be an issue of how they manage that throughout the schools, should it proceed. So I do think it's relevant.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: To the point of order: I wonder whether we might get the Clerk's advice on whether this is anticipation of legislation before the House and whether this question is actually in order. The legislation, as I understand it, has not been introduced and therefore it shouldn't be the subject of questioning from the estimates.

The CHAIR: I think I have heard enough. Minister, having heard the contributions here, if you could answer to the extent that you believe that it is in your capacity to answer, and then we can move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will leave my comments at this: Ms Mihailuk referenced my responsibility as Minister for education and for the 800,000 learners that are in our system. I take that responsibility extremely seriously, and I am not going to enter into a debate, which any child or any parent will be able to—I am just not going to go down a rabbit hole that may impact any vulnerable child that might be going through any type of vulnerability. That does have a lot to do with their school, because, in many cases, they go into their classroom and speak to their trusted teacher—probably one of the most trusted adults in their life—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But, Minister, it's pretty significant if they're changing their sex on their birth certificate.

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not going to enter into a debate that—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If they're enabled to do that, parents should be notified.

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not going to enter into a debate about vulnerable children. I'm just not going to do that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you're suggesting it's not a concern for you whether parents are notified?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going to do that, Ms Mihailuk.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Okay. I've had reports and people that have written to me post the Voice, raising concerns about some children at public schools having to be subjected to days of mourning and weeks of mourning post the outcome of the Voice.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Again, it goes to relevance, Chair.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Of course it's relevant. It has to do with schools.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: This is not a matter that goes to the expenditure of funds from the Consolidated Fund.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What a protection racket this is!

The CHAIR: On the point of order, budget estimates is not, in practice, just to do with the expenditure of funds. It's to do with other matters that are relevant within the Minister's responsibilities. I do note that we had not actually heard the end of the question yet, so if we could just let the member ask the question, thank you.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I have had people—parents and grandparents—write to me directly, and I want to quote some of the examples that their children and grandchildren have relayed to them of their

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experiences in relation to the week or two after the Voice outcome, where Australia completely said no to the Voice. Some of these teachers—and I want to quote what was provided to me—relayed to their children in their class that Australians are stupid, people are racist, people should feel ashamed and people should feel guilty. Do you think that type of behaviour is acceptable? Have you had direct reports in relation to parents having had their children come back home and indicate that that sort of language was used by teachers post the Voice?

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me be really clear in answering this question: We take very seriously our responsibility, as does every principal and every teacher, in teaching all of our children about the First Nations people of this country. Let me be very clear that I have said, time and time again, that classrooms are not places for any type of political activism, and that goes for every issue. I have made that very clear as Minister. I respect, Ms Mihailuk, that that's what you're saying you have had reported to you. I've made it very clear that our expectation is that our wonderful teachers impart their expert practice, and part of that is that impartiality in the classroom, and also using all of these things that happen on a day-to-day basis in our community as learning opportunities, which I know they do each and every day.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Thank you, Minister. Can I just perhaps ask you, Mr Deputy Secretary, have you had any incidences reported to you?

MURAT DIZDAR: I would just reiterate what the Deputy Premier said. My vast experience is that 95,000 teachers and 2,200 principals across this State take that responsibility very, very seriously. In fact, Ms Mihailuk, I can point to a communication we sent to the entire school staff from both Mr Graham and Ms Summerhayes, the deputy secretaries of the relevant areas. What we did at the time—because, as you would appreciate, it was an issue that was percolating throughout the entire country. We don't ask our staff to cut themselves off from any discussion, but we remind them of the controversial issues in schools policy. So we wrote to all staff in this organisation inside the school gates—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry to interrupt you. Was that after the Voice or was that before?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, during that period. We reminded them about how best they can support in the classroom all the children in front of them, how they could approach any discussions that are raised around the referendum, how they needed to remain politically neutral. That was for inside the school gates. Mr Ruming, our chief people officer, sent a comms to the entire organisation on the other side.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, last time I asked you about the treaty and the \$5 million listening tour that your Government has agreed to undertake. Has that now started at schools—any discussion around the treaty, to your knowledge?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Well, you took it on notice last time in November.

Ms PRUE CAR: I just don't want to give you the wrong information.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you had a response since then?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mihailuk, I don't want to give you the wrong information.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'll just remind you that I asked you back in November.

Ms PRUE CAR: There are 2,200 schools, so I want to make sure that you get the accurate information.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You told me you would take it on notice then. I didn't receive a response. I'm just asking the same question again. Given that your Government has agreed to undertake the treaty, the listening tour, the consultation tour across New South Wales, I asked you whether that treaty would be undertaken in schools and whether any type of discussion or any consultation would actually proceed in schools. Have you had any request as such to start that process?

Ms PRUE CAR: In answering your question, again, Ms Mihailuk, I would say that, as Mr Dizdar intimated just previously, our schools are places where we discuss relevant issues in current affairs at that time. Children ask teachers about what they see on the news and we use this opportunity as learning opportunities for our children. But I'll pass to Mr Dizdar if he has anything more to add on this about what's happening in the classroom.

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding is that the treaty was an election commitment. It's a whole-of-government response. I can confirm to the Committee that there has been no work done in our schools around it. There has been no instructions given because I'm not sure that that work has actually commenced and is public and is out there. If and when that would occur, then we'll make sure we give advice to our schools, just like we did with the Voice referendum, Ms Mihailuk.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Minister, can I just ask you a couple of questions in relation to the asbestos issue. I understand that we have a situation where mulch has been used in some schools that has been found to include bonded asbestos.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's right.

The CHAIR: And I note the comments that that's not something that normally should happen—that the recycled mulch is not normally permitted to be transferred to schools. How did that happen?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, good question. I have asked the same question. That's of great concern to me, obviously, as Minister, because the recycled mulch is not to be used. Obviously now we are dealing with this situation—I mean, not just education. We're dealing with it in a range of government departments, as well as in—I think I saw an Aldi this morning. It's in private companies as well. But I'll pass to Mr Dizdar about the recycled mulch question.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We've written to all of our major contractors, because, as you'd appreciate, Chair, when we're funded through government to undertake a major capital upgrade or a construction of a new school, we go out into the market and procure the contractor to deliver that. That's part of our contractual obligations. We make it clear what our entire expectations and requirements are for the entire build, alongside landscaping, which is this area, and mulch. It is factual that we require that mulch not to be recycled. Something has gone awry here. We're just as concerned as the public has been at Liverpool West. I can't add more detail to that because we're in discussions now, having also formally written to that contractor around this particular site and what has gone wrong there.

The CHAIR: When was that mulch put there?

MURAT DIZDAR: If you're asking about Liverpool West, Chair, which was the earlier line of questioning, this school has been around for a very long time and received a very substantial capital upgrade in two stages. Some of the line of questioning earlier went to, actually, stage one. Stage one was cleared by hygienists, by the expert. There were lines of questioning around the asbestos and the removal of a building. This was a two-stage capital upgrade to increase the size of the school and to provide modern facilities.

The CHAIR: So it was in that stage?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell you that stage one was cleared and made available to the school in April 2023. That was the first stage; that went to the earlier line of questioning. Then the second stage was made available to the school on 8 December last year—that was completed. This has been the area that the EPA then advised myself as secretary that they were concerned about and wanted to go and test because there could have been contaminated mulch that they had identified through the supply line. So the affected area was, on 8 December, handed across with clearance, and then we became aware with the course of events through the EPA.

The CHAIR: I understand.

MURAT DIZDAR: Then we've taken—I've got to really underscore for the Committee—overly precautionary measures here, given the health advice that bonded asbestos poses a very low health risk. It is not a decision we took lightly. It is not a decision—

The CHAIR: Sorry, I've given you quite a long stretch there. Picking up on two questions, the contaminated material basically occurred in December 2023, so definitely under a contract that the department had entered into under the new Government, not the old Government. It squarely sits within the responsibility of yourself, Minister, we've agreed, in terms of overall responsibility for this happening?

MURAT DIZDAR: The department contract precedes, actually, the Minister coming onboard. The department entered that contract, not the Government. The first stage of that contract, with the same builder, was handed across to us on April 2023. But the contract was entered some significant time before that.

The CHAIR: I heard a lot from the Government about bonded asbestos being low risk, which of course it is, but we know that bonded asbestos becomes friable asbestos over time. It wears down. It gets into little fragments and can be inhaled. Any bonded asbestos we can say is low risk right now but not necessarily low risk in future. I just wanted to point that out. I understand the narrative around saying, "Don't be alarmed yet," but obviously we need to find this stuff. What confidence do you have that there aren't other schools with bonded or friable asbestos in them right now?

Ms PRUE CAR: Chair, you're right, because it's safe—it's low risk, as you say, to use a better term, when it's bonded, but of course if it becomes anything that's not bonded then it is of great concern. That is why we're removing it. We are going through, under the direction of the new Government's taskforce as well as the EPA—which has significantly, I understand, beefed up resources to go through the supply chain in question identifying

CORRECTED

which sites, including schools, may have used companies that have used suppliers in the supply chain in question. That is how we've come up with this list of schools that we're progressively testing, which I believe 90 per cent are coming back safe and 10 per cent are coming back with some sort of bonded asbestos. Then we're acting as a result of those tests coming back positive or negative. We are working overtime, literally, to identify the sites in question, is my answer to your question.

The CHAIR: We're not just dealing with one—I guess what we've found is one supplier, and I completely understand the Government is acting, from what I can tell, quite quickly to follow that particular supplier where the contamination might be. But this is evidence of systemic regulatory and compliance failure. Personally, I am not convinced that we are limited necessarily to one supplier under what we now know to have been that failure in the framework. Is there a plan to do an audit of other sites over time—other schools—to ensure that we don't have this stuff sitting there?

Ms PRUE CAR: I suppose, in answer to your question, what the public expects of me as the Minister for education is to ensure that we look down every rabbit hole of every school build, every upgrade to see if there was some connection to the supply chain in question. As you said, it's quite complicated—it's a chain. In order to get the right answer, if I can suggest, to your question, Madam Chair, really is a matter for the EPA and the responsible Minister and the taskforce. I know that Mr Dizdar has been working very hard with the taskforce, and I'd ask him to maybe add any comments if he does have any.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's a good line of questioning, Chair. We've taken some actions that can help in being as comprehensive as we can. One of the things we did immediately is we wrote to all our major contractors, by way of capital upgrades and new school builds, to ask them to go back and check. Because, as you'd appreciate, they subcontract out, for example, landscaping—so for them to go and check their records. We undertook a thorough check in School Infrastructure, on advice from EPA, like many agencies have, around this particular supply chain and any sub-chains.

The CHAIR: The question, though, is whether we are going to go beyond that supply chain, knowing now what we know about the systemic failures of regulation and compliance.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can only go on the expert advice, Chair, as you'd appreciate. The EPA have informed me through that taskforce that the one common link with any site that's been impacted by way of a positive discovery has been this particular supplier. They've asked me to do due diligence on that, which I have. But, in doing that, they've indicated the subcontractors that could possibly be involved. So we've also looked at that. We've done a thorough records analysis, which hasn't raised any cause for alarm. There's one final thing, Chair, that you might want to know. I have written to all schools for a safety notice to remind them of our procedures and expectations around asbestos in general, but also in relation to this particular matter with mulch, so that they can raise any concerns.

The CHAIR: I understand. Coming back again to the question of how this particular recycled mulch ended up where it was, you said before that that was basically a contractor. Your expectations were made clear that we're not permitted to put that sort of material on schools but it happened anyway. What is now the contractual consequence for that breach by the contractor?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to dive into detail that's linked to the legal territory, but it would appear that we're talking with the contractor around a possible breach of contract here. Like I said to you—

The CHAIR: It's pretty serious as well.

MURAT DIZDAR: Well, it is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's very serious.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've had to decant a school to another site. I'm delighted, as an educator, that they're actually inside with teaching and learning, with their classroom teachers.

The CHAIR: Sure. But coming back to the contractor—

MURAT DIZDAR: But it's far from ideal. We are now following through with the appropriate course of action around what action we need to take with that contractor. What I'm hell-bent on doing at the moment is making sure we remove all the mulch, we make safe that location—the experts do that through SafeWork NSW, the hygienist and the EPA—and I get that school community back there as soon as I can. I have been through School Infrastructure in discussions with that contractor, and I'll make sure we pursue like we have to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, Mr Dizdar mentioned last year numerous times—I think you said April and December, Mr Dizdar—that there was clearance on those sites in relation to that construction

CORRECTED

work. Can you advise, when an independent hygienist presumably provides that clearance, what form does that take? Did they test the soil and the site at the time? What's the process?

PAUL TOWERS: My understanding is the hygienist will take samples. The samples are sent away for lab testing. The lab testing will come back, which the hygienist will verify. Then those test results are used to obtain a certificate of acceptance, I think it's called, from the EPA.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Where do the samples come from? I'm talking about the removal. Mainsbridge was knocked down last year. The April-May works notification said to the community that there would be asbestos removal. After that, presumably, there's testing that's done. Are those soil samples taken from large areas across the site, or what's that process? What specifically was the process at Liverpool West?

PAUL TOWERS: The exact testing procedure—the sampling, the spread of the sampling—I can't answer here. I'll take that on notice and provide that back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. Thank you.

PAUL TOWERS: But the testing would involve in-ground testing and air monitoring at the same time to check that the environment is not affected by the fragments. I think that was referenced earlier by the Chair. There is a range of tests undertaken to ensure that any demolition, any removal of a building which may have asbestos contamination in it—and any other contamination, of course—is undertaken in accordance with the requirements and regulations that match the EPA. That is what we would expect of the removal of those previous buildings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if you could take on notice, specifically, Liverpool West, because obviously now we've got this issue, and earlier evidence seemed to indicate that we couldn't rule out the source of this particular asbestos. In terms of the mulch being delivered to the school, Mr Towers, did you say before that you expect it to be in the range of several thousand cubic metres of mulch that need to be removed? Have you got that figure?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's come back to you on notice, like we've indicated.

PAUL TOWERS: I have a figure, but I'm not sure if I understand the figure. I'll come back to you on that figure. I don't want to provide information you can't rely upon.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it several thousand cubic metres, though? Is that your understanding?

PAUL TOWERS: It's a significant figure, yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I say, having been to the site, it's quite extensive. With a new build here—Allambie Heights, unfortunately positive, were able to isolate because it was one garden bed—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr Dizdar. I really want to ask about Liverpool West. Feel free to give these answers in Government time.

MURAT DIZDAR: It is quite extensive across the site, which made it difficult to cordon off.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When did that mulch, if we're talking about several thousand cubic metres, potentially, of removal—and I believe that's your evidence, without an exact figure as yet—start being put into the school? Was it in December last year? How long did it take?

PAUL TOWERS: I don't know the answer to how long it took. I'd have to take that on notice and come back to you. It would have been installed in the latter stages of the delivery of stage two of the new school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have there been conversations with the site manager, the project manager? Obviously it's unusual that there's that much mulch on a school site, and indeed that it's gone as deep as the Deputy Premier has said. Surely if it was several thousand cubic metres, it would have taken weeks to put in place. Did no-one notice that and think that was a little odd at the time?

PAUL TOWERS: The volume of material taken out probably includes more than just mulch to ensure there's no cross-contamination of the soil from the mulch.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, so there is more than mulch being removed at that school site?

PAUL TOWERS: Anything that the hygienist has identified as potentially affected or contaminated by the mulch would be removed at the same time, to be absolutely sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry to labour the point, Mr Towers, but it is not just the mulch being removed? There is other soil being removed because of a potential source of contamination, is that correct?

PAUL TOWERS: That's correct, yes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, when you said on the record that the reason this is taking so long is because of all of the mulch that is there, why have you not told the public that, actually, more soil is being removed as well, because of potential contamination?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I've made it very clear that my advice was in this particular case, as Mr Dizdar has said, we have a particularly serious case of where mulch was used instead of soil. There's a lot of mulch that needs to be removed—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But with respect, Deputy Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: —and that was my advice, and that's the decision that we made, based on that advice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I just redirect you, then? Now that we know that more than mulch is being removed on the site—they are going deeper, getting soil—what guarantee can you give families that this asbestos hasn't actually been onsite for months and months, and much longer than you've been on the public record as admitting to?

Ms PRUE CAR: What we will do is we will remove the mulch and the contaminated areas—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, what guarantee can you give families?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm answering your question, Ms Mitchell. When it is clear that it's safe to go back, we will communicate with the parents. I can't be clearer on this issue at Liverpool West.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Deputy Premier, if I can just redirect you—

Ms PRUE CAR: We are getting rid of the asbestos-contaminated material—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair?

Ms PRUE CAR: —and when it is safe, we will advise parents when it is safe to go back. I don't know how much clearer I can be in this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Deputy Premier, we now know that it is not just mulch being removed from Liverpool West; there is other sub-surface soil being removed as part of that. It is going deeper than the mulch. Why have you not publicly told any parent or anyone in the media that that's the case? Why haven't you told the truth about what's happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell. I would hazard a guess that maybe you haven't seen the communications that we've had directly with parents at Liverpool West. They've been very thorough, very detailed through the ways—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you've not talked about anything other than mulch, with respect.

Ms PRUE CAR: They've even been translated through the ClassDojo, so they have received them in ways that they're used to receiving their school information, that we are remediating, as a matter of urgency—in fact, we've pretty much stood up entire teams within the department focused on just this—removing and remediating the contaminated material at Liverpool West so that the students can go back to school. I don't know how much clearer I can be—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier. But we now know that the contaminated material is more than just the mulch, isn't it?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are removing the contaminated material.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because more than mulch is being removed, isn't it? Is it only mulch being removed? Direct question.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are removing the contaminated material.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which is not just the mulch.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are removing all the contaminated material.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier. My understanding is that I think it is at St Luke's?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They've got 30 cubic metres of mulch to be removed and they're closing for a week.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you've got several thousand to be removed at Liverpool West, you're not going to be back on that school site for months, are you, Deputy Premier?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Towers clearly took that on notice about the number of cubic metres that has to be removed from Liverpool West. When you reference St Luke's Catholic College at Marsden Park—a school I well know; it's in my electorate; I have the joy of representing them; and I had a long conversation with Miss Kelly Bauer, the principal there at St Luke's—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier. I am going to redirect you.

Ms PRUE CAR: They have—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm answering your question, Ms Mitchell.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, you're not.

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It's not courteous to the witness to circumvent an answer midway through and then redirect. Wider latitude is given in estimates. That includes wider latitude given to answers, including context.

The CHAIR: I'm not convinced by the point of order.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Please go ahead.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask again: Deputy Premier, if that school is going to be closed for a week for 30 cubic metres, we know that you have to remove several thousand cubic metres at Liverpool West. How do you not know how many cubic metres are there and how long the school needs to be closed for? You are the Deputy Premier. I would argue that this is one of the most serious issues to recur since you've been in the role. You don't know how much there is to remove.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You didn't admit that it's more than just the mulch coming out and you've got no idea how long the kids will be off site for.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, once again, I am not interested, as you are, in going down a rabbit hole to scare parents.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not a rabbit hole; it's a genuine question.

Ms PRUE CAR: It is because I am genuinely answering these questions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How long will they be off site and why did you not admit that it's more than mulch being removed.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have answered this.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just tell the truth.

Ms PRUE CAR: Chair, I'm sorry, this is actually getting absolutely ridiculous.

The CHAIR: Order! We have strayed away from having questions and answers at all now. We have statements followed by other statements. Can we bring it back and ask questions and then allow the Minister to answer the questions.

Ms PRUE CAR: In no way have I ever—I have agreed with Ms Mitchell—it's probably the most we've ever agreed in the history of anything—that this is one of the most serious issues, if not the most serious issue, across my desk as Minister at this point. I'm agreeing with you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're not disagreeing on that.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We don't disagree on everything, to be fair.

Ms PRUE CAR: No. There's a lot we agree with, but some pretty major things we disagree on. I'm just going to say again that at Liverpool West we are removing all the contaminated material. Mr Towers has clearly taken on notice how much that exact figure is because we don't want to get that wrong. My advice at this stage as we sit here right now is that around 90 per cent of that has been removed by machinery at this point.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: When we have clearance for when it is safe to go back, we will communicate that to the parent community.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I have limited time so I wanted to follow up on the questions that the Chair asked about what's gone wrong in relation to this issue. As I said, there was asbestos removal on that site last year and you can't guarantee that it hasn't been there for 12 months. I refer to the broader issue of asbestos in mulch, given that it's at other school sites as well. Mr Dizdar, you said something has gone awry and you've written to people about it to try to find out what's going on. What will you be doing now, Deputy Premier—you specifically—now you're aware of this, now you know that there has been a loophole? As the Chair has said, you can't sit here today and guarantee that there's not friable asbestos in mulch at other schools across the State that you're just not aware of, because clearly there is some kind of break in your process or your supply chain that recycled mulch was even allowed on a school site in the first place. What have you done since the discovery of this a week ago to improve those systems to ensure that kids are not playing with this stuff in playgrounds as we sit here right now?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is a very serious allegation. I mean we agree—we all agree with each other—there may have been a serious break in contractual arrangements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There clearly was. Something's gone wrong.

Ms PRUE CAR: The department, upon my request, will ensure that all contractual obligations have been met and there are penalties if there need to be penalties. I can't be more serious than this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But now you've been made aware of it. The whole point about having policies in place—I accept that recycled mulch is not meant to be on school sites. Clearly it is across multiple sites. This is not just one school issue; it's systemic. It's across non-government schools as well. Other than to look into this particular contractor and have a conversation with your secretary about it, what else are you going to do? How are you going to improve the system going forward? Will there be additional checks and balances on school infrastructure projects, additional requirements of project directors and those on site? Liverpool West has thousands of cubic metres on it, which is highly unusual. Surely you are going to try to learn from what has gone on and improve the system?

Ms PRUE CAR: Of course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are you going to do differently? What have you already put in place to do differently in the week or so that you've known that this has been an issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, Ms Mitchell, as I've said, which I'm happy to repeat again, we will be going through each and every one of our suppliers. That's been made clear. I have informed you. With respect, saying it's a conversation with my secretary is a little bit belittling, and probably beneath you even. I have instructed the department to ensure that all contractual obligations have been met.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So effectively—

Ms PRUE CAR: Can I just put this in perspective as well? We have almost 3,000 schools across the State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm aware of that.

Ms PRUE CAR: When we take into consideration non-government schools as well, we're talking about 12 schools that we are managing. Something has gone seriously awry here—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: —and not just in schools but across the community.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Deputy Premier, if I could just—

Ms PRUE CAR: This is of great concern to the Government, hence the standing up of this important taskforce.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. If I could just clarify, though, what you're going to be doing is going back to your contractors and working through the supply chain. So, effectively, you—

Ms PRUE CAR: To identify the sites.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. But as I hear you, your answer then is to speak to the contractors and ensure that they do the right thing. That's your solution to dealing with this problem. How do you know that this isn't going to happen again then in six months, 12 months, that it won't be friable asbestos, that it won't be across hundreds of schools, because you're not doing anything about it now?

Ms PRUE CAR: I feel like we're arguing even though we're on the same side of this issue. I'm just going to say—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just concerned that nothing is changing other than going back to the contractors and saying, "Hey, guys, who didn't do the right thing here?"

Ms PRUE CAR: The Government has stood up—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That seems to be your answer.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand you're searching for something that doesn't exist.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, no, it does exist, because you can't provide clarity.

Ms PRUE CAR: The taskforce that has been stood up by the Government—obviously, if there are loopholes to be closed, we will work to close them. I think every public statement I have made, every statement I have made towards this estimates hearing, and everything I say from the bottom of my heart is that the safety of our children is our number one priority. If we need to close a loophole, we will close that loophole.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but you haven't done any work to identify what that loophole is—

Ms PRUE CAR: At the moment, Ms Mitchell, with respect—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —and you've taken no action to change it in the last couple of weeks since you've been aware of this.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand you're trying to get a headline.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You haven't done anything.

Ms PRUE CAR: But, Ms Mitchell, with respect—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It could be happening right now at more schools and you haven't stopped it.

Ms PRUE CAR: —we are busy at work participating in the taskforce.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Point of order: Witnesses must be treated with courtesy at all times, and that includes when they're attempting to answer a question. The honourable member continues to interrupt and talk over the top of the Deputy Premier as she's attempting to answer the question. I ask that you remind the member to be courteous under procedural resolution 19 of the House.

The CHAIR: I agree with the sentiment, although not necessarily with the basis for the point of order. It had got out of hand again, with Hansard unable to record both of you at the same time. If we could allow a bit of question and answer. Thank you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, can you guarantee that more schools won't be found to have contaminated recycled mulch onsite?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've said this before in press conferences—and this has been reported in the media, so I'm also happy to say it here again—I cannot guarantee. We are trying to find out where it may be and then we are testing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks for that, Deputy Premier. Can I move on to the upgrade to Hastings Secondary College in Port Macquarie?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's probably a question more for Mr Towers. You haven't visited that school or been to that site, have you, Deputy Premier?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm happy to answer it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like to ask a very specific question about contractors, unless you're across that detail?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm happy to answer the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Can you tell me the last time the contractors, FKG, were onsite working on that building?

Ms PRUE CAR: Could I just say something about this upgrade, which I believe under your responsibility as Minister was committed to being finished entirely by the end of 2022?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I just redirect you? It's a very specific question and I have limited time.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are standing here and it's not completed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a very specific question. Deputy Premier, I'll redirect you. When was the last time that FKG, the contractors working on that site, were onsite?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm just trying to correct some of the misnomers about this particular project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can do that in your Government question time. It's very specific. Mr Towers can answer it if you're not able to.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm answering a question about this project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When was the last time that FKG, the contractors, were onsite at that school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Thank you, Deputy Premier. Is the school upgrade finished?

Ms PRUE CAR: But, I have to say, the project is well on track.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so it's not completed. The upgrade is not completed?

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you know that there's a first stage of the upgrade—I believe the creative and performing arts building, which is open? Mr Dizdar and I spoke to the principal this morning about this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Funny, that.

Ms PRUE CAR: Excuse me?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I said—nothing. Go. Go ahead.

Ms PRUE CAR: And they're very happy with their upgrade. The upgrade is on track for the second stage. It is well underway.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: Funding remains for this project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Fantastic. But when you said at the start of this year that that school project was complete, and it was in your media release that it was one of the new and upgraded schools—the project is not finished, is it?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, the first stage of the project is done—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is the project fully complete?

Ms PRUE CAR: —a project entirely that you committed to having done by the end of 2022.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, this is a direct question. Is the project fully complete—yes or no?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've made it very clear that there were two stages, and the first stage is complete.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, you didn't. It's nowhere in your press release. You claimed it was done, and it's not. There's scaffolding everywhere.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell. You can't have it both ways. I'm really sorry. I have to put this on the record: You committed to having it done by 2022, and it's not done.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier. When the P&C president, Nicole Menzies, says that construction has been going on and no-one has been on site for months, is she wrong?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take on notice what's happening on site—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you haven't checked?

Ms PRUE CAR: —but the project is well underway. It will be completed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was the school ever advised not to communicate to the broader community about proposed changes to the scope of works at this site?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take that on notice—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you don't know that either.

Ms PRUE CAR: —but the project will be completed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been structural steel delivered to site last year that has been sitting there for months?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, this is probably for you. FKG, the contractors—do they still have the contract to complete that work? Has that been terminated or does that still exist?

PAUL TOWERS: FKG is still engaged.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When do you anticipate they will finish the work by? Are they on site working today? Are they up there now?

PAUL TOWERS: I don't know if they're on site today. I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know when they were last on site? The community seems to indicate that no-one has been working on it for months.

PAUL TOWERS: I can't answer that, but I will take it on notice and I can provide information about their whereabouts.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. If you could get that to us today, that would be useful.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could just pick up the issue that the Hon. Tania Mihailuk raised with you before, just in terms of the code of conduct that you refer to in terms of teachers. Deputy Premier, do you believe teachers should abide by this code of conduct that you speak of?

Ms PRUE CAR: Of course. Of course, Ms Merton, I would say the code of conduct is important for ensuring that there is a framework around issues like—and I'm sure this is what you're getting to—political impartiality in the classroom. It's part of the wonderful expertise that our teachers bring every day to the classroom about approaching sometimes controversial issues in a way that enables students to have very rich learning opportunities about issues that may be concerning them or their families at that particular time.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, would you be aware of recent media reports of groups of teachers meeting to discuss breaking the code, bringing their personal views into the classroom?

Ms PRUE CAR: I can't speak for particular teachers—which there are pleasingly more of at the moment, thanks to the election of this Government. There are particular teachers that may be, in their own time, talking about issues that are concerning them. That's not an issue for me, per se, as their Minister. The issue for me is to ensure that there's impartiality in the classroom, and we stand by that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I table a flyer by the Teachers for Palestine NSW. On this flyer, they're advertising a rally, which was held Tuesday 13 February. Minister, I read from the flyer—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: Can we just wait until the flyer has been distributed to the members before we proceed to questions?

The CHAIR: We will need to make copies. You might want to come back to that line of questioning in the next round. Is that all right?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Okay. Sure.

The CHAIR: If I can turn to something a bit different, Deputy Premier, what has happened to Mr Manning?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: In what respect?

The CHAIR: He has suddenly gone. Where has he gone?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not sure where Mr Manning is right at this point, Madam Chair, if that's what your question is.

The CHAIR: No, sorry, I will be clear—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Where is Mr Manning?

The CHAIR: Where is Mr Manning?

Ms PRUE CAR: Where is Mr Manning?

The CHAIR: Did he get sacked or did he resign from his position?

Ms PRUE CAR: I believe Mr Manning has decided to move on to other opportunities but, of course, the hiring of executives and staff within the department is in the operational purview of the secretary of the department, Mr Dizdar.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, where has Mr Manning gone?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to wish Mr Manning all the best. He gave great service to the Department of Education. He finished on Friday. I've been making a number of leadership changes to our organisation in line with the new plan for public education, and that's one of those.

The CHAIR: Did you have concerns about Mr Manning's appointment of contractors?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to talk to contractors. I have had concern with the number of contractors across the entire department. In line with this Government's commitment that every agency, including the one I proudly lead, would look at reducing the reliance on contractors and would bring down that spend, I've had concern around the number across the whole organisation and I've been working with my deputy secretary colleagues to bring that down.

The CHAIR: We talked last estimates sessions about—I think there were 200 contractors who were attempting to be put into permanent roles, or to basically go from 800 down to about 600, I believe, with some of them going to permanent positions. How has that gone?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back with specific numbers. This has been a focus for me in bringing down that reliance and spend. I have had a number of my areas where we've also converted what were contractor roles into permanent ongoing roles, which I favour—to have permanent, ongoing, repeatable expertise. But let me come back on the exact number that we've been able to reduce across my tenure.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. How many contractors did Mr Manning have reporting to him?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take on notice what we have in School Infrastructure by way of contractors. I'd just say, Chair, it is an area—infrastructure—with my understanding across government that has a reliance on contingent labour for projects, for a certain degree of expertise. I think it is an area that will always have some degree of that. I've been at work in Mr Manning's time to make sure that we could look at all roles and what are roles that we could have repeatable expertise on. Can I give an example? We might have a contractor who is responsible for, at our end, managing a major build, but we know that we've got several major builds that will come after that. My preference, as I discussed with Mr Manning—and we worked on that—was to have a permanent person in place who could go from that project then to other projects. We have worked to bring that down, but let me take the number for infrastructure on notice as well.

The CHAIR: How many contractors were let go by Mr Manning in the period since the last estimates?

MURAT DIZDAR: I also wouldn't just characterise it as Mr Manning. Let me come back as School Infrastructure. Why I say that, Chair—with all due respect, the leadership team there, where Mr Towers is also, will have line management responsibility for that. So let me just come back with the number that we've put on and that we've taken off as well.

The CHAIR: I'm particularly interested in how many Mr Manning was responsible for initiating the letting go of or the termination of if you've got that information.

MURAT DIZDAR: If I've got that data, let me come back to you, Chair.

The CHAIR: I asked in the last budget estimates—and it was taken on notice. After we'd had the revelations with the department of transport where it turned out that there had been a number of contractors being

CORRECTED

employed, particularly in metro, who had been employed on this short-term contract but then actually had ended up being there in some cases for 10 or 12 years, I asked on notice and then I also put in supplementary questions asking for a breakdown of the contractors within School Infrastructure and how many had been there for how long. What I got back was just a generic statement, "We use contractors," basically and I never got that information. Is that information that you would be able to provide?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's not good enough, Chair. Let me go back and let me get you the number that we've got and what categories of duration we've got with that. If that was the answer we came back with, my apologies. Let's make sure we go and get you that data.

The CHAIR: I just want to bring one example of a particular consultant. I'm just looking at the eTendering records as, everyone knows, I love to do from time to time. I'm looking at somebody, a Mr Martin Berry, who I believe is the senior leasing manager of property services. He is on a contract from 13 October 2022 and he's just had his contract extended until 22 April 2024. He's on an annual salary of \$436,000. Is that a standard amount? How many other contractors are getting \$436,000 a year within School Infrastructure?

MURAT DIZDAR: It goes to my earlier commentary around particularly Infrastructure and IT with the competitiveness of what that market looks like and the need for, not only in my agency but I think you will find across agencies, expertise in particular areas. While I'm told that may be the market price that's required to get that, I share some of your concern, Chair. That's why I've been at work to deliver on the whole-of-government commitment that I bring down contractor use and reliance as number one but that I also look at building repeatable expertise. My preference as secretary, whether it's in Infrastructure or whether it's in IT or in any division, is to have repeatable expertise. But if that is expertise that has only to be short-run and short time, then I may require to go into the space that you have indicated.

The CHAIR: I would appreciate you looking into that one.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me look at the specifics of the one that you have named.

The CHAIR: I understand that Mr Berry also works at Metro. He is not only employed on \$436,000 a year within School Infrastructure; he's also got a job at Metro. So it does cause concern as to how many other people are on those kinds of salaries doing more than one job.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, let me go and look at the specifics of that individual you are naming. I'm not across what you have said by way of employment in two different agencies.

The CHAIR: Who created the *NSW enrolment growth audit* that came out in February? Were there consultants involved?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was led by my Infrastructure section. I'm not sure that we had anyone else involved. I'm just looking at Mr Towers to see if he's aware. My understanding is that it was run by us in Infrastructure.

Ms PRUE CAR: We would have to take that on notice. I would say that it was a key election commitment. It showed some startling findings about how we wish to do things differently so that we deliver the schools where they are needed, particularly in growing parts of Sydney that were neglected under the previous Government.

The CHAIR: I understand that the enrolment projections are normally completed by the department, but I understand that this particular audit may have been done with consultants and contractors involved.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back with the detail for you.

The CHAIR: That would be very useful. In the most recent annual report for education for that six-month stock—I understand you have a different financial reporting year—there was a large amount of expenses on contractors that were capitalised. I have a technical question around that as to whether that is an amount that gets transferred from operating expenses over to that capitalised amount or whether it is an amount that is capitalised from day one. Is anyone able to tell me that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to mislead you and get the technical wrong. Let me chase that detail. A number of our contractors, like we were talking about in Infrastructure and IT, are the result of capital projects and requirements for capital upgrades or major school builds, and that portion of that cost is attributed to that project. Let me get the technical answer for you. I don't want to give you the wrong answer.

The CHAIR: That would be very useful. I don't know, Mr Towers, if you know. On those accounts we always have a little asterisk that tells us how much has been capitalised. I'm interested in working out exactly whether that is a new separate cost from the amount that appears on the P&L or whether it's actually a doubling up of an amount that was previously reported on the P&L.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get you the accounting treatment and what the rules are around that.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Of course, that goes into the end of June last year so we don't have the most recent figures yet for the department because of that different reporting cycle. But are you able to tell me how you are tracking in relation to total consultant and contractor spend? It increased significantly in that period to June 2023.

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to get you the figures. We spoke about contractors but I can speak about consultants because it's an area where there's another whole-of-government requirement to bring down reliance and expenditure. I can say, Chair, that in my tenure as acting secretary and then secretary I haven't entered into an agreement with any of the big four. I've been closely monitoring with my dep sec colleagues, with required approval mechanisms at my level to enter into consultancies—again, so that we can go with repeatable expertise and build that expertise inside the organisation. So I know that that figure has also been carefully watched. While I get you the consultant numbers and detail, let me get you the contractor one as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that would be very useful. I want to come now to the New South Wales Government funding of private schools. I understand the NSW Teachers Federation reported that the former Government spent about \$850 million over-funding private schools. Has the amount of funding for private schools increased or decreased in the current budget under your watch, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is an important question and very timely at the moment, Madam Chair. I would note that the vast majority of our record funding in education is going to public schools. I will take this opportunity, if I can, to say that we're in the middle of negotiating the National School Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth, who have a sort of flipped arrangement where the majority of their funding goes to non-government schools. So we're proud to deliver the vast majority of our funding to our government schools. We're very hard at work. I will be in an education Ministers' meeting later this week, arguing that we get an increased amount of funding to our public schools as part of the new agreement.

The CHAIR: So the amount of funding for private schools in the last year—I'm just looking. In the last financial stub—that six-month statement that took us up to the end of June 2023—had just over \$1.5 billion in grants and subsidies going to non-government schools. What does that consist of, exactly?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm just looking at the right deputy secretary to pass to so that we give you the right information, Madam Chair. Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: You are asking what comprises the funding that goes to non-government schools?

The CHAIR: Yes, that \$1.5 billion in the 2023 financial year. Grants and subsidies—what exactly are we spending that on?

CHLOE READ: I might need to take the full breakdown of that on notice, but a large proportion of it would be the State Government portion of the school resourcing standard for those schools.

The CHAIR: So that falls under grants and subsidies?

CHLOE READ: I believe so. I'm looking at Ms Blackadder, who is nodding at me.

SALLY BLACKADDER: Yes.

The CHAIR: So that has increased year on year and I guess you're saying that's because the percentage amount required has increased?

CHLOE READ: No, the percentage committed for the State Government and the National School Reform Agreement for private schools is on a decreasing trajectory in terms of percentage. But that doesn't mean that the actual quantum will decrease because there will be other funding elements in there. Also, as the number of students change and the profiles of those students change, then the actual amount may be different—may be higher in their particular year.

The CHAIR: I might come back to that. There was another line item in the Government amounts where it showed quite an increase over the years in the amount of out-of-pocket expenses that parents are having to pay. Can you explain why that is? I went back four years because I wanted to see if it was a COVID blip, but the percentage is actually increasing quite significantly in terms of the amount of subject contributions, and the sports and extracurricular activities revenue coming in. Can we explain that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Into government schools, you mean, Madam Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have to say, every question relating to the funding of programs within schools, the practice sometimes of schools asking for parents to contribute to that—it all does actually relate to the need for greater funding as part of the National School Reform Agreement. We believe the Commonwealth has a big role

CORRECTED

to play in coming to the table on that. Ideally, we would like to see a situation—in fact, it's our Government's commitment—where we get to 100 per cent of that SRS funding at least as a minimum so that schools are properly funded and their programs are properly funded so that every child can have the opportunity to reach their full potential. That's what Gonski recommended all those years ago that we've never been able to realise. All of this relates to the drive for the urgent need for more funding in our schools. We don't want to see parents have to dig into their own pocket to do that, especially in public schools, because it is their right to send their child to a public school free of charge. We just don't want that to happen and we need more funding for our public schools.

The CHAIR: I absolutely agree with you. I understand that that period up until the end of the financial year for 2023 was primarily not when Labor was in charge. But we had an increase from \$43 million to \$86 million, which is double in terms of the amount that parents were putting in for sports and extracurricular activities. How did that happen? Do we know?

Ms PRUE CAR: I might ask Mr Dizdar to elucidate.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, let me come back with the exact figure. What I can tell you is that we monitor this space very carefully. If you're talking about subject contributions, these predominantly occur in high schools, in industrial arts and in elective subject areas. I can tell you, Chair, that in 2017 that figure across 2,200 public schools was \$41 million and in 2022, because we go off school years, it was \$43 million. So I'd argue that there's been very little movement over time. But you're quoting an \$86 million figure, which would be alarming, so let me come back.

The CHAIR: You are talking about subject contributions, which on a financial year—sorry, I know you work on a different reporting cycle, but if we take the standard 2022 financial year to the 2023 financial year we're going up from \$37 million to \$42 million. But this "sports and extracurricular activities" line that parents are paying has gone from \$43 million to \$86 million in that same period.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay, Chair, I have now understood. That's slightly different to subject contribution as well. I can tell you—and Ms Summerhayes might be able to add—that, in my movements across the State talking to principals, this is an area of concern where bus costs, for example, have gone up to ferry children to PSSA sport or Wednesday afternoon sport.

The CHAIR: If we're to deal with it and if we're to reduce it, we need to know where it's coming from. That's why I'm asking what has contributed.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm only giving the anecdotal evidence around transport cost as being one thing raised with me.

The CHAIR: Has there been a department investigation into exactly where these costs are?

MURAT DIZDAR: What we have done, and I'm proud to have done it, is write to the entire principal base at the beginning of the year reminding them around voluntary contributions. From time to time Ms Summerhayes and I have got to go back and unpick where a school calls it, for example, "fees" or "required payments". These are voluntary contributions. No parent should feel obliged. Of course, many parents in the State want to back in their school and help where they can, and this is one way they can.

The CHAIR: We also hear of teachers putting their hands in their pockets to pay for students as well, which is awful.

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, with record funding through the school-based allocation report, we don't want that to be the case. We reminded all our schools around emphasising the voluntary nature. We've had a stance since 1884 in public education that no child can be excluded from the curriculum or no family can be excluded by way of socio-economic complexity or requiring to pay fees. That's the differentiator in public ed and it needs to stay that way. We've kept reinforcing that, particularly—my communication said—off the back of cost-of-living complexities.

The CHAIR: It's now an opportunity for Government members to ask questions, if they have any. No? That means we can have an early morning tea.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We will start again with the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, did you have an opportunity to check the figures over the break of how much mulch was being removed from Liverpool West Public School?

PAUL TOWERS: No, I don't have those final figures for you.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You said earlier that you did have some figures in front of you. I'm just trying to ascertain what sort of volume we're talking about in cubic metres. Is it tens, hundreds, thousands of cubic metres? Can you give a rough indication?

PAUL TOWERS: The figures I have don't give me confidence in them and I want to get them properly checked before I provide them to the Committee at this stage.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you think you would be able to get that to us by lunchtime today? How long will that process take?

PAUL TOWERS: I have to take that on notice because a significant amount of work is going on, on the site at the moment. The situation is very dynamic. I don't know if the team is able to give a final figure at this stage, even an interim figure. I'd have to take it on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Did you say earlier though, Deputy Premier, that you understand that 90 per cent of that has been removed? That was your evidence?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. I did say—yes, sorry, Ms Mitchell—that my advice was that as we sit here approximately 90 per cent of what needs to be removed has been removed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do we know how much has been removed then so far? The Deputy Premier is saying—

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't have that. I have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking Mr Towers. You have advice that 90 per cent of what needs to be removed has been removed. I'd like to know how much has been removed thus far then?

PAUL TOWERS: I don't have that figure at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then how do you know it's 90 per cent, with respect?

Ms PRUE CAR: I was advised by the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: By whom?

Ms PRUE CAR: By the secretary that it's 90 per cent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, do you know how much has been removed?

MURAT DIZDAR: I know that 90 per cent of the site coverage. I don't know in terms of cubic metres or weight.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No-one sitting here can—

MURAT DIZDAR: I know by way of coverage of the site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, thank you.

MURAT DIZDAR: And we're working with SafeWork and EPA as we remove to have each section of that school cleared. And so from people on the ground—from Infrastructure—I'm told that 90 per cent of the coverage has been removed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. This is a final opportunity. No-one here this morning can tell me the exact amount per square metre of mulch that needs to be removed from that school? You can't give an indication if it's in the tens, hundreds or thousands of cubic metres? No-one has that information.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take it on notice, like we've indicated.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't have it now? No-one has it now? You're all under oath. No-one has any idea of roughly how much? You can't give me any indication?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a significant amount.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect—

MURAT DIZDAR: That's across the school.

Ms PRUE CAR: We've made that very clear.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's across the school.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that, but a significant amount could be a hundred cubic metres or 10,000 cubic metres.

MURAT DIZDAR: We were not able to cordon off that school and that's why we made the decision to go onto another site for continuity of teaching, learning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I respect that, Mr Dizdar, but I'm trying to understand exactly how many cubic metres of mulch need to be removed at Liverpool West. It's underway at the moment. The Deputy Premier has said that 90 per cent has been removed, yet nobody can tell me how much has left the site and how much needs to be removed overall. No-one has that figure with them.

MURAT DIZDAR: We are happy to come back to the Committee with the number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, just before the break the flyer was tabled and I hope people have a copy of it. This was drawn to my attention by a concerned parent.

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't actually, unfortunately, Ms Merton.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You do now.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. Deputy Premier, if I could just read from the flyer issued by Teachers for Palestine NSW. The flyer was issued before the scheduled event, which was 4.00 p.m. Tuesday 13 February. The flyer reads:

All day, we will wear our Keffiyeh, Palestine badges, and Teachers and School Staff for Palestine T-shirts into school

Deputy Premier, we speak about the code of conduct for teachers. Does this concern you?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Merton, I have to say that the rally in question was outside of school time. Of course we expect our teachers—and I've made it very clear in all of our communications with them, and I know this is part of their professional expertise, I have to say—to remain neutral and impartial in the classroom. That is one of the reasons why we have the code of conduct, as many organisations do.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: I really can't control what teachers do in their own time.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could redirect you to the flyer. In terms of reference to "in the classroom", "wear your gear, bring your banners, let's protest for Palestine in the classroom", this is also supported by Teachers for Palestine posts. I am happy to table these documents. In these photos you will see that we have teachers in the classroom—I can see books, shelves, desks, whiteboards—wearing T-shirts, Teachers for Palestine. A post states:

Some of the photos from our day of action for Palestine last week. We won't be silenced, we won't be deterred. We will continue to make the genocide being perpetrated by Israel visible and make our support for a free Palestine visible too.

The right to protest is freely available to anybody—any parent, any teacher. But Minister, the code of conduct relates to the classroom, school hours, student learning and the student school environment. This is in the classrooms of New South Wales schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, you're right. That's what the code of conduct does refer to, Ms Merton. You're correct. We've made it very clear that teachers must abide by the code of conduct. We as a department even have a dress code for our teachers in terms of professional standards of dress. It is made very clear to them. I just want to make it very clear, before I pass on to Mr Dizdar to make some commentary about this, that Teachers for Palestine is a group of people who happen to be teachers who feel a particular way about this issue. This is not something from the department or the Government. This is not something that has been sanctioned by the Department of Education. This is a group of private citizens who happen to be teachers in our system who obviously feel quite passionate about this particular issue—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you, and we agree on that, Deputy Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: —but do have to abide by that code of conduct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's in the classroom that this conduct's taking place.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, which I've answered.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As the responsible Minister, what's your reaction? Is there a directive? What do we tell parents? "It's okay, I have a code of conduct"? But in terms of the—

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Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Ms Merton, I gave you my reaction.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —application of this code in the classroom, how does it work?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll ask Mr Dizdar to explain how it works in practice. But we have a code of conduct we expect teachers to—that's my reaction.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The expectation is there—

Ms PRUE CAR: And I've made it very clear.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if it's not happening; if there are photos—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But how is it upheld? "It's okay, I've got a code. Go do your own thing. I know you're in the classroom, I know it's school hours."

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not at all what I said.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: "We don't enforce the code." A breach, concerned parents?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can add, Ms Merton—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What's the process where there's a reported breach of the code? I've got photographic evidence here and we sit here talking about the code, but it's not enforced?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me talk to the process and then I would welcome, if you would like, outside of the Committee—if that is a government school that's in front of you, I'd really welcome, as secretary, if you could provide that—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm not going to pick schools here. I'm talking across New South Wales.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think Mr Dizdar is saying so he can follow it up.

MURAT DIZDAR: There are 3,000 schools. I'm responsible for the oversight of the government system of 2,200. If that's one of the schools that I'm responsible for, I'm happy, outside of the Committee, to take that detail. I've made it very clear as secretary on four occasions that I've communicated, with what is a global tragedy that's occurring, that our schools are not immune—it's impacting on our schools—I've made it very clear to 95,000 teachers, who are, for the main, remarkable in how they work through situations like this, that they have to be politically neutral, that they cannot take a side and that the best way to support 800,000 students is to embrace the full diversity. In fact, Ms Merton, last Friday Ms Summerhayes and I ran a principal live stream, where we spoke to principals in the State around this issue, around how we could support them and around how—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Your efforts are well recognised to support the code—

MURAT DIZDAR: So that's a particular incident there. I would be concerned as well. Let me—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —but how is the code enforced? A breach—sure, I can single out a school where there might be something and you and I can have a conversation. But, to parents across New South Wales, how is the code upheld? This protest was planned. Advance notice was given. Minister, was a directive issued from you to remind teachers of the code and how that operates? You spoke earlier about the issuing of a directive relating to the referendum. What's happening today?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, there has been a directive from the department about dealing with this issue in an impartial and a very sensitive nature. I would say the need for that is very, very real in our school environments because—I'm just going to say this once and very clearly. We are responsible for 800,000 students. There are Jewish students and Palestinian students. There are Jewish teachers and Palestinian teachers. We take our responsibility very seriously for a large group of people—students and teachers—that are impacted, feel strongly by this issue, and our responsibility is to maintain harmony in our school system. We've issued that directive very clearly. You've asked and the answer is yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: And on several occasions, I would add—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In the event of a breach, what action—Minister, we see these photos. We talk about the delicate situation. What do you do in response to this? Is there discipline? Is there, "It's okay"? "I'll reinforce the code"? Is it more than a piece of paper?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to be really clear about this. It might shock you to know that I'm not involved as Minister in the everyday discipline, as you say, of teachers in classrooms. I trust that, with the Department of Education, as Mr Dizdar tried to intimate to you, Ms Merton, if there are cases where parents are concerned that there has been a breach, or someone has concern that there has been a breach, then that will be dealt with on a

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school-by-school basis according to the code. I think that's why—I'm not inside his head, but I'm assuming that's why—Mr Dizdar asked you if you would like to talk to him about if there was a particular school, because then that can be followed up in accordance with the code of conduct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That's very much recognised. Minister, in the event of breaches, what powers are available to you?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Ms Merton, I think I just answered this. The education Minister—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But as the Minister what can you do? Is there discipline?

Ms PRUE CAR: —does not involve himself or herself in the discipline of teachers. That's the Department of Education as the employer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, how many teachers retired in 2023?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm glad, Ms Mitchell, that you ask about retired teachers. As you well know, last year, when you yourself were the Minister, resignations outstripped retirements for the first time ever and we're actually making good progress in reducing the number of vacancies across the system—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll just redirect you, Minister. It's very specific.

Ms PRUE CAR: —which today we've announced is down by 20 per cent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like a specific number. How many teachers retired in 2023? I want a figure. Mr Ruming might—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to take that on notice for the exact number, unless Mr Dizdar—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has anyone got it?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar can.

MURAT DIZDAR: It was 2 per cent of our workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I'd like a number. How many teachers retired in 2023? Mr Ruming, do you know?

SHAUN RUMING: It's 1,078.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many resigned in 2023?

SHAUN RUMING: It's 2,050.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, at the last hearing you said that you wanted to see less resignations than retirements. Clearly, that's not happened. Can I ask why, when I asked about this and asked for the figures through a question on notice towards the end of last year, you didn't provide that data when it was asked of you?

Ms PRUE CAR: In relation to supply issues, resignation issues, retirement issues, I'm going to start answering this question this way. We came to government to address the chronic teacher shortage that you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I just redirect? I've only got a few minutes. It was a very specific question. I put a question on notice last year to ask for this data. The answer that I got back on 22 December was that this is collated at the end of the calendar year. That was actually the last day that the department was operating and, indeed, schools had finished. Why was I not given that data when I asked for it in December?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm not sure what credibility you have coming in here asking about teacher supply—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could I please redirect? Earlier—

Ms PRUE CAR: —when we are doing absolutely everything possible—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a very specific question.

Ms PRUE CAR: —to turn around the tanker that was the destruction to supply and retention that you created.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier. You said in these processes last year that you wanted to see less resignations than retirements.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I do.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That did not happen last year. I asked you for that data, and you did not provide it. In terms of the process around answering a question on notice, Mr Ruming, when I asked that question—or, indeed, when any member asks the question; I know Ms Boyd had had an issue earlier with not getting the information that she wanted, and, unfortunately, it's a repeat occurrence from this Minister and this office—did you provide those actual figures to the Minister's office to answer that question on notice? Was the data given?

SHAUN RUMING: We provide data to the Minister's office on a regular basis, on resignations.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So when I asked that question—

SHAUN RUMING: The number that I just gave you before, Ms Mitchell, was the number for 2023. That data is collated in March of each calendar year. So we will be going through that process in four weeks time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I asked for those figures—

Ms PRUE CAR: That was March last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I asked for those figures in December, and nothing was given to me. So you don't have any indication of that—did you give that data to the Minister's office and then was that not provided through the Chamber? That's what I'm trying to work out.

SHAUN RUMING: This was the data that we provided to the Committee last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right. So you don't have figures now for throughout the entirety of the 2023 school year?

SHAUN RUMING: No, but we—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What was that 2,000 and that 1,000, then? Where has that come from?

SHAUN RUMING: That comes from the reporting of last year of March. We will get the figures updated in about four weeks time when we do that—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you don't have data for how many have resigned in 2023?

SHAUN RUMING: The data that I just provided was the data that we provided at the end of last year in October to this Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In October?

SHAUN RUMING: When we had the last budget estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But when is that taken from? I'm sorry. You've confused me with the answer that you've given. I want to know, in the calendar year of 2023, how many teachers resigned and how many retired?

SHAUN RUMING: We will be able to tell you that in March.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right. It's now the end of February. You don't have any indication? Do you have any preliminary numbers that you can provide?

SHAUN RUMING: No, I don't.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Nothing at all? No indication? Have you asked for an update on that, Deputy Premier, as to how resignations versus retirements are tracking?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, of course, I have. My advice is—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, what is it? Is it better or not?

Ms PRUE CAR: My advice is that that is coming in a number of weeks. As you well know, from your time as Minister—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you don't know. Thank you. I'll just move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: —we are a couple of weeks into term 1 at the moment. As things settle down, we can know where we're at.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I understand that, but I'm asking for data—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm pleasingly able to report to the people of New South Wales—

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: —that we are making progress.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking about resignations versus retirements. I asked in December, and I didn't even get the figure of 2,000 and 1,000 that Mr Ruming has just provided now. Will you commit, then, when that data is made available to you in March, that you will publicly release it at that month and not wait until there's a convenient point in time?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take your questions on notice. I have to say, Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, it's a genuine question. If it's going to be available in March—it's one of the benchmarks that you said to this Committee you would be looking at to improve—

Ms PRUE CAR: It is, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —will you publicly release that data in March when it's available?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I think I've made it a virtue of my tenure, thus far as Minister for education—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, we look forward to seeing it in March, then.

Ms PRUE CAR: —to be transparent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, great. We'll see it in March.

Ms PRUE CAR: In fact, today we came out with the vacancy numbers, which you always refused to give to the public.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Deputy Premier, I've asked for those numerous times and not been given them through the House. It's a repeat occurrence from you and your office. But I look forward to seeing those resignation and retirement data publicly released in March. Can I just take you to the annual report? There's an interim annual report on the department's website at the moment. Have you read that? Have you seen that document?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have seen the annual report, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you read it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have seen the annual report. I have been briefed on the annual report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, have you read it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have been briefed on the annual report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so you haven't read it. Have you looked at the annual report from 2022? Are you familiar with that document, the one from the year before?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have been briefed on annual reports in my time as Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I just wanted to refer you to the fact that the previous annual reports listed a number of targets right across the public school system, going to things like attendance, Aboriginal student outcomes, what happens for children in terms of post-school destinations.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There's academic outcomes in terms of NAPLAN and the like. That's all in the 2022 report. There is no mention of any outcomes targets in the draft or the interim annual report that's available now. Under your Government, will you not be releasing or setting targets for statewide outcomes across the Department of Education schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm really glad that you asked about this particular question, because it goes to the heart of our recently released plan for public education, which was released after deep and meaningful consultation—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

Ms PRUE CAR: —with a profession that was ignored and rebuked under the previous Government. We have—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, it's just a very simple question. I just want to redirect you—

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Ms PRUE CAR: Under that plan, we will be working with schools on their school-by-school targets to ensure that our target as a Government—and let me be really clear about this, because this is so important for parents to understand, because this is the feedback that they have given to us—is to lift all students, no matter where they are starting from. I know that your previous targets, Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: —were about the two top bands of the HSC.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, if I could just redirect you—

Ms PRUE CAR: We are interested in lifting all students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will just redirect you. I agree that parents deserve to know outcomes. As a public school parent, I definitely want to know across the system how the children are tracking. There are a range of measures, very visible in the 2022 annual report, that talk about, as I said, post-school destinations, attendance, improving Aboriginal education outcomes, early childhood, NAPLAN. There were very extensive targets that were set, and it's publicly reported and available for all parents to look at. Will that be included, that sort of statewide data—targets and outcomes that you want to see met—in the annual report when the final one is released for 2023 and going forward? Will you have statewide outcomes and targets that parents will be able to read and pick up in the annual report for the entire Department of Education?

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, Ms Mitchell, the previous approach, which you say—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, it's a specific question, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: —worked so well, left us—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you have outcomes and targets in the annual report or not?

Ms PRUE CAR: We inherited a system—

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It would assist the conduct of this hearing if we allowed for a question-and-answer session.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not hard.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: I've refrained from taking points of order, but some of the questions are infinitely longer than the answers that are being provided.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because I want to know if there are outcomes in the report.

The CHAIR: I do agree that this has become quite scrappy. The time is about to expire anyway.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, will there be outcomes in the annual report; yes or no?

Ms PRUE CAR: I can tell you that parents will be able to work to ensure that they can see their school plans, with the outcomes in their school plans.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So that's a no for statewide. Thank you. My time has expired.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are committed to lifting all students. Can I say, it's not like the previous approach worked. Did it work, Ms Mitchell? I don't think so.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're not going to report it.

The CHAIR: Can we come back to where I was when I had my last round—

Ms PRUE CAR: Gladly. Yes.

The CHAIR: —in relation to the doubling of parent contributions for sports and extracurricular activities. Where I wanted to get to with that is we hear a lot from the Opposition about the school voucher system no longer being in place. We're obviously all very aware of the cost-of-living crisis that we're in. What has been done to systematically unpick that increase to ensure that you can decrease it in the future?

Ms PRUE CAR: It is greatly concerning. I'm going to pass to Mr Dizdar, but I'm going to make it very clear as well, as Minister I think it's important that I say this. The secretary has made this very clear to the leaders of our schools, our great principals, that the voluntary contributions are voluntary contributions. No student is to

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be excluded from activities or from enrolment in schools because of the lack of ability to give a voluntary contribution. They are not fees. I really want to make that very clear, because that's something very important to me about what sets us apart in our system.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I want to make sure I come back with that figure because, as you would respect and appreciate, during those complex COVID years, we had no excursions running, no camps running, no extracurricular, no sport. So I want to make sure I get the right advice and the right numbers. Has the spike that you referred to gone back to what normal levels would be or is it part of the anecdotal that I've also picked up across the State? For example, I referenced transport costs by way of the school hires a bus to take the rugby league team and drop off the softball team. Principals have told me that's become more expensive across the State. I want to make sure I get the accurate info. You would appreciate those three tough years across that COVID landscape had none of that occurring and now it's gladly back to normal. But let me come back with the detail.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

MURAT DIZDAR: We have stressed—and I've seen this as a parent of three children in the system—the voluntary contribution, even with subject contributions for electives, no child can miss out, no parent can feel like they're obliged to—no parent in their communication can feel like this is an obligation or a fee or a must-do, because that's what we pride ourselves on. Across the last four years—we give guidance that if you're going to increase the voluntary contributions—we haven't allowed for an increase of voluntary contributions. We're very respectful that families are doing it tough out there. We want to make sure we can support them in our education delivery.

The CHAIR: I'm looking at the last four years of that line item. In the 2020 financial year—that's the middle of 2019 to the middle of 2020—we were sitting at around \$68 million. Then it was \$68 million again in the following year, end of 2021. And then 2022 was this 43 and now we're back up to 86. So it is the highest it's been in four years. I'm not sure that's explicable from a COVID blip, but I guess \$40 million of expense for parents across the State is quite significant. Is there any way that the Government can just be allocating \$40 million through the budget to make sure this doesn't happen again?

MURAT DIZDAR: I totally concur with you and I wasn't offering it as an excuse. The mere practicalities of those COVID years meant no excursions, no activities and no sport. That's why I want to go back and unpack that figure. I'll get that advice. I'll provide it to you. I did have the voluntary contribution and the subject contribution figures which I was reading out to you. They've remained very stable. But I do appreciate that you're talking to extracurricular and sporting, so let me find out the exact detail of what's attributable to that.

The CHAIR: The other line item I find curious—and again I'm looking at over four years—is in relation to canteen sales. In the last financial year it was just over \$29½ million in revenue for the department from canteen sales, up from around \$21 million in 2020. Again, in the current cost-of-living crisis that causes me concern. Is that line item the amount of profit being made on those goods or is it something else? Is it a lease to for-profit operators? What is it?

MURAT DIZDAR: Canteens, Chair, you'd appreciate, fall into a couple of categories. They can be P&C-run canteens and parent volunteers. And I do want to thank the parents across this State who do that, because some of our operations can be not viable by way of student number or capacity. If it wasn't for those parents and their willingness to assist, in many locations we wouldn't have canteens run.

The CHAIR: Just on that, because I asked about this in the last estimates on supplementary questions and I got an answer back that we have 512 for-profit canteens in New South Wales, so ones that are not run by P&Cs or school run. What percentage is that of all of the canteens?

MURAT DIZDAR: Did you say 512, Chair? There's 2,200 schools, so I'm going to say, roughly, a quarter.

The CHAIR: Again, Minister, this is not something that happened under your watch. But this privatisation of services within our schools—does that concern you that we have 25 per cent of them being run for profit?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I talk to that category, though? That category is where the canteen is leased. They have to comply with a healthy canteen guide and also a pricing guide that is part of the tender application.

The CHAIR: But we're still getting \$29 million in profit from our canteens during a time of extreme crisis for the average family.

MURAT DIZDAR: One other detail that I'd just provide for you, Chair: Those funds don't go to the department. Those funds go to the school and would go back into that school's general operation. I can tell you as a former principal in the system I did have cause to tender out the canteen at the time—fantastic operator. There was a small income flow that came back into the school, which was great, through that lease. I have to say the

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school community was really happy because they were being looked after by way of nutrition. I also made it my business as principal, if there was any child who was struggling financially with their family, to make sure I'd feed them and make sure they were well looked after.

The CHAIR: Perhaps I need some clarification on what that line item is then. How much of that \$29½ million is profit being made on goods sold from the canteen? I appreciate that there might be an amount going back into the school, but we've just talked about out-of-pocket costs for the average parent. The fact they're putting more into their school is not necessarily good in the context. Also, how much is coming back in, in terms of lease fees, for that quarter of our canteens that are being run for profit?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go and see if I can give you that breakdown. I just wanted to reiterate, Chair, and make that clear. I think you've appreciated that. I don't want you to think that money is coming back into the department. That's going back to that individual school, if it's a leased canteen. Just stay with me—

The CHAIR: But it's still more money that's going into our schools from parents' pockets, rather than from the department.

MURAT DIZDAR: I appreciate what you're saying. Let me look at that breakdown and also give you guidance about how we go about those leases to make it reasonable by way not only of a healthy canteen policy but by the pricing structures of that as well.

The CHAIR: Minister, is your Government concerned about those—we had very large privatisations under the past Government that we all rightfully criticised, or that some of us rightfully criticised.

Ms PRUE CAR: Not all of us, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: But there was also a bunch of those small, unnoticed privatisations, or privatisations by stealth.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: Are you concerned that for-profit canteens are being installed in our public schools? Is that something you would be looking to reverse?

Ms PRUE CAR: Am I concerned about privatisation across the board? Yes, I'm very concerned about privatisation. I would say that this Government stands very proudly on taking that issue to the election, in stark contrast to the previous Government. I don't know if it's correct to say we've all spoken against it. I think the current Opposition is still in favour of privatisation of almost everything. But when it comes to canteens, Mr Dizdar is right. Some schools might choose to do that. But I do take your point, Madam Chair, that it is still then asking parents to dig into their own pockets. At the same time, of course, as Minister I respect that some schools might make that decision because they feel it's best for them and their school community. But we don't want to see it become, as you say, a privatisation, which makes it even harder for parents to keep up with the cost of living. If it comes to it, as Mr Dizdar clearly said—I've been to many schools where this is the case, and I really appreciate this is just anecdotal—where there are children that need food and there is a for-profit canteen I would bet my bottom dollar that that public school would provide food at that for-profit canteen. But I take your point. I do take your point.

The CHAIR: Because it's still a voluntary contribution of a kind. It's a contribution the parents are having to make.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand.

The CHAIR: In an ideal world each of those children would be making it clear when they weren't being fed. But we know that that's not necessarily universal.

Ms PRUE CAR: In an ideal world we would have full funding from the Commonwealth Government for public schools. We would not have a system that was very skew-whiff so we would be able to provide everything that we want to provide at public schools, yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: In some cases too, Chair, we have to be very respectful where the principal and the school team want to really concentrate on core activity; teaching, learning, classrooms. If I take you to Cherrybrook Technology High School where the principal recently retired—a great operator in Gary Johnson—we're talking of a school of 1,500 students. It can be a massive operation and a massive admin operation for parents and the P&C to run. The preference there will be to outsource that to maybe generate some income for the school, but to keep it within reasonable limits. It's not the first thing that schools jump to, but there are size and scales. We have schools that are less than five students and schools that are up to 2,000 students.

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The CHAIR: I think we're talking about two different things though. Obviously, there are P&C run schools.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: But there could also be not-for-profit—people running school canteens who are getting paid a wage and all the rest of it. There are other options.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The CHAIR: What we're talking about is parents having to pay someone else's profit margin. I'm not convinced that that is something that a Labor government would want to be doing.

Ms PRUE CAR: I take your point, Madam Chair. We certainly have to look at this carefully to ensure that parents aren't unnecessarily having to dig into their own pockets. I respect the point you are making greatly.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My question relates to the proposed new high school at Bungendore that was announced by the previous Government in 2020.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: With a promise that it would be completed by January 2023. Given that the Land and Environment Court's decision in December said that the DA for the proposed school was invalid because of failure to get approval from the Minister for Crown Lands, as well as emerging concerns regarding lead contamination, have you considered relocation to either of the previously proposed alternative sites?

Ms PRUE CAR: Thank you, Dr Cohn. This has been quite the ongoing issue that the local community at times has been extremely concerned about. Of course, it has been the subject of legal action, as you say. It's an issue that we inherited from the previous Government. I will pass on to the relevant deputy secretary or Mr Dizdar so I make sure we give the correct information about the site selection.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're looking forward to lodging a new application to meet the requirements.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Given that legal appeals processes and further DAs are going to set the process back a year or years further for a project that was announced back in 2020 and a sod hasn't been turned yet, is that acceptable to families in Bungendore? Why won't you consider revisiting some of those other alternative sites now that there's so much trouble with this one?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've also had an independent assessment of the site selection. It's been well known by all of our community there, the sites that were considered. In fact, I remember as deputy secretary going down there to address the local council at the time with the range of sites that we considered. That independent assessment of the site selection process undertaken by us as a department confirms that that's the site to pursue. I really respect and appreciate the frustration on the ground; it's far from ideal. I am committed to delivering on that government commitment of building that new school. We are in the processes of respecting the court's wishes and lodging a new application for that school.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Understanding that there were barriers with some of the other sites but now there are also significant barriers with this one—and I understand that one of the reasons for its selection was proximity to essential infrastructure and likelihood to be up quickly—do you not think that that needs revisiting now that it's been four years since its announcement and not a sod has been turned?

MURAT DIZDAR: In what is, Dr Cohn, a far from ideal situation, having to re-lodge again gives us the opportunity to go back and meet the current requirements that are there and address things like you pointed out. We've got a team that's hard at work on doing that. We plan to lodge that and we plan to meet the requirements and deliver the new school.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Just confirming for the record, it's still your plan to attempt to deliver that school on that site?

MURAT DIZDAR: All the advice I've had, including that independent assessment of the site selection process, is that that's the right site to pursue. Our next lodgement will be in line with that site.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Moving to a completely different topic, in last year's estimates hearings in responses to questions asked by my colleague Ms Abigail Boyd you said that the DPE was preparing guidelines for decision-makers regarding synthetic turf in public open spaces. There are references made in the *Synthetic Turf Study in Public Open Space*, but it doesn't specifically consider synthetic turf in schools and the impacts that it has on schoolkids. Will those guidelines provide specific guidance around its installation and use in schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: I believe Mr Dizdar has information on this.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a really good question, Dr Cohn. We prefer natural turf as far as practicable and possible on school sites. As you know, with traffic and wear and tear it can deteriorate if used extensively, particularly on high-demand sites, and we're partnering with lots of councils on shared facilities. Synthetic turf is one of the four options within our playgrounds, but I can tell you it's not commonly used in New South Wales public schools. Our preferred mode of delivery is natural turf on any capital upgrades, on any major builds.

But why I don't rule it out as one of the options is that we've had some co-delivered projects. If I take you to Fairfield High School—it's a fantastic high school—we were able to achieve there mini soccer courts that you often see right through Europe where they're playing all sorts of hours. We've got school-hours access and then community privately-run access after hours. That provider delivered synthetic turf for that material. It wasn't delivered by us. Why we don't rule it out is that in some co-partnership opportunities we'll look at it, but our preference is to have natural turf.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Given that it's your preference for natural turf, I assume that's for the many reasons outlined in the chief scientist's report, including particularly heat risk and bushfire risk for kids. Why is that not prioritised in funding agreements with a private provider, like at Fairfield? You've still got kids playing on synthetic turf.

MURAT DIZDAR: At Fairfield it's not the sole thing that we've got for access. We still have ovals and play space that's natural turf. But this was an opportunity to also be able to tap into—our preference wherever possible is to deliver with natural turf.

Dr AMANDA COHN: While we're on synthetic turf, I'm also interested to understand what protections are currently in place for schools that are in extreme and high bushfire risk areas. We know that synthetic turf can increase the risk of adjacent buildings being ignited in a bushfire because of the way that they hold heat. There are several schools, for example, in the Blue Mountains area that have synthetic turf playgrounds. How is that risk managed by the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: Another very good question, Dr Cohn. I know that in our high-risk areas each of our schools has a bushfire management plan. That's developed with our work health safety directorate; we don't leave it to the school on its own. We work with Rural Fire Service et cetera to make sure evacuation zones and all the ingredients that are necessary to best protect that school are taken into account—in fact, including what you've referenced around synthetic turf. But I can come back to you on the specific of how we address that part of the plan. Is that okay?

Dr AMANDA COHN: I would appreciate that. My concern is that the Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines only recommend that synthetic play equipment be shaded and that there is no specific guidance there around the application of synthetic turf in high bushfire risk areas.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I don't believe that to be the case of the only thing we advise on that front. Let me come back with the specific advice we provide to those sites in bushfire risk that have got synthetic turf.

Dr AMANDA COHN: My last question is back to the Minister on this topic. There were some extraordinary efforts by citizen scientists this summer looking at synthetic turf, particularly in metropolitan Sydney, who've measured with thermometers the heat coming from synthetic turf.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

Dr AMANDA COHN: The synthetic turf was measured as hotter than concrete in summer. Do you think that's acceptable as a playing surface for kids?

Ms PRUE CAR: It's very concerning, of course. I hear that as a concern from parents as well. That's obviously why we prefer natural turf to synthetic turf. In many of these cases we have little children playing on these very hot surfaces. If you look at somewhere like my part of the world, it gets very, very warm.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Absolutely. So you understand the concern from those families—

Ms PRUE CAR: I do.

Dr AMANDA COHN: —that new synthetic turf surfaces are still going in?

Ms PRUE CAR: I certainly do. We make every effort as a department and as a system to prefer natural turf.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, can you advise whether there's currently a freeze on recruitment for vacant positions in the Professional and Ethical Standards unit within the department?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: The question of the Professional and Ethical Standards team within the department is it's a hard job that they do. It's a very important job that they do. They have been the subject of a review. I will pass to Mr Dizdar about any freeze on the team.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, but are you aware of a freeze, Minister, before you pass to the secretary?

Ms PRUE CAR: It's an operational matter for Mr Dizdar.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But with respect, you've just said it is a very important unit in the department, and I would agree. They deal with very serious issues of teacher misconduct allegations.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But are you aware of a freeze on recruitment for that particular directorate?

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm saying in answer to your question, Ms Mitchell, is that I am not responsible, as you well know—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But are you aware of it? I'm not asking—

Ms PRUE CAR: —for the daily operation of the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Deputy Premier, I'm not asking if you're responsible. I am asking if you are aware of a freeze of recruitment for positions for that very important directorate. Do you know?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am saying in response to your question that I would pass that to Mr Dizdar because he is responsible as secretary of the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you asked if there's a freeze on it? Have you been made aware of it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am passing to Mr Dizdar right now to answer your question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, can you answer for the Minister, please?

MURAT DIZDAR: The executive director that heads up PES would seek line management approval, through the deputy secretary, of any role that they would be filling or the creation of a new role.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, the Deputy Premier has referred to you; she is not able to answer. Is there currently a freeze on recruitment for vacant positions within that directorate?

MURAT DIZDAR: I haven't put a freeze on any directorate across the organisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many vacant positions are there in PES at the moment?

MURAT DIZDAR: I wouldn't have that at my fingertips but I'm happy to find out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take it on notice? Are they being actively recruited for, any of those vacant positions?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back with the detail on how many, but my expectation would be that the executive director who leads that unit—and we're talking about a very large organisation, with 170,000 employees—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm very well aware of that. I just want to know how many vacant positions there are at the moment within PES, that unit, and are there active recruitments underway for any vacant positions or has that been submitted to a freeze?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I can say is that there's no freeze that has been given by me as secretary across the organisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, you've said that. But is there active recruitment for vacant positions in PES at the moment?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm very happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could take that on notice, do you think you would be able to get that for us before the end of today?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll do our best.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, at the last estimates we spoke about the importance of learning in the classroom and how critical that was to you.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's what the classroom is for.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: You said:

We need children at school to get the benefits of a first-class education ... we make no apologies for encouraging children to go to school.

Minister, is that still the case?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, of course it is the case. We as a government could not be more committed to improving the education system, the one we were left with in disarray by the previous Government, and tackling the chronic teacher shortage so we have teachers in front of our students in our classrooms, where teaching and learning occurs.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: And that priority for the importance of classroom teaching has been communicated across New South Wales schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every single school across New South Wales in the public system—every 2,200 of them, each one of them—every day is committed to the teaching and learning in each one of their classrooms. I would very much hope they know that my commitment as their Minister—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just in terms of a directive from the Minister about the importance of classroom teaching and the classroom environment, there's no specific directive on that?

Ms PRUE CAR: That teachers teach in the classroom, Ms Merton? That's what the expert practice of teaching is: to teach in the classroom—teaching and learning in the classroom. I'm wondering if this is a trick question.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's not a trick question, no. Minister, it was three weeks after the last estimates, where we agreed on the importance of classroom learning and teaching, that we had students assembling once again on the School Strike 4 Climate. You might have seen some of the media press. It was kids walking out of the schools, walking out of the classroom, got the banners. They were accompanied by adults on this one. Minister, how is this still allowed when we talk about the importance of classroom teaching? We've got students leaving the school grounds during school hours, protesting to the streets for climate action.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Merton, obviously by the content of your question I'm to assume that you are quite familiar with all the media coverage in relation to that particular issue, which I'm hoping would mean that you'd be familiar with my very strong comments at the time, which were that we expect students to be at school—same way we expect teachers to be teaching in classrooms, if we have enough of them, which, of course, is what we're hard at work to do. But we expect students to be at school. In fact, I think I remember coming under quite a bit of fire by quite a number of student activists for my comments around students staying at school. So I agree with you, Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Your comments, the directive from the Minister, the importance, as you just said, of staying at school, learning in the school—it wasn't very successful if students are still taking to the streets during school hours to protest.

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you suggesting that I would say something and then that would stop—like, what's happening is that students—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, many hundreds of students—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm out there saying, "Please"—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —are completely ignored.

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand you're reading from your question, Ms Merton. But I'm answering the question. We're in agreement. Students need to be in the classroom. I made that very clear. Principals know that that is the position of the department. We made that very clear, from the Minister, from the secretary down.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, students are continuing to protest during school hours. Directives, advice is going ignored. Minister, are you aware of how many teachers also participated in such climate protest strikes during school hours?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Once again, we are in agreement that this is not acceptable, that we need teachers at school because that's where their expert practice has the opportunity to change the lives of the children in the classroom. That's what we are committed to as a government. That's what all my public commentary and my commentary to the workforce and to the students in our system has been. I actually cannot be clearer on this, that this has been the expectation of the Government and the department.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I appreciate your intent on this. Do we have information as to whether there was a spike in absenteeism in terms of teachers on that day? Were leave provisions taken to allow students to protest?

Ms PRUE CAR: Teachers or students, Ms Merton?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Teachers.

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you asking about both? You seem to be going in between both.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm asking about teachers, you being the Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I'm proudly the Minister for teachers. I'm happy to call myself that. Mr Dizdar, was there—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Was there a spike in absenteeism for teachers during these strike days?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not sure. I'll pass to the secretary of the department.

MURAT DIZDAR: In my 27 years in the organisation, unfortunately there have been moments like this where there's been activity that university students have been enrolled in. In my recollection—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just redirect, it was absenteeism of teachers.

MURAT DIZDAR: In my recollection, each and every time—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is that something that's tracked, possibly, during these days by the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: We track attendance daily—every single day.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do you want to take that on notice in terms of the big climate protests? Is there an absenteeism of teachers on that day?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't believe that was the case at all. What I was saying is that in my 27 years—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: "I don't believe. I don't know. No information."

Ms PRUE CAR: I think he just answered.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I said that there wasn't a spike in activity at all. Both my predecessors and I, on each occasion, have communicated our expectation to school when these things come around. I'm all for student advocacy and student voice, but I also am all for our students being inside the school gates and using the mechanisms there with their teachers to engage in learning. When these things come to our attention, we communicate our expectation to school communities. You should know—and I'm sure the Committee would appreciate—that our schools then follow up on that absenteeism from that student with that family. I can say there hasn't been a spike in what you referred to as staff partaking in that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, if a local member and a P&C invite you to visit a school, will you undertake to do that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I get invites very regularly to go to schools, and I make it a virtue to go to as many schools as possible, so I look forward to receiving any invites from local members of Parliament.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Fantastic. You received an invite on 21 August last year from James Griffin and also, I believe, two letters from the P&C, wanting you to talk about Balgowlah Boys. Will you visit Balgowlah Boys school with James Griffin?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to look at what's happened to those requests, but I know that Mr Griffin, as the member for Manly, as is his democratic right—he's been elected by the people of that community—has been arguing things about the school, I think about things for a particular school that was never budgeted under the previous Government that he maybe had believed—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, if I can just redirect you.

Ms PRUE CAR: —yes it was, but wasn't.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can check with your office, but it's pretty easy, you could actually just say now. Will you commit to visiting Balgowlah Boys with James Griffin?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will have a conversation if Mr Griffin would like to have a conversation with me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But he's already written to you and requested a meeting and he hasn't heard back from you. Can you say now that, yes, you'll meet with him and you'll visit the school? It's not a hard one.

Ms PRUE CAR: I look forward to speaking to Mr Griffin about that particular issue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So we look forward to seeing you at Balgowlah Boys soon?

Ms PRUE CAR: I look forward to speaking to the local member about his concerns about his school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He's asked me to ask you whether you would commit to visiting—

Ms PRUE CAR: He can speak to me, with all respect.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, he's already written to you months ago and you didn't respond. Will you commit to visiting Balgowlah Boys?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will speak to Mr Griffin about that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I hope that that's a yes, because he's been waiting months and he hasn't heard back from you. Minister, if a school had a reduction in students of about 30 per cent from one year to the next, would that concern you?

Ms PRUE CAR: Obviously there's a range of reasons why attendance might fluctuate at particular schools, but we certainly want to see public school enrolments steadily increasing. We're invested in that as a government, of course.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you aware that at Rankin's Springs Public School, enrolments have fallen from 32 at the end of last year to 23 at the moment?

Ms PRUE CAR: I know this might shock you, Ms Mitchell, but I'm not sure of the actual enrolments at every particular school in the State of New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, that's the advice that I've had. Are you also aware at Rankin's Springs—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry. Once again, I get that the way you do things is to abrasively interrupt me at every point that I'm trying to answer the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is the community asking me to ask you, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: Right. Okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is actually a really big issue in that small town.

Ms PRUE CAR: A bit of respect would be probably a little bit more edifying.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: All right. Are you also aware that there's been significant staff turnover at that school between last year and this year?

Ms PRUE CAR: I know there are a range of concerns at Rankin's Springs. I have, in fact, met with the local member and the P&C, which I have spoken about before.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm aware of that.

Ms PRUE CAR: I will pass to the department about what may be happening at Rankin's Springs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's all right. I'll ask Mr Dizdar later. I've only got a few minutes left with you. Are you aware that parents have been told not to talk about that school situation publicly and that a number of staff and former staff are very concerned about what's happening with the students at that school?

Ms PRUE CAR: Honestly, in order to make sure that I give the community the right information, I'll have to take on notice that information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. I have a number of questions to put on notice about this, and I would appreciate an answer. You said in the lead-up to the election that you were going to employ an additional 250 school counsellors. How many have been employed so far?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take that on notice about how many more school counsellors we have in the system. We're very proud to give them an historic pay rise, along with the teachers of New South Wales, to encourage counsellors into our schools, because it was something that was a key—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can redirect you, Minister, there were 250—

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, once again, I am attempting to answer the question—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You took it on notice.

Ms PRUE CAR: —and your tone is constantly abrasive and interruptive.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have seven minutes left.

Ms PRUE CAR: This is a serious issue about the mental health of our children.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The question has been taken on notice.

The CHAIR: I see a discourtesy from both the Minister and members asking questions. If we could just tone it down slightly. Please, go ahead.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, you just said that counsellors received the pay increase. Did that pay increase flow to those counsellors or psychologists that don't have a teaching degree? Did they get the same pay increase?

Ms PRUE CAR: School psychologists will be receiving a pay increase as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But they didn't get the same one as the counsellors who have a teaching degree as well, did they?

Ms PRUE CAR: School psychologists are separate to a separate award and they will be receiving a pay increase.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. But you just said then that counsellors all got a pay increase but that's not true because they haven't received the same amount, have they?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell, with respect, I think you have a little bit of the wrong information. We will be giving school psychologists a significant pay rise.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but has that happened?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar would have the details.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Mr Dizdar, I can ask you later. Minister, you just said then that school counsellors—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, sorry—

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Deputy Premier just said that they have all got it, and they haven't.

The CHAIR: Order! I have to hear the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Chair, it's entirely within order for the Minister to refer to a public servant to elucidate on an answer, as the previous Minister did on countless occasions during her last appearances at budget estimates.

The CHAIR: On the point of order, that is correct. However, it is also then well within the member's discretion to instead ask that question later on and move the Minister on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, have the school psychologists received a pay rise as of today?

Ms PRUE CAR: School psychologists have received a pay rise in parity with school counsellors in a deal struck with the Public Service Association.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When?

Ms PRUE CAR: They have received parity with school counsellors.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But when? When was that received?

Ms PRUE CAR: As of now, they are being paid parity with school counsellors.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm trying to understand. It wasn't done when the original deal was done with the teachers who also have a psychology qualification a few months ago. It happened at a later date. Is that correct? I just want to know. Is that right?

Ms PRUE CAR: It did happen at a later date but it was arranged—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I will move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: —and they are paid parity. It's a totally different award. We couldn't do it at the same time because it's a different award.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. I am very well aware because I had—

Ms PRUE CAR: I think there's a lack of understanding of industrial agreements here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —a number of them contact me who were very concerned that they were not being treated the same way.

Ms PRUE CAR: Because the previous Government hated unions so much, I think, and working people.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Deputy Premier, for that editorial comment that is untrue. Mr Dizdar, did you appear in the Schools Spectacular?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I did.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know the cost of the item that you were in?

MURAT DIZDAR: I was proud to appear in Schools Spectacular. It was the fortieth anniversary. The production team asked if I could make a guest appearance and I said I was happy to as secretary.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how much it cost for the item that you were in?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I don't.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take that on notice and come back to the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm happy to do so.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of information being transparent, I've asked in the past about how many demountables are currently on school sites in New South Wales. Mr Towers, is there an overall figure that you can provide to the Committee as to how many demountables are on school sites?

PAUL TOWERS: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you do that, can I ask—in previous rounds I've asked and I've been referred to the School Infrastructure website, where every individual school, some 2,200, is listed with the number of demountables. But I'm well aware that there is an overall figure that the department has. Will you provide that overall figure on notice and not refer us back to the website again? Will you undertake to do that, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I will take that on notice but I would say that you very well know—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know that the number exists. I would like the overall number.

Ms PRUE CAR: —that the number of demountables increased by—what was it under yourself? I think it was 35 per cent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's why we'd like to know what they are under your Government.

Ms PRUE CAR: About what we are doing to fix your mess?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Referring us to a website is not the answer when there is a master list that exists. I just want the overall number and I think it's important that we are given it. Can I ask, Deputy Premier, with the announcement of the preschools this week, did you or your office ask for those sites to be broken down by electorate?

Ms PRUE CAR: I want to make this very clear and I made this very clear yesterday. One of the most wonderful things about this announcement is that those sites were selected based on an expert panel, reviewed independently and then reviewed again by a probity adviser.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Specifically to redirect you, Deputy Premier, did you or your office ask for those sites to be provided to you by electorate?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am saying I will take that on notice—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Do you consider Wollongong—

Ms PRUE CAR: —but I'm telling you that these sites—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, sorry, you have taken it on notice.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, I understand that—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, I have another question. The question has been taken on notice.

Ms PRUE CAR: —you want to keep redirecting me but I am answering the question.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have two minutes left. Deputy Premier, do you consider Newcastle and Wollongong to be in regional New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: They are regions of New South Wales. I understand—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you consider them to be regional New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: They are in regions in New South Wales, but I know where you're going with this, Ms Mitchell. There are some areas in rural, remote and regional New South Wales—there are many that are getting these public preschools, of which you failed to deliver in government, and I will stand by this commitment each and every day of the week.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, can I please redirect you?

Ms PRUE CAR: I believe it's going to be one of the most incredible things we do as a government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a very specific question. On the weekend, you released 49 regional sites—preschools for the bush. Do you consider Wollongong and Newcastle to be the bush?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think your first question was regionals. I know you're drawing a long bow here. I don't think we're saying—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You stood up at the Labor country conference and said, "Here they are."

Ms PRUE CAR: —that Wollongong and Newcastle are in the bush.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said that you consider—

Ms PRUE CAR: They're regions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So they shouldn't have been included in the list of regional preschools, then, the ones in Wollongong and Newcastle? Is that your evidence?

Ms PRUE CAR: They are regional. They are regions in New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Newcastle and Wollongong are regional?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I understand what you are trying to get at about this gotcha about Newcastle and Wollongong. We can talk about our public preschools all day, every day, 100 of them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You had them in your list of regional preschools that you dropped to the paper. Do you consider them to be regional communities?

Ms PRUE CAR: You failed to deliver any of them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you consider them to be regional communities?

Ms PRUE CAR: If you want to nitpick at where they're coming at—where they're being delivered at, be my guest.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There are plenty of regional communities getting nothing.

Ms PRUE CAR: Like Eugowra, that you failed to fix when you were Minister, you mean.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could just pick up on the Milperra campus and the announcement, the pre-election commitment:

Any new development on the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra must include a new high school.

Those are comments from yourself. Your colleague Kylie Wilkinson echoed those comments: "Communities and parents are still registering with us at the moment about the shortage of schools. Demountables are an option available to that." What is the status on the announcement of a new high school on the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice of what's happening with that site at Milperra. I understand it is subject to a development by the Western Sydney University.

The CHAIR: Just following up on that one, because I recall asking about that at last estimates as well. Minister, will there be a high school on that site or not?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice about what our plans are, if any, for that community there at the previously owned site at Western Sydney University at Milperra. We're clearly delivering all of our election commitments that we went to the people of New South Wales with. In fact, some of the schools that we're delivering in south-western and north-western Sydney that the previous Government refused to deliver for all for 12 years—

The CHAIR: That's not the question, though. The question is about this particular site. I understand that the south Sydney planning panel made a determination on 24 July in relation to that land, which is about four months after Labor came to government. Did anyone from the Department of Education make formal representations at that time for this to be used for a public school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice, Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Gallop inquiry recommended at least two hours of face-to-face relief for primary and secondary school teachers. Has there been any money put in the budget to try to implement that recommendation? Where are we up to with that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Really important question. As many people have heard me say ad nauseam, and I'm happy to say to the Committee, again, that the recommendations of the Gallop inquiry really guided us as the then Opposition and now as a government in terms of getting to the root causes of why we have such a chronic teacher shortage—in fact, critical to this issue of face-to-face relief for teachers in order for them to prepare for classes, to do professional development work, all the things that we know that they need face-to-face relief for.

Of course, in order to do that, we need more teachers in the system. I would love to be able to sit here and say that we're at a position where we can do that more easily than we can at the moment. Of course, we know from today that vacancies are down, trending down for the first time in many, many, many years. But we have so much more to do in terms of arresting the shortage in New South Wales, and we just simply need more teachers in order to provide release from face-to-face teaching.

The CHAIR: I don't want to take away from that. I agree with you, it's nice to see a change in this regard.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm just being honest about the situation.

The CHAIR: And that is basically what I want to know, really, it's not been shelved—

Ms PRUE CAR: No, no.

The CHAIR: —it's just we are waiting for there to be capacity in the system before we're able to implement that recommendation, correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: A hundred per cent. One thing I have learnt from speaking to thousands of teachers, literally since being Minister, is one thing they value that they never got from the previous Government is honesty and transparency. In fact they are constantly telling me they felt like they were being gaslit. It sounds very, very dramatic but it's true, and that's why I'm being totally honest about this face-to-face relief. We need more teachers in the system.

The CHAIR: Looking at the teacher attraction incentive scheme, I understand that there has been a review or there's going to be a report released in relation to that incentive scheme. Is that correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're looking very carefully at incentives, obviously, because especially in some hard-to-staff areas, they're very important in terms of incentivising people, particularly to rural and regional remote schools. I will pass to the secretary of the department about any review.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, there's been quite a bit of work. Mr Ruming leads that work for us. I wonder if he's got where we are up to. If he doesn't, we're happy to come back to the Committee. Like the Deputy Premier said, we continue to evaluate because while they are some of Australia's leading incentives, financial, transfer points et cetera—I just came from Broken Hill recently, where it is still complex, despite those incentives, to get staff to make those decisions to be in those localities. I think it's well covered that the teacher shortage, not only in this State but across the country, is not universally experienced. We still do it tough in our rural, regional and remote locations and the geography of New South Wales is not quite like Victoria, for example, our next biggest counterpart. We have a lot more complexity. I know that this is something we keep evaluating, keep looking at. In fact, we've had to move some of those incentives into metropolitan locations where we haven't had to do that in the past as a short-term fix, because we've had sites where we had to advertise five, six times. I wonder if Mr Ruming has got where that work is up to?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, sure. Thank you, Chair. As Mr Dizdar has explained, I think quite rightly, this is not just a New South Wales but a national issue. We have been focused on two important foundations around teacher pay and job stability. I think we reported to the Committee last year our temp to permanent work transition where we are taking temporary teachers and making them permanent teachers. That uplift has taken our permanent workforce from 64 per cent to 78 per cent, so really important foundations to build on top of our BAU hiring. We added more teachers in 2023 than in '22 or '21. It might interest the Committee that we placed 5,499 teachers into the system. We also, in addition to our BAU, have nine different workforce initiatives to attract and retain. They are quite varied from our Grow Your Own program across New South Wales to mid-career.

The CHAIR: Apologies to interrupt. I am curious on the incentives scheme. As I understand it, it was being reviewed. Is that correct?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes. There are numerous programs that have different incentives all the way through.

The CHAIR: I understand.

SHAUN RUMING: They are right through a number of programs. Twelve months ago we had around 14 initiatives that we were working on. We are now focused on nine, but we have incentives and scholarships and all sorts of things right through different programs.

The CHAIR: I am particularly interested in the ones to attract people to rural schools.

SHAUN RUMING: We have teach.Rural Scholarships. We've had 60 successful applicants offered scholarships and the application process was between July and August of '23. We actually received 413 applications, so we were oversubscribed.

The CHAIR: Again, in terms of there being a review of the effectiveness of the incentives, are you basically saying that's an ongoing process across all of the incentive programs? Or has there been an official review and would there be a report available so that we could all have a look at the effectiveness of those programs?

SHAUN RUMING: Sure, happy to come back to the Committee on notice with an update, but we constantly review these programs and five programs were discontinued, and we've focused on nine programs, not specifically to rural and remote, but happy to come back to the Committee.

The CHAIR: For example—forgive me, because I don't know how this particular program works—I understand that Deniliquin High School had what they called a "status four" for their incentives scheme to attract teachers. The question that I've been asked is, how does that move? If it's been given a four and then there's a period of time where there is a delay and we still don't have any increase in teachers, does it move up a level?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can help you, Chair. That refers to the transfer points of a school. A staff member that takes up permanent appointment at Deniliquin High School for one year of service accumulates four transfer points. That comes into play when you want to put in a transfer to another part of the State. Every school in New South Wales starts with one point and it goes up to eight points, depending on the complexity of that location and school. A four-point school would be considered to be reasonably complex. One of the things that we're at work on with the NSW Teachers Federation—because this goes to an award matter—is to examine some of those and how they sit. Some of it, Chair, can be historical as well and may need adjusting. That site could now have greater complexity. The geography could look different.

The CHAIR: Which is what I'm hearing, for example, at Deniliquin. Does it happen on an ad hoc basis or is there a process built in where you will look at those things?

MURAT DIZDAR: Really good question, Chair. We need to look at this on a statewide basis but there are times where we make adjustments. Some new schools might come onboard or, like I said, the complexity

CORRECTED

might change. We're very carefully making those adjustments because of the knock-on effect you can have. But it is a statewide picture that we will need to look at. I believe we're just in preliminary steps with that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just another, discrete issue: Tirkandi Inaburra, the Aboriginal-led centre for Aboriginal boys. I probably have pronounced it wrongly.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, I missed where you said?

The CHAIR: Tirkandi Inaburra.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay.

The CHAIR: I'm sure that I have pronounced that wrong.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Hansard will get it right.

The CHAIR: It's west of Wagga. Is that about right?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I said Hansard will get it right.

The CHAIR: Hansard will get it right. It's west of Wagga. It's an Aboriginal-led centre for Aboriginal boys. It was funded by DCJ, and then it was temporarily closed. At the beginning of 2024 it was announced that it would be permanently closed. Is the Department of Education looking at re-establishing that school?

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I'm happy to help the Committee, if I can go back to my DCJ colleagues as well. I'm not across that specific one. I know you'd appreciate we've got several across the State—

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely.

MURAT DIZDAR: —where we work with other agencies. But I'm happy to go back to my DCJ colleagues and see what is the status there, and also what we've done locally if that is the case with what you say.

The CHAIR: Thank you. If we can turn to early childhood, I understand obviously there have been a lot of efforts to try and encourage affordability. The recent announcement of the preschools is great, but we still have a huge number of both preschools and childcare centres being privately held. Has there been any consideration given by this Government to bringing those back into public ownership at all?

Ms PRUE CAR: Like you, Madam Chair, I would say that I'm greatly concerned about the access to—if we look at early childhood education and care and then preschool education, both of those provisions to children in New South Wales. And, of course, the public provision of that preschool education, for instance, is something that's very important to this Government, hence the largest increase in public preschools in New South Wales history. That's 100. That's doubled the size of the provision of public preschools throughout the State. Where we can really make a difference is actually building these things on school sites, which we are doing—the single biggest lot that any government has built. I agree with the premise of your question, and that's why we are building that. We need to provide the expansion of public provision of that real life-changing preschool education, particularly in the year before school, but also in a way that complements services that exist in the sector around those locations as well.

The CHAIR: I guess we're building—which makes sense to me—more public preschools. I guess we wait and see after that as to whether or not we still have an affordability problem with the private.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're building the public preschools obviously, which will be free. They're basically ensuring that in those 100 sites, those primary schools become preschool to year 6 sites, which is just brilliant, I think. That's certainly the feedback I get from the community also. We're providing other assistance within the sector and then we have, for the first time ever, fee relief for parents of three-year-olds in preschool. There is quite a bit of evidence, as I'm sure you're aware of, about those two years before school. Because we have an 18-month window for school starting age in New South Wales in kindergarten the three- to four-year is also important.

The CHAIR: Before the election, a commitment was made to the United Workers Union to address the pay and conditions of school cleaners in New South Wales public schools. Has any money been budgeted to facilitate that happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: A commitment was given—you're right—to the school cleaners in New South Wales who told me very clearly that their working conditions were very difficult. We have committed to a review of school cleaning; that is underway. The United Workers Union is part of that review. When that is completed, we'll be communicating with the community about that. But we're reviewing that. I accept the complaints from school cleaners. I have had many in my electorate who have said the same thing: The conditions put on them by the contract entered into by the previous Government were pretty unacceptable.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Again, I'm wading into an area I don't really know the answer to; I will be honest about that. When we look at these school cleaning services, how many of them are directly employed by government and how many of those schools have outsourced to private operators the employment of those cleaners?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice so that I could get the right information for you. Unless, Mr Dizdar, you have details.

MURAT DIZDAR: There are eight contracts across the State. We don't directly employ any cleaners for our 2,200 sites.

Ms PRUE CAR: Because they are whole-of-government contracts.

MURAT DIZDAR: They're under the contracts, whole-of-government contracts. Like the Deputy Premier indicated, we're underway with that cleaning review. We're on track to undertake that work this year.

The CHAIR: In the past was there a point where we had cleaners being directly employed by the Government?

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding, Chair, is—and this precedes even my 27 years—there was a period in the department where there was direct employment and then we've been through a number of decades of whole-of-government contracts. But I can't say that I can speak for that time. It was before my tenure in the department.

The CHAIR: It would be interesting to know if any consideration has been given to whether or not directly employing cleaners in schools would, perhaps, all up, be more cost-effective.

Ms PRUE CAR: The review will, I would hazard a guess. Without wanting to pre-empt the findings of the review, I would hazard a guess that the review would be looking into that.

The CHAIR: I have one more pressing question before I hand back to the Opposition. Just coming back, Mr Dizdar, to our discussion on consultants and contractors. Another one that came across my desk—which you no doubt will need to take on notice and have a look into, but I'd appreciate it if you did—is Mr Darryl Walker, who is the director of research and innovation at School Infrastructure NSW. I understand that he was employed under—he's only been gone a short time and I have forgotten his name.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Manning.

The CHAIR: Mr Manning—I'm so sorry. He was employed under Mr Manning's watch from an infrastructure consultant firm and is on approximately \$600,000, is what I'm being told. There are allegations that there may be a conflict of interest involved in that appointment. If you're able to look into that appointment and whether it's still ongoing, I'd be very grateful.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not aware of it. I'm definitely happy to follow up and take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, what's the current status of the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program with United Way?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice what the status of the Dolly Parton—what did you call it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know what that is? Have you heard of that program?

Ms PRUE CAR: I know that Dolly Parton has a great interest in encouraging reading in young children.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She does. She's wonderful. Maybe that's something else we can agree on, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: There you go.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you a Dolly fan? Dolly brings everyone together.

Ms PRUE CAR: Look at this, bringing us all together.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Don't get me started on her or Taylor Swift, because we'll be here all day.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, that's true.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take on notice the status of that? There was funding provided by the previous Government to roll that out in a number of vulnerable communities, and I've had some local government areas who are keen to pursue further funding opportunities. Could you just let us know if that's your intention—to provide any more money or to look to expand that program?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could just touch on housing density and some significant announcements and agreements from the Premier relating to the National Housing Accord and 138,000 new homes. I'm just wondering if you might be able to update us in terms of where your discussions might be at with the Premier relating to the increased population, the housing density announcements, and how we're going to meet the schooling requirements of this new population.

Ms PRUE CAR: I can assure the estimates hearing that, as is well known, this is one of if not the most important priorities of the Government: addressing the housing crisis and the affordability crisis that our young people find themselves in. As a result of that, obviously we are undertaking some pretty ambitious and systemic planning reforms. I can assure the Committee that every discussion that we are having about this—in every meeting, including Cabinet meetings, without wanting to disclose what happens in the Cabinet meetings, I am making the point that new communities must be provided with school infrastructure. Because it is not only the right thing to do; it is of personal priority to me as a member of Parliament who represents areas that were sprawled under previous governments, where their populations exploded and where it has taken this Government to deliver schools that those people have deserved for decades.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just take you to an example of housing density and where local schools are at capacity, there's been no commitment for new schooling or recognition of new schooling—and that would be relevant to Castle Hill. We had the New South Wales Government announcing double housing density from 5,000 to 10,000, and no new school funding commitments. How do we explain that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, I can say to the people of that community and to the estimates hearing this afternoon that, through our enrolment growth audit, we have made it very clear that we will be monitoring projected enrolments in a way that has not been monitored before. I've instructed the department to do that on a much more thorough basis, because I have seen firsthand through my own community in north-west Sydney not far from Castle Hill, where we have suffered under the lack of planning for schools that are needed in communities—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just redirect, this was a density doubling from 5,000 to 10,000. The local schools are at capacity.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm answering your question. We will monitor that and look at student enrolments to ensure that the schooling in that area is adequate for the children that are there as well as projected to come into that community. That is a priority for me as a Minister.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there budget provision and capacity to deliver this for the community?

Ms PRUE CAR: We will provide the schools that are needed for growing communities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a budget to build new schools in that area?

Ms PRUE CAR: I can't be clearer on this. This is of personal priority to me. I've experienced this firsthand in my own suburb, in my own electorate, in my own community. We will provide the schools that are needed for growing communities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a budget allocation for new schools, particularly around—

Ms PRUE CAR: The budget will be coming up, as Opposition members are well aware of. The budget will be coming up. We will provide the schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We've doubled the housing density in local communities from 5,000 to 10,000. There are no new schools. There are no budget commitments. But we are going to meet this?

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, Ms Merton, I don't know if the Opposition is well placed at all to talk about the provision of schools in growing areas. Our enrolment audit exposed that these student enrolment projections were so off that some areas had doubled the size the previous Government thought they would be.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that then, Deputy Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: We will provide the schools that are needed for growing areas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, great. So, we look forward to the budget to have a significant capital investment in all of those areas for new and upgraded schools, if what you're saying is correct.

Ms PRUE CAR: We will provide—honestly, I'm now sounding like a broken record. I'm providing the answer to the Committee, which is that we will provide the schools for growing areas that are needed.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, in terms of sector support in the early childhood sector, why did you cut funding from organisations like CCSA and CELA, who have supported preschools for years?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You are not aware of that funding cut?

Ms PRUE CAR: But we are committed to supporting the sector. We are committed to supporting the sector as well as building up the public provision of preschools in this space.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you aware of the funding cut? You would, of course, be aware that the majority of preschool provision in this State is done through not-for-profit providers.

Ms PRUE CAR: In long day care centres. I understand that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, no, not in long day care. Community preschools make up the bulk of the early childhood delivery sector for preschool. There's about 700 community-run preschools in the State. You don't know that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm waiting to get to what your question is, as opposed to rolling statements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just said that not-for-profit is for long day care. We're talking—

Ms PRUE CAR: Both settings in long day care as well as community preschools, as you well know.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you agree that community preschools provide the bulk of provision of preschool education in this State?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, currently.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that will continue to be the case, because I think it's about 700. CCSA and CELA received sector support under the previous Government to support the work that was done by the majority of the preschool sector that your Government has cut. Are you aware of that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: But I'll pass to Mr Barraket, for any—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, no. I'll come back to that in the afternoon. It's fine. You can take it on notice. Can I also ask, in relation to the childcare fund, there was an allocation of \$100 million from this financial year to be spent. How much has actually been spent?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What is the status of the 50 preschools that you committed to building at non-government schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice. We're committed to delivering that. That's part of our election commitment, of course, that we're committed to delivering—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know if any work's been done on that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to take that on notice so we can give the Committee the right information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great. Thank you. Minister, you'll recall in the lead-up to the election last year on numerous occasions you said that you would fill the funding shortfall if an agreement wasn't reached for the Commonwealth to provide 100 per cent of the SRS. Is that still your policy position as a government?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm really glad you asked this question. We are so hard at work at the moment to reach 100 per cent of the SRS. As is well documented in the media, the Commonwealth have offered us a position that we believe is not the best offer for the students of New South Wales—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

Ms PRUE CAR: —and we're hard at work to get that from the Commonwealth.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I accept that. However, you said before the election—both yourself and the Premier were widely reported in media indicating that, if the Federal Government didn't meet that shortfall, you would provide it at a New South Wales level. Is that still the position of your Government?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm not conceding that they won't meet that shortfall. We are asking for them to make that shortfall and I am in deep negotiations with them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And if they don't?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, this is really important.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is.

Ms PRUE CAR: Because I do not want to—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because it was your election commitment and you need to tell the truth.

Ms PRUE CAR: I do not want to jeopardise negotiations with the Commonwealth Government to give our children the funding they deserve. I'm not conceding the Commonwealth aren't going to give it to us.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, with respect, prior to the election both yourself and the Premier—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not conceding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —are on the record saying that we will fund it if the Feds don't. Are you now walking away from that position?

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm saying to you, Ms Mitchell, is I am not conceding that they are not going to give us that amount and I'm not backing away from that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Go in and fight for it, that's great. But if they don't come to the party—

Ms PRUE CAR: Fighting? I'm not—you might want to jeopardise our negotiations. I don't.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, no. But, with respect, you already jeopardised it, because prior to the election you said that—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not jeopardising and I'm not conceding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —you would fill the funding shortfall if they didn't, and they know that.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not conceding, because that is—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My question is, if they do not provide that money will you honour your election commitments to provide that additional money?

Ms PRUE CAR: —neglecting my responsibility to the children of New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you honour your election commitment to make sure that we reach a hundred per cent of the SRS, as you said you would prior to March last year?

Ms PRUE CAR: Our commitment to 100 per cent of the SRS during the life of the agreement stands and we will not concede that the Commonwealth—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you'll provide the money if they don't.

Ms PRUE CAR: —will not come to the table. And I tell you what, I'll be arguing until I'm blue in the face on this issue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, that's great, but if they don't come then it will be interesting to see what happens.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're not conceding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I also just want to quickly ask you, in *The Daily Telegraph* in an editorial recently, you wrote in relation to school funding that you accept some of the Federal Government's conditions on the funding. Which conditions do you accept and which will you not accept?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going to go into chapter and verse about what we're negotiating with the Commonwealth Government. You might want to prejudicial those negotiations; I don't. I believe our children are too important.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You indicated publicly in the media, Deputy Premier, that you accept some. So what do you accept?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: We are going to fight tooth and nail for funding that our children deserve. I'm not going to be subject to going through chapter and verse what these very delicate negotiations are going through right now—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. Do you support all of the recommendations that have come through—

Ms PRUE CAR: —because there is no more important job ahead of me at this point than arguing with the Commonwealth Government. I believe they have their heart in the right place and they will come to the table with their part of the bargain to ensure that our children's schools are fully funded once and for all—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: —something that you never delivered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You wrote an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph*, publicly stating that you accept some of the conditions on the funding. What are the ones that you accept? You've put this out there in the media that you accept some of the conditions. What do you accept?

Ms PRUE CAR: Minister Clare and I do agree, as do Ministers around the nation, that there are some things that we agree on about the ways to improve outcomes and the ways to address the chronic teacher shortage. But I'm not going to go into that in chapter and verse to this Committee, because at the moment we're deep in negotiations right now to get that funding that we deserve from the Commonwealth, as the biggest system in the State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you support outcomes, why aren't outcomes in your report, then? Why is it not in the annual report?

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms PRUE CAR: We do have system outcomes. I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell; I'm not going to let you get away with peddling mistruths via budget estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But they're not in there. You show me where they are in the interim report and I'll admit I'm wrong.

Ms PRUE CAR: We have outcomes. Every school has targets and we're committed to lifting all students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're not there. You don't have statewide targets.

The CHAIR: Order! Some of us are hangry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm fine. I'm good.

The CHAIR: No, I'm hangry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I thought you meant me. I could go all day. In fact, we will.

The CHAIR: I want my lunch. That brings us to the end of our morning session.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Sorry, Chair—

The CHAIR: I'm so sorry. It's Government question time.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Yes.

The CHAIR: I don't get my lunch at all. Go ahead.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Chair is hangry. Be careful.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: I have just a few questions to the secretary. Mr Dizdar, there were a number of important questions for us this morning about asbestos previously located onsite at Liverpool West. Could I seek clarification? Was that previously identified asbestos remediated when it was identified?

MURAT DIZDAR: In the earlier line of questioning around that stage one with Mainsbridge, my understanding is that that was all rectified.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Is it the case that a hygienist's certificate would have been required before children would be allowed back onsite?

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

CORRECTED

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Turning to the more recent issue of mulch, can you clarify the timing of the removal of mulch onsite at Liverpool West? I know you've taken some of that on notice, but just a rough guideline.

MURAT DIZDAR: We indicated through the Deputy Premier that we're 90 per cent of the way through the removal. It's quite slow work with heavy machinery. We're working with the EPA and SafeWork for clearance as we go. We did communicate to the school community initially that we thought it was two days, and that was the advice I gave to the Deputy Premier. Once we got onsite and realised the extent of the issue, we then communicated to the Deputy Premier's office, through myself, that it was going to be longer. The advice was somewhere about up to two weeks. We're running really hard. If we can bring that back, that would be wonderful, but we'll keep updating the school community. That 90 per cent removed is the advice I've got as I sit here, but the clearance of each of those zones happens through SafeWork. What I won't do is go back to the Deputy Premier and say we're right to go back until I've got full clearance from SafeWork and the hygienist. I can say that we just visited yesterday at Gulyangarri, where the school has been decanted to. I want to take my hat off to the leaders of both schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: Incredible.

MURAT DIZDAR: We spoke to community. We spoke to students. We, in fact, stayed back and spoke to staff. They're really respectful and appreciative that, one, we've got their students inside school gates; two, off that zone to get it safe. We're going to do all we can to make that as expedient as possible without compromising safety.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Accepting you can't give a specific number about the amount that you're removing, what's the—

MURAT DIZDAR: We have said to the school community that we think it's up to two weeks but that we'll keep them updated. This is week one of those two weeks, the first of those two weeks, and we're at Wednesday. It's been good progress to get 90 per cent offsite. The latest I've got is the weather today and yesterday is not helping either. But short of saying it will be a definitive, we think it's that sort of time period. If that moves any, we'll make sure we update the school community, either forwards or backwards. But, like I said, we won't compromise the safety. It will be the hygienist and SafeWork that say to me, as secretary, "Here's the clearance certificate. You can bring back the school community."

The Hon. BOB NANVA: On the amount of mulch specifically—I know you can't give a specific number, but just a broad amount that is being removed?

MURAT DIZDAR: My advice, because we wanted to chase that with the line of questioning, is that about a thousand tonnes have been removed.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Can I seek some clarification? I'm a little confused at the moment on the issue of soil that's being removed at Liverpool West. That's not connected to the previous identification of asbestos that was remediated, as you've now said. Can you explain why soil is being removed as part of the mulch removal?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I really welcome that clarification. It has nothing to do with the soil that was previously referenced or the previous work zones that were cleared. This specifically relates to garden beds throughout this school, which are quite extensive in play areas and in walkways between buildings. It specifically relates to that and the EPA advice and alert that we need to check all of that. That's what came back positive by way of the testing with one sample. That's what we're at work to remove. In removing all of the mulch, any material that may be there with it, because it could have impacted, is also being removed.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: It's to reduce the risk of cross-contamination, effectively, from the mulch?

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct. That's a perfect phrase for it.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: We have concluded this morning's part of the hearing. Thank you very much, Deputy Premier, for your attendance. We have finished with your questioning. The Committee will break for lunch and we will return at 2.00 p.m. for further questioning.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms SARAH HURCOMBE, Executive Director, Service Excellence, Early Childhood Outcomes, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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The CHAIR: Thank you all for coming back. I note that we have an additional witness joining us. I will now commence again with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Welcome back, everybody. While you're here, Ms Hurcombe, I just want to ask some questions about the preschool announcement, obviously. In the last estimates hearing, you let us know that there was some work happening with an independent adviser and that you were working on the location of those sites. They've been announced in recent days. The Minister has referred to, I think, an independent advisory group that provided advice. Can you tell me who was on that panel? Or Mr Barraket?

MARK BARRAKET: Thank you for the question. The panel consisted of a number of deputy secretaries and executive directors from within the Department of Education. There was an independent chair and also a probity adviser that were part of that panel.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you tell me how many deputy secretaries and how many EDs and who they were?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes. There were two panels that were convened, and the membership did change slightly for each of those, because we did change some of our executive during the time that we were—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, the substantive position as opposed to the person in it, if that's easier for you to give.

MARK BARRAKET: There was myself as the Acting Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes, for the first panel. Deb Summerhayes, Cathy Brennan—both were school performance deputy secretaries at the time. There was also Anthony Manning as the chief executive for infrastructure. There was a representative from the Department of Communities and Justice as an Aboriginal representative. There was also a representative from Learning Improvement, which is now Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing—Ms Megan Kelly. They were the decision-makers for the panel. For the second panel, it was largely the same, with the exception of Cathy Brennan, who was no longer acting as a deputy secretary for public schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was the change in the first to second panel purely just because of personnel? What was the difference between—

MARK BARRAKET: It was purely personnel, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You also said that there was an independent—I think "probity adviser" was the terminology that you used.

MARK BARRAKET: The independent probity adviser was part of the process that oversaw the process that we undertook to select the 100 sites for the schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And who was that?

MARK BARRAKET: I might pass to Ms Hurcombe, who can give us the name of that individual.

SARAH HURCOMBE: Sure. The independent probity adviser was Heath Jess, who's the director of Procurement Co.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think there was an additional consultant, I can't remember the lady's name, who was also—

SARAH HURCOMBE: Abigail Goldberg was the independent chair of the assessment panel and the independent expert reviewer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was she involved in both of the two panels that Mr Barraket—

MARK BARRAKET: She was involved in both, and so was Heath Jess.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the criteria around the selection of those sites, what direction were you given from the Minister or her office in relation to what you needed to prioritise?

MARK BARRAKET: There was an agreed methodology that we used as part of the selection process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And what was within that agreed methodology?

MARK BARRAKET: The selection process looked at socio-economic disadvantage, educational outcomes in areas where there was an undersupply—so the supply and demand modelling—and we looked at population data as well. We looked at developmental needs of children through the AEDC data and then we looked

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at some local intelligence through speaking with principals, directors, educational leadership and also service providers in the areas where we were considering schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When the first 10 were announced just after or around the time of the budget last year, presumably those 10 weren't subject to the same criteria in this process of the panel. My understanding is that because they were new builds that were underway—

MARK BARRAKET: They were subject to a different process because they were new builds that fitted the election commitment for new public schools to have a preschool onsite.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There have been 100 sites announced by the Government. Did that panel provide those 100 sites to the Minister's office or was there a larger list at some point or were things shortlisted? What was the process to get to 100?

MARK BARRAKET: The assessment panel met and we were provided with a recommended list of schools over two meetings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, provided by whom?

MARK BARRAKET: From Ms Hurcombe's team, who were working on this. They provided the assessment panel with a list of sites that were recommended. There were also additional sites that we considered. When we finalised the list of 100, that was then presented to the Deputy Premier for consideration.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Hurcombe, the list that your team put together presumably had more than 100 sites on it. Are you able to tell us how many were on that list?

SARAH HURCOMBE: Sure. As Mr Barraket has indicated, the process was a robust approach. We originally looked at all primary and central schools across New South Wales before narrowing them down by applying the data methodology that Mr Barraket has indicated. From that number and from that broader amount—let me just find it—I believe it was 231 schools. That excludes the new builds and major upgrades.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In that process you found 231 potential sites that fit that methodology that Mr Barraket has just spoken about.

MARK BARRAKET: Correct.

SARAH HURCOMBE: That's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In going from the 231 to the final 100, how did you decide who was in and who wasn't, if 231 met the criteria?

MARK BARRAKET: In addition to the data pieces that I described, there were a few other pieces that we considered. There was a site assessment that was undertaken for each of the schools to make sure that it was possible to build or construct a preschool onsite. There was also some financial analysis undertaken, and there was also a commitment that we wouldn't displace any Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Through that process and through the local intelligence that we had through speaking with DELs, through speaking with principals and speaking with local service providers, we were able to reduce the number of schools that we considered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate a hundred was your commitment and I know that you've got to work within the parameters of what government gives you. Of the 231 sites, how many were—I was going to say "knocked off the list" but that's not very parliamentary terminology. How many didn't have the right capability onsite to have a physical service?

MARK BARRAKET: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also provide the other criteria where you spoke about not wanting to displace Aboriginal-controlled or the reasons why others weren't—and numbers, as best as you can provide.

MARK BARRAKET: We're happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The list of a hundred that was provided to the Deputy Premier's office, is that the list that was announced or were there any changes made?

MARK BARRAKET: That is the list that was announced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you have to provide that with an electorate breakdown to the Deputy Premier's office?

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MARK BARRAKET: No, we did not.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the capacity for those a hundred preschools, what do you foresee will be the amount of places that will be available at those sites?

MARK BARRAKET: We are still doing work to ascertain the size of each of those preschools. Previously, I indicated—or I think Mr Manning may have—that they will be preschools staffed for 20, 40 or 60 students. That is work that is still to be done. But with a hundred preschools on that, we anticipate a minimum of 2,000 places a day with a maximum of up to 6,000, but I expect it'll land somewhere in the middle.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So the sites have been identified and announced, but at this stage we're not sure how big each of them will be, depending on—that work still needs to happen?

MARK BARRAKET: That work still needs to be done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame for that work to be completed?

MARK BARRAKET: We will commence that shortly, but I don't have a firm time frame on that at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, depending on the nature of the builds—are you looking at new standalone structures? Are you looking at modifying existing classrooms? Presumably there might be School Infrastructure. I appreciate, Mr Towers, you're new.

MARK BARRAKET: Mr Towers might add to this, but predominantly they will be new standalone structures. There might be a couple where we use existing school buildings or facilities that are not being utilised, but I think predominantly they are new builds.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there anything, Mr Towers, that you wanted to add to that?

PAUL TOWERS: No. Mr Barraket has described it well. Fundamentally, the new facilities will be standalone in existing primary schools. There are a number of existing projects underway, capital projects, where the preschool could be incorporated as part of the school development.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But at some sites that still needs to be finalised as you work through that process?

MARK BARRAKET: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When do you hope to start to see construction of some of these preschools onsite?

MARK BARRAKET: We do need to commence a procurement process in terms of construction. We will be commencing that immediately. The commitment is that these sites will be online for day one, term 1 in 2027, although we do anticipate there will be some that are operational sooner than that. Gulyangarri is an example of that, where we anticipate that it will be open later this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, it was almost built, really. It was well underway. In terms of the other nine of the 10 that were announced as part of the budget last year, has construction started on any of those new school builds yet or are they still some time away?

MARK BARRAKET: I might see if Mr Towers has any information on that but, to the best of my knowledge, no. But he might have further information.

PAUL TOWERS: The answer to that is no. The planning is underway for the inclusion of preschools in the capital works project, but construction has not started yet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to provide on notice for the remaining nine when you would anticipate construction to begin if that's possible?

PAUL TOWERS: Yes, we can do that. That will be linked to the program for the capital project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Any indications would be very helpful. Ms Hurcombe or Mr Barraket, I'm happy for either of you to answer. Is the intention of the Government or the direction that has been given to you from the Minister—they talk about universal preschool access. Does that mean every child five days a week in the year before school? Are they the policy settings that you're working under as an agency?

MARK BARRAKET: We are still in the process of working to define what universal preschool is. These public preschools are the first step in working towards that. There's other work that we are undertaking to ensure

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that there is increased supply and accessibility through a range of different grants programs that will help set the foundations for universal preschool.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When do you anticipate knowing what your parameters are around universal preschool access and what the Government defines that to be?

MARK BARRAKET: We are doing work at the moment to explore the evidence behind the appropriate age and hours for children, and that will define the work that we do. There's further modelling that we want to undertake as well to make sure that the definition that we arrive at is going to be achievable.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As it currently stand, is it five days a week for every child? Or is that still work that's ongoing?

MARK BARRAKET: We are still defining the age and hours for children to participate in universal preschool.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that's government direction and decision, and as the public service, that's sort of a bit outside your remit. In terms of these new hundred preschools, is the intention that children will be enrolled for five days a week?

MARK BARRAKET: At this point, we would just continue the current enrolment policy that we have for our existing 100 public preschools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So the two days, the 15 hours, in line with the Federal funding agreements? Is that what you're looking at?

MARK BARRAKET: I might check with Ms Hurcombe to see if she's got information on this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can take it on notice if not.

SARAH HURCOMBE: Or I could pass to Mr Graham as well, but we do know that current practice tends to be about five days a fortnight.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's right. Because they tend to operate on school hours, it's a little bit different.

SARAH HURCOMBE: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And once they operate and open, it is the intention that they will be free for families for the days that they are attending?

MARK BARRAKET: The current process for fees would apply, and that is that public education is free. Some sites might ask for a contribution, a voluntary contribution. Of course, we would accommodate families that are unable to make the contribution.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're just looking to continue the existing processes?

MARK BARRAKET: We're looking to continue the existing process. We don't have plans to—or we've not provided any advice to change that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I suspect we will be back here at the next estimates, as more time passes. But still on early childhood, the Flexible Initiatives Trial under the childcare fund—can you provide any information about that process, where that's up to and when that money will start to become available?

MARK BARRAKET: Certainly. Let me just pull up my notes on that. The Flexible Initiative Trial is \$20 million across two years. The first round opened on 1 September 2023, and we anticipate that successful applicants will be announced shortly, over the next couple of weeks. Round 2 for that program is expected to open in April 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it like a \$10 million allocation each round? Or how are you breaking down that money?

MARK BARRAKET: I would need to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. I'm going to change to a different topic: back to Mr Manning no longer working for the department. Secretary, you said in earlier evidence that you have made that decision as part of other leadership changes. Are you able to clarify whether Mr Manning resigned or if he was terminated?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've made several leadership changes in my tenure, and it was one that we came to mutual agreement on.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, did he resign? Did he tender a resignation?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was he asked to resign? I'm happy for you to phrase it how you see fit, but I'm trying to work out if he was sacked or if he resigned.

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to be very respectful of his service and time, which I have been.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I made a number of leadership changes. Some were mobility, which some people went to different government agencies, and some left the department. He left the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did he tender a resignation?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I indicated, it was through mutual agreement and discussion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I respect that, but there is obviously a process when an employee leaves the department. Did he tender a resignation?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm just going to repeat for the Committee: It was through mutual agreement that Mr Manning is no longer with the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I don't want to labour the point, but did he tender a resignation or was he terminated? Because if an employee leaves, there has to be some process in order for that to happen. I'm asking did he initiate that process or did you?

MURAT DIZDAR: I really want to be respectful of his six-year tenure at School Infrastructure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As do I.

MURAT DIZDAR: I had discussions with Mr Manning. We came to a mutual agreement around his tenure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I go now back to asbestos at Liverpool West?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers or Mr Dizdar, which company is doing the removal of the mulch and that asbestos removal onsite?

MURAT DIZDAR: School Infrastructure is leading the work, and we've got SafeWork and EPA out there with us.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you brought in contractors to do the physical removal?

MURAT DIZDAR: Under the auspices of School Infrastructure. We've got our own people.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But School Infrastructure in and of itself doesn't have employees who come in and do this. You must have got an outside contractor who's onsite to come in and do removal. Are you able to tell me which company is doing that removal?

MURAT DIZDAR: I will take it on notice which company, but we've had to get expert help in to undertake that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. Do you know, Mr Towers, which company is onsite doing that removal of the mulch?

PAUL TOWERS: I can't remember the name of the company. I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a chance that it's Beasy?

PAUL TOWERS: That doesn't sound familiar.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I've been given from a resident in the area a notice of asbestos removal work from Beasy on the Liverpool West Public School site from 12 February this year through to 31 March. I'm happy to table a copy of that. I'm just trying to ascertain whether they are actually a company that's doing some of the removal, because that's gone out to community members, I've been told. I'm just trying to find out if that's actually correct.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's make sure we come back with the right company that we've employed.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. I will give that to the staff. If you could come back on that, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You'll notice when you receive the copy, and I appreciate that it's not in front of you, that at the top of that notice—and it's of a photo, so it's quite poor quality; I'll concede that—it seems to indicate that the date of that notice of work is actually from December last year as well. I'm happy for you to take it on notice, but if you could provide firstly whether Beasy are currently doing the work, if they've done previous asbestos removal work on the school site and at what dates?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to do that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate you haven't seen it before.

MURAT DIZDAR: This is a bit difficult to read as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. But you can see the date of December and you can see what's there. As I said, this was provided to me.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go back to our people and make sure we get the right information for the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you. I also want to go back to—I'm going to run out of time, but I'll take 30 seconds—the Port Macquarie Hastings school community. Were you able to find out at all since this morning whether there are contractors onsite at the moment to finish that project?

PAUL TOWERS: I don't have that information at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. I've been given an indication that the company in question has only been engaged to fix up defects from the previous work and not to continue the rest of the project. Is that your understanding as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can help the Committee here.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Please.

MURAT DIZDAR: The contract was with FKG. It's still in place. They completed the works that we contracted them to do. But, as a matter of course with these contracts, they're live, like you indicated, until all financial aspects are finalised, which includes works such as defects. We have engaged another contractor for the next round of works.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, who is that contractor then who's been engaged for the next round of works?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get the details of who that is for the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will come back to this. We're out of time for our round. I will hand back to the Chair.

The CHAIR: No problem. I have a few questions over a few different areas, and then I'll pass back, so don't go anywhere.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm here all day.

The CHAIR: Good. In relation to Mr Manning leaving the department, did he get a termination payment?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, he did.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I want to ask some questions around the early childhood education workforce.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The CHAIR: I know there's particular interest in the strategy to basically get more people in and to improve pay and conditions in order to get those people in. Is someone able to tell me what—

MURAT DIZDAR: I can start it and then Mr Barraket and Ms Hurcombe will be able to add to this.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

MURAT DIZDAR: This is again, Chair, of national concern. When I go to the education Ministers meeting with the Deputy Premier, it's a topic of discussion right across the States. We've got a number of initiatives

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in play at the department to help get more early childhood workers into the workforce. There is a range of scholarship initiatives that Mr Barraket will be able to talk to. There's wraparound assistance to support study and development by way of mentoring and assistance with financial and non-financial barriers to study. There are also strategies and initiatives in place to lift professional recognition and attract and retain a qualified, sustainable workforce. This is something that's important to us. We want to get more early childhood workers into the sector, and they're the initiatives that we're targeting. But if you want a greater degree of detail, Mr Barraket might have that.

MARK BARRAKET: Thank you, Mr Dizdar. I just want to reiterate what you said, that the workforce challenge is something that is of national significance. All States and Territories are in a very similar position. We've got a range of initiatives within New South Wales that fall within our responsibility to support attracting and retaining ECEC teachers and educators. We've got a significant scholarships program, which is under way. I'm really pleased to indicate that we had over 2,300 applications for that, so we have increased our funding to support that program.

We've also got the election commitment for professional development. We are planning to roll that program out in mid-2024. That will be a significant piece of work that values the profession, builds their capability and leadership and helps retain the existing workforce. There's fee-free ECEC VET places available, up to 25,000. My understanding is that as of June 2023 there were over 15,000 current and aspiring educators enrolled in that program.

We also have an accelerated degree program with the University of Wollongong. Currently there are around 225 students enrolled in that. There are also some initiatives that will be forthcoming through the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund that will support workforce initiatives. We're due to submit the strategic investment plan for the fund to the Treasurer and Deputy Premier by the end of this financial year. There is a range of other initiatives that we have in place as well.

The CHAIR: A couple of questions off the back of that, then. What specifically is being done to assist with wage increases for the sector?

MARK BARRAKET: A lot of the wages are set by the Commonwealth. They fall underneath Commonwealth awards. We do work closely with the Commonwealth to advocate for stronger pay and conditions for the workforce. The initiatives that I outlined fall within the responsibility of New South Wales as a State to deliver on, but a lot of pay and conditions relate to Commonwealth awards.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, it might be of interest that we employ 2 per cent of the workforce in early childhood education, like Mr Barraket indicates. The vast majority is under the Commonwealth.

The CHAIR: Yes, I understand that. I guess the council-run early childhood education centres are of particular interest. That's a place where the Government can lead in terms of the best pay and conditions. Has there been any budgeting done or any work done so far to help councils provide a higher wage for workers?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Barraket might have some detail, but those initiatives he outlined that we're running run across the sector. It's not like we're just trying to create more early childhood education workers for our government preschools; it's to try—

The CHAIR: But in terms of wages—

MURAT DIZDAR: —and increase it across the sector. I'm not sure if he's got that detail around councils. But we would be advocating in our role for better outcomes for that workforce with the Commonwealth.

MARK BARRAKET: I'm happy to take on notice the piece around councils and come back to you on that.

The CHAIR: That would be really useful. I understand that this is something that Local Government NSW has been asking for, for some time—the USU has also been campaigning on this—to ensure that there is a State allocation of funding to encourage that wage increase at a council level. If you could come back to me, that would be very useful. In terms of getting people in and giving them that sort of on-the-job experience, is that a Federal responsibility in terms of traineeships within these education centres or is that something that the State Government gets involved in?

MARK BARRAKET: Are you talking like practicum experience, like we have in our schools?

The CHAIR: Yes. It's been put to me that basically people were put in as trainees on a trainee rate.

MARK BARRAKET: Typically, those kinds of things may occur as part of the study. But I'm happy to take the specifics of that on notice and come back to you.

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The CHAIR: That would be very useful. I have a completely different question now about domestic and family violence. We talk a lot about the need for prevention, and prevention is reliant on good education. What is the New South Wales Government doing to fund and support those primary prevention initiatives in everything from early childhood to primary and secondary schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Specifically, Chair, on domestic violence?

The CHAIR: Yes. When we look at the Change the story framework that was updated in 2021 and that sort of primary prevention strategy, a large part of that relies on the education system.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. Both Mr Martin Graham and Mr Paul Martin might have some details they can add here by way of the curriculum and any specific programs. I know it does run through the curriculum K to 12, particularly in high schools, through our PDHPE curriculum. But I wonder if Mr Martin might start first by way of NESAs and the curriculum and then Mr Graham might have some detail as well.

The CHAIR: I would appreciate that. I will add in one more little question that you could address at the same time. I understand that there is a bit of an ad hoc approach to respectful relationships education across schools. I'm interested in what the Government is doing to ensure that consistent approach to the education as well.

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you for the question. The issue of respectful relationships was added to the PDHPE—the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education—syllabuses a few years ago in, I think, 2018. I will correct that if necessary. It has been included, I understand, in more recent syllabuses. That is the PDHPE syllabus K to 6 and 7 to 10. The second iteration of consultation begins on 26 February coming up, so people have an opportunity to contribute to and comment on the syllabuses. In terms of consent and other issues in relation to PDHPE, they have been increased in terms of their coverage in both K to 6 and 7 to 10, age appropriate.

Consent when we talk about very small children relates to them giving permission to lend a pen or a pencil or something or other but it is the notion of permission and ownership and appropriate respectful behaviour. And that becomes obviously more complex in secondary. Those issues are taught in schools depending on—they're definitely taught and the syllabus has to be taught because it's part of the requirements—the context of the school. Sometimes there are different contexts, different ages of students, different faiths and different emphases that are placed around the common and required content so that would account for some variation. But anything that's in the syllabus is required to be taught; that's essential. Within the bounds of that level of discretion, the content needs to be delivered.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might just get Mr Graham to add to that and, Chair, could I take the liberty to place on record that it's Mr Graham's birthday today?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Happy birthday, Martin! Sorry you have to be here for us.

MURAT DIZDAR: His loving family wanted to spend it with him today but I made him come to the estimates hearing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We'll let you go at 5.30 p.m.

The CHAIR: This is your present instead.

MARTIN GRAHAM: I couldn't think of anything better, to be honest.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Please don't mislead the Committee.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That may be more of a sign about me than the Committee. We work very closely with the Department of Communities and Justice around these kinds of issues. As Mr Martin mentioned, there's both the statewide syllabus and the connections through the various elements of the syllabus but also local connections with schools and also the kind of awareness-raising days and so on. That's where we have a particularly close connection through our school performance people.

It often comes up in the consent materials because of course it's about power and power relationships. We did a lot of work in 2021 with all of our school colleagues and the department on behalf of Catholic and independent schools to develop a whole range of consent materials. When you look at them in the age appropriate way, because it's K to 12, they come to issues of power and people being able to be empowered so that in any relationship in any form they are aware of those issues.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I just want to add that we also support our staff through, if required, domestic violence leave, section 51A transfers. As far as possible, we try to adopt a humanistic and supportive approach around what can be awful circumstances.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Thank you. Completely different topic: unflued gas heaters. It's such a different topic, it's crazy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We're getting a sense of déjà vu, but keep going.

The CHAIR: How many public schools have unflued gas heaters installed?

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, let me take that on notice and get you that detail, because we've been at work around air cooling and heating in schools. There was a five-year program that recently came to completion, where we upgraded something like 9,000 learning spaces, close to 600 libraries, worked with sealed schools. We removed something like close to 4,500 unflued gas heaters as well. But your question specifically was how many remained. Let me come back on notice, if that's okay.

The CHAIR: That would be really useful. I will give you just a couple to take on notice, if you will. How many currently still have the unflued gas heaters installed? That number of how many have been removed in the past 12 months—presumably that's the 4,500 that you just mentioned, or is that over a longer period?

MURAT DIZDAR: What period was that? It's not over a specific period, but that was as at the end of last year.

The CHAIR: Okay. And then what percentage of New South Wales public schools have a solar PV panel system installed?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we've been on a big sustainability campaign as well, so let me get you that data as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I have one final small question at this point. It's a financial one, I'm sorry. There's a reference in your financial statements on page 195 that talks about revenue from grants, but there's a curious line in there that talks about the department providing educational services "as agreed with the Department of Home Affairs". It just leapt out to me because I couldn't work out what the Department of Education would be doing for the Department of Home Affairs. I was very curious and thought I'd ask.

MURAT DIZDAR: I will just see if my colleagues know. Normally I'm trying to get more money out of the Commonwealth. So if I'm supporting them, let me find out what it is.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Particularly for refugees—

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Refugee students.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, for many years we've received additional Commonwealth funding for those students.

The CHAIR: Okay. Great. Thank you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, you just said earlier that Mr Manning did receive a termination payment. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you able to advise the Committee how much that was?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Just coming back to the issues at Hastings in Port Macquarie—and, I'm sorry, it was towards the end—Mr Dizdar, you said that another contractor has been engaged to do stage two. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the name of the contractor, Ms Mitchell, but there is another contractor that has been engaged to undertake the remaining work at Port Macquarie campus.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: At the Hastings campus? Because there is Westport campus and Hastings campus.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, did I say Port Macquarie?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: I meant on the Hastings Secondary College site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, which is in Port Macquarie.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Got you. Did the contract engagement for the second stage go out to tender? Was there a process for that?

MURAT DIZDAR: There would've been, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has the forecast end cost of current works exceeded the approved funding for the project? I'm happy for yourself or Mr Towers to answer.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's get you the detail of what the budget is and where we're at with the budget.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay—on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Please.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Are either of you able to tell me whether a request for additional funding was made for that project? My understanding is that it was. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding was that when we had the initial budget, we looked at topping up that budget for further works.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay.

MURAT DIZDAR: So let me come back on detail on what that was, if that's okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was there a request? Can you advise whether a request for additional funding was made throughout the process?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back with those figures, if that's okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. If that request was denied, could you also advise the Committee of that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, but my understanding is that we are fully committed, in budget, to undertake the further work that's remaining. In the phone hook-up with the principal, I got her angle of what those remaining works were, and we'll make sure we deliver on those works.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just trying to clarify, the original business case of the project and the upgrades that were part of that, is that what will be delivered or has that been revised in terms of the scope of work?

MURAT DIZDAR: The remaining works, as I understand—and I'm happy to correct these by way of the detail if I don't have them down pat—in talking with the principal, there's Building B with some works to happen there by way of support unit teaching spaces. There's a toilet block to complete. There is an infrastructure piece with the PCYC—I'm going to describe it as a multipurpose facility; that is to complete. And there's some works to complete in Building T. I was informed they're food technology and materials learning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will the project be delivered as per the original business case or has the scope been revised because of a budget issue?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I want to do, Ms Mitchell, is go back as secretary and compare what I was advised of by the principal in line with what was that original scope, but deliver on everything we agreed to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy for you to confirm it on notice, but the question of will the project be delivered as per the original business case, that is the intention. Is that what you are saying now?

MURAT DIZDAR: The intention is to deliver on what we committed to up-front.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that information that you've taken on notice to the Committee.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure. I did say here, Building B with the support classes, Building T with the food technology classes, the toilet block and also the multipurpose facility.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The School Infrastructure website lists that this work will be completed by the middle of this year. I think it says end of term 2 in 2024. Is it on track for that to be completed by that date?

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding is that the multipurpose facility—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking about the entirety of the works. When will that be completed by?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go and get the advice and come back.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Towers, do you have anything else that you can add to that?

PAUL TOWERS: No. I think the secretary has provided the information that you need. I have nothing to add to it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I guess you would appreciate, for the community it's a little frustrating because it was touted as all being finished at the start of the year. Clearly it's not. The Infrastructure website says middle of the year. We've been told that there weren't any additional contractors, now there are new contractors, and there's literally no work happening on site and hasn't been for several weeks. I understand you've got time to provide questions on notice, but if there is any additional information that you can provide to us, that school community and the parents, I'm sure, would like to know exactly what's going on.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, Ms Mitchell. In the next break if I get any further update—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you can, I would appreciate that.

MURAT DIZDAR: —I'm happy to table it, otherwise I'll come back quickly on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, what discussions has the Department of Education had with the Department of Planning in selection of the eight accelerated Transport Oriented Development precincts relevant to the Transport Oriented Development SEPP?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, let me take that on notice and come back. We're one agency amongst many others. I imagine our Planning colleagues have been in discussion with us on that as well, but let me come back on what input we've provided and when.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you had any discussions as Secretary of Education with the head of Planning about this?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me take it on notice. I talk to the head of Planning on a number of things but let me come back on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, given the significance of this reform in terms of population and future schooling needs, the community are asking what discussions are taking place between Education and Planning.

MURAT DIZDAR: I really respect and appreciate the importance of it and that's why I want to come back with the right answer for the Committee—the details.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As a follow up, are you aware if the Department of Education has provided any information to the Department of Planning in the selection of these Transport Oriented Development sites?

MURAT DIZDAR: We would be part of these discussions, but I want to make sure I've got the right detail for you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any of your deputy secretaries who have been involved in that work with Planning who can answer?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to go back, because up until two days ago Mr Manning would have been leading there, so I want to make sure I come back with the right detail.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, as you can imagine, community concern on this relates to local schools being reported at capacity and then a big influx of new housing and residents being the result of these plans. What are some of the measures that the department would consider in a situation like this in terms of projected needs, looking at how we expand the existing schools? I'm just wondering what might be on the table or under consideration in terms of planning for something like this.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, I'm fully focused on delivering the \$3.5 billion this financial year for new and upgraded schools that are in Western Sydney and another \$1.4 billion that I'm responsible for for regional schools. That's 15 new schools, 17 upgrades. They're in some of the State's top 10 student growth areas. I always welcome student growth. It means more students, more community having confidence in public education. I make no secret that I want to grow public education, so I'm fully fixated on delivering for public education on those fronts. On broader whole-of-government discussions around growth areas, growth corridors, I think our growth audit spoke for that. I know that our planning colleagues liaise closely with us on growth areas.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Plans for increasing school capacity to meet new housing or changes in the community—I'm just wondering where we're at in terms of budget commitments.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, I just gave you this year's financial year commitment that I've got to execute as secretary, which is \$3.5 billion for new and upgraded schools and \$1.4 billion for regional schools. That's 15 new schools and 17 upgrades that I've got to get underway, and they're in the growth audit that was called out as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I go back because I know that Ms Hurcombe is only with us for a few more minutes here. In relation to some of the early childhood reforms, has there been any consideration—and it might go to the Flexible Initiatives Trial as well—looking at other models of delivery to support parents? One that has been brought to my attention recently—I don't know if you've heard of the company called BubbaDesk, where they look at working onsite with parents still there. It's almost a creche-type model. In terms of the Flexible Initiatives Trial, is that really looking just at centre-based care or are you looking at other forms of early childcare provision?

MARK BARRAKET: I'm happy to take that on notice, but my understanding is it is predominantly centre-based care.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the criteria for the funding, which you said is open and I think has now closed because it's going to be announced shortly—

MARK BARRAKET: Round one has closed, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What were the requirements for the application process for that funding? Was it only open to existing providers?

MARK BARRAKET: That's my understanding, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When do you anticipate the second round of that to open?

MARK BARRAKET: I anticipate that will be in the near future, in the next couple of months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of Start Strong funding for preschools, were there any changes put in place to the funding guidelines or the rollout of that funding for services this year?

MARK BARRAKET: We did update the guidelines for that earlier in the year, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What is different? What was changed?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll have to take on notice the specifics of the changes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Going back to the preschool commitments, there was obviously also a commitment from the Government to deliver 50 preschools, I think it was, on non-government sites.

MARK BARRAKET: There was a commitment of \$60 million for new or upgraded facilities in non-government sites. I think that's around 50 sites. Ms Read might be able to add further detail on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

CHLOE READ: The commitment, as Mr Barraket just outlined—50 new and upgraded preschools at non-government school sites in high-growth areas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has any work commenced on identifying where those might be? How does that tail into the work that has been done by Ms Hurcombe and her team and Mr Barraket?

CHLOE READ: Work has commenced with the sector on the design of that program. It's going to follow the Building Grants Assistance Scheme model. In terms of the intersection, I don't know if you guys—

MARK BARRAKET: We did not consult with them on the sites that we were proposing, nor have we had discussions with them around proposed sites that they are considering.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you look at that as part of the process? If you're trying to spread the support across communities, if there's an opportunity to do that—

SARAH HURCOMBE: At project level there is definitely that collaboration happening across Ms Read's team and my team as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, with the BGA requirements, it's low-fee-paying areas and it's making sure it goes where there's need. Will you be using the same methodology that was applied to the hundred preschools or will that be separate?

CHLOE READ: I think it'll be separate but it will be similar in terms of the intent of the program—high-growth areas, socio-economic status, student demographics and classification as a special school. But we

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will be working with the Catholic and independent sectors to determine the right process for awarding those grants.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a time frame of when you would expect there to be information to the community about where they would be located?

CHLOE READ: I might take on notice the exact time line. We're working on adjustment to the guidelines and making regulation to do with preschools and non-government schools so that we give them really good advice—clarity for the sector on the way that they can operate well without falling foul of any of the guidelines on not-for-profit status.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's a whole other kettle of fish, but I'm not going to ask you about that at the moment. Mr Dizdar, the School Experience Program, I think it's called, when everyone who's on your senior executive goes and spends time in a school—have all senior executive staff participated in that program?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm very proud of the program. We've extended it all the way down to director level; we started with the senior team. We've asked everyone to go out and spend time in schools to appreciate their operating rhythm, to look at their successes and challenges and to bring that back to us. We also said that any new employee inside the support arm of the organisation, we'll put them on the payroll and they can start but we want them to do a week in a school before they then undertake their work, so that they've got that immersive experience as well.

Having spoken to the PPA and SPC, we've had great feedback from schools as well because it's been symbiotic. It's been growing their knowledge of the organisation and opportunities, and I know it's positively impacting on our work. In fact, I was just reading the Public Service Commissioner's recent report on the workforce. There's a case study of one of our employees, the head of industrial relations, Donna Wilcox, who undertook that immersive experience.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, just to clarify what you've just said: Everybody director level and up who was an existing employee has done that program?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, we started with the senior exec, including myself, and then we moved down to the executive director layer—we opened it up there. Now we've also moved down to the director layer. Not everyone's completed it but we're in the process of it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a time frame for when you would want everybody to complete it?

MURAT DIZDAR: We didn't put a set time frame on it. I want everyone to undertake the experience, but to do that within what their workstreams and workload—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, you've got to move people around. I get that. You just said before that before they start, new employees are going to do that program. Again, is that any new employees at director level up? You said something about the service arm. I just wasn't quite clear on what you meant.

MURAT DIZDAR: The arm that supports all the schools, which is you used to know as the "corporate arm"—we've called that school support arm. Anyone that comes into that space—it could be in finance as a 7/8 clerk, it could be in procurement as a 5/6—if they're new to our organisation, we want them to undertake that program as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that extend to the early childhood directorate as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: It encompasses the whole organisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If someone is an early childhood director and, for instance, their main role is working with early childhood providers and services to ensure that they're meeting regulation requirements, do they have to go and spend time in a school or do they go to an early childhood service? I'm not taking away from the merit of the program but my question to you is, if your day-to-day role is in the regulatory arm of early childhood and you spend a week in a school, I would say that that's actually not related to your core business. I'm trying to understand how you determine who does it and where they go.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a very good question. In that case, we have a hundred preschools, as you know, on government school sites. We team them up with one of those sites. They can both see the school in operation, as well as the preschool. We might combine that with immersive experience in another setting as well on the early childhood front.

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Martin, this might be your space. In terms of the curriculum, parents are interested in learning about the process of this and their involvement and consultation and feedback. I'm wondering if you might be able to let us know how that works.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Is that in terms of the curriculum materials the department produces or the New South Wales syllabus?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sorry, Paul Martin.

PAUL MARTIN: Two Martins, one surname.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not birthday Martin, the other Martin.

PAUL MARTIN: The older Mr Martin. There are 111 syllabuses in the process of being renewed. Most of those syllabuses have at least one, but often two, consultation periods. The consultation periods allow for teachers and the sectors, and also community members, to put in their views to us on either the NESA website or more formal submissions. We then take into account that consultation to provide a second phase of consultation. So the syllabuses that are to be finally released at the end of this year go out for their second phase of consultation on 26 February. That includes the ones I mentioned earlier: PDHPE in K to 6 and 7 to 10, and history and geography in 7 to 10. I can provide on notice all of the syllabuses and the consultation periods for 2024.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just clarify in terms of the process on the consultation, how do parents participate in that?

PAUL MARTIN: They can go to the NESA website, where the syllabuses are on display. There is a very simple process by which they can make comments or provide their own advice. We also go through formal consultations with each of the three organised parent groups: the P&C association, the independent schools parents and Catholic schools parents. They are invited in and they get the opportunity to have a conversation with our curriculum experts. So there are a number of ways in which parents and, broadly, community members can engage.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will stick with you, Mr Martin, while you've got the floor. Can you tell me how many teachers were given approval to teach in New South Wales last year? Have you got any data around that with you?

PAUL MARTIN: I have. It'll take just a second.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's all right.

PAUL MARTIN: The number of accredited teachers, conditional or provisional, in 2023 was 8,909.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a breakdown for how many of those you understand went into which of the school sectors?

PAUL MARTIN: I do but not here in front of me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could take that on notice, that would great.

PAUL MARTIN: I can, yes. Some of them will be teachers who teach across sectors, because there will be casual or temporary teachers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Some early childhood. But whatever you could provide on notice would be great.

PAUL MARTIN: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you also be able to provide on notice how that data compares to, say, the last three years as well in terms of those numbers and where we're seeing the split?

PAUL MARTIN: I can do that. I think I can say there's been an increase, but I'll provide the exact data on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to go to probably Mr Towers on the Northern Rivers school sites. Obviously, there are still issues around the flooding that was a couple of years ago and the rebuilds. I'm wondering if you can provide any update on the current status of some of the school builds up there—and I'm happy if Ms Summerhayes also wants to provide any information as well—particularly the schools in Lismore and Richmond River High Campus. Is there any update you can provide the Committee on that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I might start and then Mr Towers—

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine, and I appreciate you've only been in the role for a brief period of time, Mr Towers.

MURAT DIZDAR: The works that have been completed were Coraki Public School, Murwillumbah East Public School, Goonengerry Public School, Stokers Siding Public School, the Pocket Public School, alongside Wyrallah Road Public School, Main Arm Upper Public School, Mullumbimby Public School, Crabbes Creek Public School and Lismore Public School—so 10 schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's happening with Richmond River? They're still on the Lismore High campus, is my understanding.

MURAT DIZDAR: They are, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously I'm well aware of the issues of the existing site and what happened, but have there been any decisions made about the rebuild of that campus?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Mitchell, we're working with the Reconstruction Authority, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, and Lismore Council to flush out all the options for rebuilding Richmond River High.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any time frame of when a decision will be reached in relation to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to go back and see if there is any other detail, but I don't have that in front of me. I think, as you know and appreciate, it's quite a complex situation there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Absolutely.

MURAT DIZDAR: So we're still exploring options around where would be most suitable to rebuild.

The CHAIR: Can I just interrupt to ask if we need Ms Hurcombe in attendance anymore?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No.

The CHAIR: You are free to go. Thank you.

(Sarah Hurcombe withdrew.)

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, you'll come back if there's any additional information and time frames?

MURAT DIZDAR: If there's any other detail that we have. I know that community would want surety, but they'd also want us to make sure we're working with all these different arms to get it right as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate the complexities, as you well know, but I also am aware that it has now been some time.

MURAT DIZDAR: It has been.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that uncertainty is never good for communities when that continues. Can someone advise whether or not Lismore Preschool is still on a school site? They were briefly moved. I think they might still be there on one of the public school sites. Does anyone know or have that information?

MURAT DIZDAR: I will see if Mr Barraket knows anything on that.

MARK BARRAKET: I'm not sure. I will have to take that on notice, unless Mr Towers is aware.

PAUL TOWERS: I believe the Lismore Preschool is at the Lismore South primary school site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

PAUL TOWERS: They're temporary facilities, while the new facilities are being provided.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I was just wondering whether they were still there. The temporary to permanent program for the school teachers and the budget allocations there—the funding for temporary teachers to become permanent, was that sourced from existing school budgets or has that been funded through the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to talk to this. If the Committee is interested in the numbers, there's 9,074 teachers that have been made permanent out of that initiative.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many support staff?

MURAT DIZDAR: And 7,888 support staff that have been made permanent. We're really proud that the workforce has moved from something like 64 per cent permanency on the teacher front to 78 per cent. We want to be the country's leading jurisdiction on this front, and we're at work on that. I must say, I've been taken aback by the feedback we've had from people, both by email and on our visits, what it's meant to them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Secretary, I have 40 seconds left. Can you tell me, is the funding for that program sourced from existing school budgets?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, and I want to make sure I give you that as well. The qualifying rule was that they had been employed by a school for three years or longer. Those schools were already paying for that personnel. So in the vast majority of cases, those schools are now picking that cost up. In some cases, the department is absorbing the cost as well, because there could be backfill like long service leave, maternity leave or workers compensation leave.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide a breakdown of that on notice, how many have been filled by the school and how many the department is covering?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy if we've got that detail, to give that to the Committee. I'm not sure that we do, but I'm happy to come back to the Committee if we have that detail about the proportion of who is picking the cost up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If those are positions that are above establishment, how is that being managed in terms of those staff? And if, for instance, enrolment numbers go down and they're above the utilisation policy, how are you going to manage that going forward?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a really good question. Again, I want to reiterate, these positions were already in those schools for three or more years, and they were committed to go into their fourth or more year. As you know, with the school-based allocation report and the funding, schools were using the flexibility to have more staff. We're at work with the NSW Teachers Federation because, as part of an award agreement, we have a staffing agreement as well that you will recall from your time. We're working on what those procedures may look like, because this is a brand-new initiative, and where would that sit in our staffing procedures.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So that will be worked through as part of the award negotiations and the staffing agreement?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, I gave you the wrong detail there, Ms Mitchell. It's as part of the staffing agreement.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When is that next one due to be finalised?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're in discussions at the moment. We're hopeful of reaching an agreement on the staffing front within the next few months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You would envisage as part of that negotiation that there will be a determination about what you will do with any staff that are above entitlement? As you said, these are people that have been there for three years

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —but things could fluctuate and change. You might find a school has surplus teachers and so you will be looking at how you are going to manage that. Is that part of that staffing agreement?

MURAT DIZDAR: You described that really well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I did do it for a couple of years so we'll see how we go. You mentioned the negotiations and particularly the next award negotiations with the Federation and some of the work at a Federal level around the right to disconnect, and I know this has been raised in other States. Have you had any discussions with the Teachers Federation about the implications of some of those Federal workplace legislative reform areas and how that would impact the next award negotiation?

MURAT DIZDAR: Part of the heads of agreement that we struck on the teacher award last October was that we would have ongoing discussions and work with the Federation around teacher workload and the standing and status of the profession. It's under that umbrella that we're having some discussions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you looking, though, at what implications there might be from Federal changes in terms of that right to disconnect? I know in WA, for instance, it's been raised in the media that

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it might be challenging for parents to know when to contact teachers or how you are going to manage that. Is that part of your discussions with the union?

MURAT DIZDAR: Some of the preliminary discussions have been on that front. We're following what's happening at a national level.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any concerns or challenges that you see around parent access to information? Obviously, as a parent, you don't want to be bothering your child's teacher during school hours. But if your time to contact them afterwards becomes limited in terms of that, how are you going to manage that so that parents know the best way and the best time to connect with their child's teacher if there's new requirements or arrangements? How are you going to communicate that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think these are really good questions. I'm not only the secretary but I'm a parent in the system as well, so I'm very respectful and appreciative of those questions. I don't want to be presumptuous because we are nowhere near anything. We're monitoring the national front. We're having ongoing discussions. I am hell-bent on improving teacher workload as a former teacher in the system. I don't want to be presumptuous on anything. Certainly, if we get to any stage where we are looking at something more concrete, that would have to be part of the considerations and we would have to factor those things in

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the time frame for the next award negotiations and when do you expect that to be finalised by with the Federation?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think there are September discussions because it was an October to October agreement across four years—a heads of agreement with a one-year award and a three-year heads of agreement. We imagine having discussions with the Federation in September.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to that one at a later estimates hearing as the year progresses, Mr Dizdar. I want to take you now to issues around staffing. I think, Mr Ruming, you provided back to this Committee in February last year that by 2027 there was going to be a surplus of teachers, but my understanding is that there are obviously concerns, particularly about high school subject areas as well. Do you have any updated data or have you done any further work in relation to where you think teacher numbers are projecting into the future over the next couple of years?

SHAUN RUMING: I would have to take the specifics on notice. What we have continued to do is fill vacancies as fast as we can. As we lift the standing of the profession, we have taken more graduates in 2023 than we did in 2022 or 2021, which is a green shoot, for sure. We've got 858 participants in our different teacher workforce initiatives, which are above and beyond our BAU hiring efforts. But I would have to come back to you on projections.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I'm happy for you to provide that on notice. If you're doing that, do you have any projected data of how many teachers—and it can be as a percentage—will reach retirement age, say, over the next five years? Do you collect that data or project that?

SHAUN RUMING: Again, I will have to come back to you on notice on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, Ms Mitchell. Given the shortage across the State in various pockets, we're encouraging teachers to stay beyond retirement with us if they can. We've actually kicked off a Teachers Re-engage program as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I was just about to ask you about that. How is that going? I think my understanding is that you are contacting recently retired teachers to see if they want to come back as casuals. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We've been contacting and personally ringing—through our HR folk—colleagues that are recently retired and asking them would they be willing to come back and assist. We've had fabulous response. We've been saying, "We can meet your needs—if you want to work one day, two days or five days, locations." Mr Ruming might have the exact details. We're in the process of making something like 4,000 calls to recently retired. I think we've already got something like 80 that have commenced with us, and we've got about 300 of those that have already said they want to be part of it as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have figures?

SHAUN RUMING: Yes. We started the project—I'm going to say—in November/December last year, of which we have made about 1,500 calls. We've got about another 1,500 or so to go. Mr Dizdar is very close, but we've had 285 from those first round of calls of people saying they were very interested in working with us.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, 285 of the first 1,500?

CORRECTED

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, 285. Not all calls connected, as you can imagine, Ms Mitchell, and we didn't want to be a pest.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Everyone screens.

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, everyone screens. We've had 60 to date that have actually started in schools. We are working with another 100 teachers at the moment in terms of getting them ready to go back into schools. I think the level 3 casual rate that was introduced in the last round of award negotiations was attractive to people to come back as well. We only had two steps for casuals prior to that; we now have three steps. We're getting good feedback. Principals are very happy that they're able to access more casuals, but we've still got some ways to go in the coming months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Of the 60 that have re-engaged, for lack of a better term, do you have a breakdown of how many of them are—are they all just engaged? Not "just"; sorry—are they all engaged as casuals, or are any of them looking to fill other vacancies?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we were determined to do is meet them at need. If they wanted to be temporary or wanted to be permanent, there's such opportunity that we wanted to meet them at need.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. The merged and collapsed classes data that was provided the day of our last estimates hearing by the media—I think the Minister gave some indication at the last hearing that that would be something that might be looked at annually with regard to how many merged and collapsed classes there are. Is that your understanding, Secretary, that that would be an annual collection of data? What's the process for that?

MURAT DIZDAR: It is. The Deputy Premier wanted me to go and get that data. We didn't centrally hold it. We completed that in term 3. We would like to do that at the equivalent time for comparability.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will that be publicly released when it's completed?

MURAT DIZDAR: I imagine so, just like we did this occasion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I noticed that there was an announcement yesterday about more support units across the system. Are there any specific strategies in place to help recruit—particularly qualified teachers—for inclusive education and SLSOs for SSPs but also for those support units as well and further funding support?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's another very good question, Ms Mitchell. This is an area that's of high demand in the workforce challenge that we've got—to make sure that we've got skilled, qualified, backed-in folk around both at a school learning support officer level but at a teacher level for support classes and also in SSPs, in special schools. I think their workforce challenge is even more acute than if you look across high schools in general or locations in general.

Mr Ruming might have specifics, but I do know that we run scholarship programs that have been historically there that we keep building on where we do take teachers that are interested in being special ed qualified and we support them financially through the study process for that so that we can get already established teachers that are willing to go into that area. I know we've got scholarship programs for those that want to enter undergrad in that space as well. The other thing that we've been doing is the SLSOs who want to convert into teaching as well—we've been supporting them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking specifically for those children and those units where there are obviously additional needs and that inclusive education practice and specialisation. I appreciate there are scholarships, but they've been in place for a period of time. Is there anything new or different in that space? Although we are doing an entire inquiry into this matter as well, so there might be more opportunities to ask about that. Mr Ruming, do you have a breakdown of any data in terms of how many vacant positions there are at the moment in each SSP and support unit in schools as well? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

SHAUN RUMING: Yes, I would need to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Also, if you can, how many unfilled SLSO positions there are in the same units and SSPs, please.

SHAUN RUMING: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, I want to go back to PES. Are you able to provide—I'm happy for you to do it on notice—how many investigations PES has conducted over the last three years?

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MURAT DIZDAR: If we hold that data I'm happy to. Can I just use the opportunity to provide you some detail on a previous PES question?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, please. About the recruitment?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, because in the break I spoke to the head of PES, the executive director there. I can tell the Committee that there are 204 positions in PES. There are 15 vacancies at the moment and 11 are in the process of going through recruitment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And the other four?

MURAT DIZDAR: They've just occurred. They're working out what the steps are with those. If we can, we might take that question that we did put on notice off notice if you're okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Actually, I'm now going to put another one back on notice. You said there are 205 positions currently.

MURAT DIZDAR: There are 204 positions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to provide on notice how many positions there were in that unit over the previous three years as well? I'm just trying to ascertain if the overall numbers have remained steady or moved up or down.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm sure we should have that data.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, you did some homework and now I'm giving you more.

MURAT DIZDAR: But we did take one off.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We'll call it even. Some of the work around rural and remote staffing—I know that there was data released today. I think it was sitting at about 1,800 vacancies at the start of January. Do you have a breakdown, Mr Ruming, of how many of those are in rural and remote areas?

SHAUN RUMING: I think I can answer that. Our rural and remote vacancy as of 5 February was 938 vacancies, down from 1,241 similar time last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then 5 February—is that the most recent vacancy data that you have?

SHAUN RUMING: That's the most recent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What was the overall number? That was the 1,800 or so that was—

SHAUN RUMING: It was 1,782 as of 5 February, down from 2,242 similar time last year, so a change of 460 folks.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I'm not sure who is best placed to answer this. The Rural Experience Program, where university students can go out and get a taste of what it's like to live in wonderful regional areas—and they should all come out and live in the country. How many people took up the opportunity to be a part of that program last year? Do you have any data around that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's come back to you with the number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is anyone able to tell me where they went, what that program offered last year?

MURAT DIZDAR: If we have that detail, let's provide that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does anyone know? No? What about for 2024? Are there any further experiences planned through that program?

MURAT DIZDAR: I know that, having just kicked off the school year, it was at the end of last year—it was in term 4—that we just farewelled a couple of busloads on the program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know where they went or what they did?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's why I want to get you that detail.

SHAUN RUMING: Are you talking about the Rural Experience Program or Beyond the Line? There were two.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good question. I'll take both. I was thinking about Beyond the Line, but also Rural Experience Program is when teachers go out and teach in other schools for periods of time as well.

CORRECTED

SHAUN RUMING: Yes. For 2023, with the Rural Experience Program, we had 114 participants over the two years—85 participants in '23, 29 participants in 2024. I can come back to you on the exact numbers of Beyond the Line. That program ran, I think, last year for the first time. It was stopped prior to with COVID et cetera. I personally waved off one of the buses. I think there were two actual buses of 60 or so, but I'll come back on the details. They were off to places like Mudgee; I said, "I wish I was going with you—good wine country." But they went to a series of rural and remote. My understanding is we have hired a few people through that program who went out there and experienced that and wanted to be part of our rural and remote teaching community. But I can come back on the specifics.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. I saw some recent data on it.

MURAT DIZDAR: I know you know this really well, Ms Mitchell, but the Committee might not. That Rural Experience Program is where they leave the metro on secondment and actually go in and teach.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, and go and do a term.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, fantastic.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I was looking at two sets of notes and got myself muddled. Yes, Rural Experience Program, there were those numbers, and Beyond the Line, there were two—

SHAUN RUMING: Two groups. It was the same group, but they went reverse itineraries.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Are you able to provide—and I'm happy for it to be on notice—how many of Beyond the Line participants you expect this year and where you look to send them, and also how you determine where they go? Mudgee is lovely, but I'm just curious as to how you determine where they head.

SHAUN RUMING: Sure. I will come back on the specifics. My understanding is we're running two cohorts because of the success of the one cohort last year: one set for March-April and one set for September/October.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Fantastic. The Camellia-Rosehill strategy—this is coming back to the housing density questions that my colleague asked earlier. The Government's announced its intention at Rosehill racecourse to repurpose that for housing. Has there been any work done by the department and School Infrastructure in terms of what the need might be? Is there any work to put a primary school or a high school on that site if that medium density level housing goes ahead?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back on notice. We've got several established schools in that area by way of primary school and high school provision. I certainly am across the announcement as well. We've been at work with our planning colleagues on what the needs analysis might look like—whether the existing footprint out there by way of primary schools and high schools is sufficient or not. Let me come back.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you aware, Mr Dizdar, if there's any—I appreciate you did take this on notice before—ongoing meetings between the head officials of various agencies around Planning, Housing, Education to deal with some of those challenges of higher density population, again going back to what my colleague said. I appreciate you indicated it may have been Mr Manning but, as secretary, are there meetings of the various secretaries to discuss these matters? The Government says it's a big priority and I'm trying to understand if that's filtering through to a public service level in terms of that collaboration?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a secretaries board, which has got the heads of all the agencies. Some of these things come up to the Secretaries Board. I'm on the infrastructure committee across whole of government. I do rely on my School Infrastructure arm to go into the detail, but I'm across these things. I don't want to get it wrong for the Committee. That's why I want to take it on notice and come back with the details.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Student and Parent Experience Directorate—is that still operational within the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why was the decision made to discontinue that work?

MURAT DIZDAR: I looked at the re-prioritisation of different areas in the organisation to align it with the plan for public education, and I took features out of the school parent experience directorate and placed them elsewhere in the organisation and removed other parts of that division.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that my actual bell that just rang?

The CHAIR: You can keep going.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, those staff have been moved to other areas in the department? Is that what you said?

MURAT DIZDAR: Some of the roles and features of that particular division I lifted and shifted into other parts of the organisation. Other people that were displaced in that process, we looked at opportunities within the organisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And what about the work that was being undertaken by that directorate? Where has that gone?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's where I moved it into different parts of the organisation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For instance, there was some work I know that was happening about advice out to parents—and this is going back to my earlier questioning around how you communicate, how you provide updates to parents, but also to receive that feedback back to the classroom teacher. I know that there were trials of text messages and different ways to work through how parents wanted to be informed about what was happening at their children's school. Is that sort of work continuing now but in other parts of the department or has that ceased?

MURAT DIZDAR: Some of that function that you're describing I moved into the comms and engagement directorate.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are they doing in terms of that parent engagement piece then in the comms team?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can come back with the detail of the workstreams and work areas that they are working on, but I moved some of that function into comms and engagement to work closely with our P&C Federation, but broader parents. There was work that was duplicative here. There was work already occurring in comms and already work in student parent exchange and I wanted to align that work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The draft annual report talks a lot about communication and that being really important. Do you think it sends the wrong message that there is now no longer a dedicated unit within the department to focus on students and parents and their feedback and to have that work being a specific responsibility of one area of the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it sends a wrong message if I allow for duplicative function and overlapping function in the organisation. If I don't align functions to get right behind the plan for public education, to make sure that I efficiently deliver on the budget that I'm given, I think that sends the wrong message. I was determined to make sure that I had those resources aligned.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you have to make those changes because of budget restraints?

MURAT DIZDAR: I made reprioritisation decisions off the back of the plan for public education. I would have done those regardless.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The work that was done, particularly around—I'm going to say I think it was a memorandum of understanding between parents and teachers, because, as you would well appreciate, I think it's very important that parents are engaged in their children's education. However, there are times when perhaps parents feel that that availability of teachers should be 24/7, which is not reasonable. There was some work or discussion around how we can better have that messaging out to parents around how you should be in touch with your child's teacher, what you need to be doing. Is there any update on that that you can provide the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: We are proud of this because we hadn't had this before: We did sign a 10-year partnership agreement with the P&C Federation. I just recently met with Yvonne Hilsz, the President of the P&C Federation. Because this scenario we want to get tighter and better, both to meet the needs of our parents by way of information and access to the school and inquiry, but also to strike a balance about what's reasonable and what time frames can look like. One of the things that we were at work to look at was the charter—I think you are referring to the charter that was there—for parents that we provided to public schools. We are at work with the P&C Federation to revamp that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a time frame for that work?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back. It's a pretty important piece.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was also some work—sorry, this is changing a little bit—but the Chief Behaviour Advisor, I think at the last estimates we were given information that there was a remit or a focus on cyberbullying and online.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have there been any other—and I am happy, Mr Martin, I think the Chief Behaviour Advisor is under NESAs in a sense, working across sectors—areas that the Chief Behaviour Advisor has been asked to support the school sectors on since we last met?

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you for the question. The Chief Behaviour Advisor works through NESAs but largely works to the schools advisory council and the Minister, the Deputy Premier. You are right about the cyberbullying as being a focus and involved in a roundtable process—I think that goes on from last year and the year before's round table. I think also the independent and Catholic sectors have both used Professor Cross in behaviour issues in their sectors, but I'm not specific and I can put on notice the work she's done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you also be able to provide on notice specifically the work around cyberbullying, if there's any indication? And, Secretary, if you have any information, feel free.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

PAUL MARTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I guess I want to know what advice and feedback around cyberbullying has been provided to the school sectors by Professor Cross.

PAUL MARTIN: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: That would be great, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. Can you also provide—and, again, happy for this to be on notice—how many vacancies we have in terms of school counselling positions in schools at the moment, or if anyone has got that data?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. And then in terms of any sort of scholarship programs for additional school counsellor positions, if there are any currently open for application or underway?

MURAT DIZDAR: When we come back to you around the support units and the scholarships and programs, let's add counsellors, if that's okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: We will take a short 15-minute break for afternoon tea and we will return at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will recommence questioning with Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Martin, I will pick up the issue of curriculum and consultation, if I could, in terms of consultation across the school sector for government, independent and Catholic schools. I'm wondering about the priority that NESAs would give to curriculum consultation across the school sector.

PAUL MARTIN: There's a very extensive consultation process that we undergo. I'm happy to provide on notice the numbers of meetings we've had and with whom and the various consultations we've had formally across the sectors. It is extensive. We also have a curriculum committee that provides recommendations for approval of syllabuses and/or drafts of syllabuses, and that has representatives from all three sectors. The NESAs board itself has the three sector heads: Murat, Dallas McInerney and Margery Evans, who is there now. I was thinking of Geoff Newcombe because Geoff was on the board for many years. AHISA and the Catholic Secondary Principals are also cross-sector representatives on our NESAs board and are represented in various NESAs committees. I would suggest that we go through one of the most extensive consultation processes of any curriculum authority across the country. I'm happy to provide some more details.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Following that, in terms of accommodating some of the faith-based Catholic schools across the sector in the curriculum discussion relating to subjects that fall under PDHPE, I'm wondering how that is managed. I've had parents reporting some concerns and views that they hold in the faith-based schools and the curriculum relevant to the PDHPE on issues with things like Planned Parenthood and some of those views that they may have. I'm just wondering if there might be any insight as to how that's working.

PAUL MARTIN: Not only are those groups individually contacted and consulted by our formal curriculum organisation, I also have specific and separate meetings with Christian Schools Australia and with

CORRECTED

people from Islamic schools and from the Catholic sector, both parents and principals, and they engage in the issues. What we try to do with the syllabus is balance a student's entitlement to have access to absolutely important and necessary knowledge, which includes areas that may be controversial or at least sensitive, like puberty and sex and sexuality and those issues, as has been the case for a generation.

We also provide opportunities for the context and the faith of the school to be accommodated by the manner in which those lessons occur. It is, as you've indicated with your question, a delicate balance, but we feel that we've done that. Again, I would put on record the rights of the student, within reason, to be educated around some of these matters that Australia or New South Wales as a jurisdiction feels are important for young people to know, while at the same time not overstepping the mark in relation to faith or ethnicity or culture. We have a little bit of correspondence around it, but not so much as to give me an indication that we've got it wrong. Again, the PDHPE syllabuses will be out very shortly. The 7 to 10 one has more of the detail in it that is appropriate for older students. But, again, as I said, we allow school-based context, parental information, permission notes and all of those sorts of things to occur within the context of the syllabus.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Martin, just in terms of Planned Parenthood, in terms of the consultation, do they have a seat at the table alongside the school heads? Or how does that work? Is that an appointment?

PAUL MARTIN: Other advocacy groups, and there's a range of them, can put in submissions to our syllabuses, but the people we consult most directly is the education community—so parents, teachers, school systems and sectors. They're the ones who have the most consultation. As you would imagine, there are a variety of groups out there that may have a view about our syllabuses, and they are quite free to put in submissions. As far as—I don't know, I have no knowledge of Planned Parenthood or their access to our syllabuses. They're not privileged in terms of the content that they would espouse.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: They're not in an appointed position or an official position, in terms of the curriculum discussion?

PAUL MARTIN: Not as far as I know, but I'll check that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That would be helpful, thank you. If I could follow up, this was raised earlier today, in terms of Milperra. I was wondering whether there might have been anything further in terms of plans, announcements or what the status might be in terms of a Milperra educational precinct. It might involve a high school. This was the site of the Western Sydney University campus at Milperra. I'm wondering, now that all your colleagues are with us today, if there might be something further that you could provide the Committee with.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back with the detail, Ms Merton, around where we're at with that and what it looks like for surrounding schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: All right. Another question, and I'm happy to table these. This information came to me from a parent. I will let you see the picture first.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay, thanks.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I was contacted by a parent asking questions in terms of the placement of the acknowledgment of country sign at the front of the school. Does the department have knowledge or awareness of signs such as these on display in the playgrounds of New South Wales government schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: I support the school's decision. It's a local decision and a contextual decision that they have made. Let me say as Secretary I support the acknowledgment of country at our schools in appropriate forums and structures. I do not dictate to schools where they may want to put that acknowledgment of country. If this photo is accurate, the school I'm looking at has chosen to put that on their noticeboard. I back them in.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of parents asking about the cost of this, is this a cost that we would assume would be somewhat determined by the P&C? Is it within the Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to guess here. In a new school build, Gulyangarri Public School, that I've been to twice since its opening, the noticeboard is part of the school build and installation. That's picked up as part of that project. When I was a principal in the system, I replaced the lettering board that had to have the GA putting the lettering with the electronic board. I did that through school funds, because I considered it important to communicate with the community. There will be a combination of departmental-delivered notice boards in new builds and upgrades. In this case, I'm imagining it was a school decision. Let me put on record that I back in our schools to respect our First Nations people and to deliver acknowledgment of country in appropriate structures and forums. This picture says that this school has chosen to do that on their notice board. I back them in.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the display, is guidance provided to the school on this or is it at the discretion of the school?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're talking about professionals who are leading and managing the school, one of the most educated workforces. The only guidance we would provide is that they can't put up things that are defamatory or go into contentious, controversial matters or take a particular stand. I don't consider the acknowledgment of country to be in that category.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have some questions related to before and after school care grants—which I think is Mr Barraket. The transport grant—there was a round two for 2022-23. I received some feedback from an organisation that applied for funding. They were told in May last year that it was at the assessment round and that they expect that that would be sent to the Minister to provide final authorisation within the coming weeks. It was followed up again by this organisation in July last year, and they were told that the assessment panel recommendations are currently with the Minister. They now are still waiting, and we're now into February of 2024. So it has been some months. What's the status of that program?

MARK BARRAKET: I will have to take that on notice because I think that predates my time in ECO, but I am happy to follow up and come back to you on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm sure they're happy if I mention them. This was the New School of the Arts Neighbourhood Centre in South Grafton. They put in an application and were told, as I said, various times throughout last year that it was all being assessed, yet they're still waiting and nothing has been determined either way. In May last year, they said that they would be told in coming weeks and were just not receiving any information. So it has been nearly 12 months.

MARK BARRAKET: I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with the grant application or the outcome of that. I will take that on notice for you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that on notice, that would be wonderful. Thank you, Mr Barraket. I want to turn now to the issues at Willyama High School out in Broken Hill, in terms of the mould. Is there any updated information that anyone can provide in terms of the work that's happening out there, whether the path forward has been determined in terms of whether it can be cleaned, or whether you need to have it knocked down and rebuild a new school? What's the status of that particular issue?

MURAT DIZDAR: I was out there last Wednesday, Ms Mitchell. I went and visited both the closed site and spoke with our folk out there and also the sites where our education is continuing. Can I just, on record, commend the four principals of the schools for their extraordinary leadership. It's not easy to start a school year with a significant interruption of this kind, where we sent year 7 and 8 at one stage to one location, and 9 and 10 to another, and 11 and 12. I was at Broken Hill High, and year 11 and 12 are continuing there, which is fantastic to see. Year 9 and 10 are at Morgan Street, and year 7 and 8 are at Broken Hill North Public. I want to commend them. I want to thank our people that put in arrangements to support them, including the delivery of laptops, the delivery of demountables to add to the infrastructure provision. That was a hot topic when I was out there. Staff were asking me. I assured them that we would not compromise their safety. We would not be returning to site until we get the full outcome from the hygienists. We don't have that as yet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's fine. Can I just go back a step? From media reports and through some questions asked in the upper House of the Minister representing the Deputy Premier, my understanding is that that was first detected over the Christmas holidays. Is that correct? Can you provide a time line of when the mould was first discovered and when you became aware of the extent of the problem?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yeah, I'm happy to come back on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was it January? You were just out there. Was it over the school holidays?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to get the dates wrong, but the advice I had in the discussions I had with our people and the schools was that this was detected over the recent summer break.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate, Secretary, you've indicated that that work of an independent hygienist is still ongoing. Is there a time frame as to when you would anticipate that work to be concluded and next steps can be decided upon?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, the first time frame we communicated when I was out there was that we want to have a pop-up school in place because we've gone on to three different sites and split up the school. We've got staff moving between sites and families, so we're working hard to get a pop-up school on the Broken Hill High School site for day one, term 2. We're running really hard to have the school community back together.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many demountables do you need to get out there to do that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get you the number, but I'm going to say it was something like 39 teaching and admin spaces. But I don't want to get the number wrong. It was just last Wednesday when I was out there that they were giving me that detail. I was able to observe things that already happened and are in play there. The first thing that we're really running hard on is to bring the school community back together and then get the expert advice on the Willyama site. Is it possible to remediate and rectify? Or will it require a complete knockdown rebuild? We're not at that stage and I committed to those school communities—I think I did this on ABC Broken Hill on the day as well in an interview—that we'll give them that information as soon as we have it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate it is no small logistical effort to move that many out to the Far West as well, but clearly that would indicate to the community that you anticipate the solution will take some time if you're moving onto a temporary site. And I respect the educational reasons why you're doing that but, clearly, going back to Willyama any time soon is probably unlikely—is what I'm picking up from what you're saying.

MURAT DIZDAR: I was up-front with the staff and community there. We wouldn't put a pop-up school together lightly because, if the decision is that I can remediate, if that's the expert advice, that will still take me some time, given the extent of what I've been advised on by way of this mould.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What have you been advised on so far of the extent of how many classroom areas? Is it fairly well spread throughout the school?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, that one is an enclosed school. It's quite—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I've been there.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's quite a unique build. The Committee may not know. It's not a build that we would necessarily repeat. It was of an era, of its time. The hygienist advised me and our asset management folk that they're testing every single space in that school, so that's why it's so comprehensive and takes some time. I think there can only be one or two results. Either we can go in and remediate, which will take considerable time, or it may well be a knockdown rebuild, which would take a length of time as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In any preliminary advice that you've been given as to the source of the mould—again, I had heard media reports around summer conditions. Broken Hill always gets very hot in summer and that particular school, as you've said, Secretary, is interesting in its architecture. What I'm keen to know is why now? Do they have any reason as to why they think that this particular issue has arisen over this summer? Is there any inkling as to the source of why this has happened?

MURAT DIZDAR: I just want to be careful, Ms Mitchell, to not really dive out of my area of expertise, but I can tell you what I was advised when I was out there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, I don't have any expertise in this space. I'll rely on the experts, but I was told that there was quite a collision of unique circumstances there—very, very hot temperatures combined with extreme humidity—that led to the situation that we're in. As someone who has visited the area a number of times in my career, I asked whether we'd had similar conditions and it was described to me as a pretty unique set of circumstances, but that's also part of the investigative work that the experts are undertaking there. I don't want to deviate from their expertise.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it your intention, once that advice is given, to make that public to make sure that the community knows what has been discovered and why and what you'll be doing, whether it is remediation or rebuild?

MURAT DIZDAR: Definitely. I did pick up that the school communities were very appreciative and respectful of the ongoing communication. There have been several that have been sent—all from the notification period to then the operational arrangements at those schools. Having met with the local member as well, he shared that view that I picked up that there's been good communication. It's certainly incumbent on us, when we've got the detail and the information about what we're facing there, to communicate with those school communities. That would be our intent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you do need to remediate extensively or, indeed, knockdown-rebuild, it is still the intention to keep Willyama as a separate high school?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, I don't want to jump into what might be the outcomes, but I did pick up when I was there quite a strong consensus that I replayed back to the Deputy Premier and her office from my trip that

CORRECTED

they were quite keen to have two high school provisions still there. Students said that to me and a whole range of staff in those settings said that to me, so I replayed that sentiment back.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of funding provisions, either way remediation or a rebuild is going to require additional funding. Do you have the resources available to be able to do that in terms of extra budget allocations from Treasury? Have those discussions taken place?

MURAT DIZDAR: We haven't got to that level. We certainly will need, with what's required and what we can fund. I'm not sure if it will be able to be met within our budget or not but, regardless, it will be work that we need to undertake. Again, I don't want to be pre-emptive and jump here. I'm really running hard to make sure our operations this term are as smooth as they can be, then have that day one, term 2 school come back together. I know how important that is and how valued that would be. That's quite a bit of work there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that.

MURAT DIZDAR: So I want to make sure we get that right and then, when we get the expert advice, act on that expert advice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask, in relation to the Davidson High School hall, I think the P&C recently launched a petition wanting to see an upgrade to that hall. Particularly, the female toilets, I think, are in a bit of a state of disarray. Is there any planned work to upgrade that hall or put a new hall in or improve the toilet facilities at Davidson High School?

MURAT DIZDAR: I certainly don't have the detail. I'm not sure if Mr Towers does. Otherwise, we can come back to the Committee.

PAUL TOWERS: We don't have any provisions for that at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was also some media. I'll put a plug in. I've already mentioned Taylor Swift. Now I'm going to mention INXS, because I believe that they were also past students of Davidson High School. I have a very eclectic music taste, Chair, and I'm very proud to talk about it as much as I can. There was certainly, I think, a bit of a push too from the local community that maybe, if the Government was looking to build a new hall, you could name it after INXS and that would be a very worthy tribute to a legendary Australian rock band. I'll leave that one for you to consider.

PAUL TOWERS: Actually, it's only half of INXS. The other half is The Forest.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Half is still worth a hall, in my view.

PAUL TOWERS: I thought they were from WA.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's something the Government can consider. If you can put that on the radar, that would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: I just want to add that Human Nature, as well, are also fantastic ex-students of ours.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Hurlstone Ag.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're Hurlstone? We could do this for a long time.

MURAT DIZDAR: Public education blood lines run far and wide and deep in all walks.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Absolutely. Very exciting. You've thrown me now. I'm going to ask a couple more infrastructure questions, probably through you, Mr Towers, or the secretary, depending on who is best placed.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The site of the proposed new high school for Jordan Springs—I believe that was announced recently. Is that land now owned by the department and ready to start the process for that planning to occur?

PAUL TOWERS: I will take that on notice because I'm not confident I can recall whether that piece of land has been acquired yet. So I'll take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But a site has been selected.

PAUL TOWERS: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the Deputy Premier was out there last week.

PAUL TOWERS: Yes.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct. But in terms of ownership, let's come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you. Again, I'm happy for you to take this on notice if you need to, but if you could provide some indication as to the scope of works for that site. My understanding is that there's a Government commitment that it will be open day one, term 1 2027. There has been talk, I think, of 1,000 students, but there was also some media commentary around that school being delivered over stages. So could you provide—and, again, happy for it to be on notice—what the intended capacity is for that school, both on its day one, term 1 opening date and then into the future as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also provide on notice what the current enrolment is for Jordan Springs Public School?

MURAT DIZDAR: Primary school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

PAUL TOWERS: I can provide some information. There is a contract negotiation stage for the land.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To secure the land?

PAUL TOWERS: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Medowie, the new high school there. At the last hearing I think Mr Manning indicated that School Infrastructure was close to securing a site. Has that been finalised?

PAUL TOWERS: No. We're still in the process of looking at options and identifying sites and selecting one.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My recollection is maybe it had gone out for expressions of interest but that it was close. I appreciate it has been the end of the year and the start of the new year. Do you have an estimated date as to when you would anticipate a site to be identified for the high school at Medowie?

PAUL TOWERS: Not at the moment. The process will inevitably lead to some level of negotiation and there's no certainty around the time frame for that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you still working though on a day one, term 1 2027 opening for that school?

PAUL TOWERS: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But not sure when the land will be secured at this point in time?

PAUL TOWERS: That's correct.

MURAT DIZDAR: Is this Medowie?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Do you want me to give you a bit more?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you've got it, that would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: The project is underway. We are working towards delivering the school 2027. There's a site selection process that's begun to identify the optimum location for the high school and work is underway on the business case.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because I think that was the same information that we were given in October.

MURAT DIZDAR: Is it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And I was curious as to whether there had been an update, now that we are at the end of February, about site selection?

MURAT DIZDAR: My notes indicate that we are still in the process of that site selection.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What is the status of the works you are undergoing at the moment at both Irrawang and Hunter River High School in the same area? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm just seeing if we've got that, Ms Mitchell. We might have to take that one on notice.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's okay?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's not a problem at all. What number of students will be accessing the Small Group Tuition program this year? Do you have any data on how that program will be rolled out this year and how many students you anticipate will benefit from it? I am happy for whoever's patch that's in to answer.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham has a lot of detail on this one.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd love to hear as much detail as Mr "Birthday Boy" Graham would like to give me.

MURAT DIZDAR: We can throw to him.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Certainly. The tuition program, 2024 there will be approximately \$50 million allocated for the program. I can get you the precise figure on that. It's allocated for students who are below the expected level in NAPLAN. It will be provided to all schools, including SSPs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the CESE evaluation of previous rounds of funding—I think some evidence came from that around concern about whether or not there was value in it—I am happy to put on the record that I think small group tuition is important and I think it makes a difference. Anecdotally, I certainly heard a lot of that when I was the Minister. Are there going to be any changes to the implementation or anything from that CESE evaluation that you will put in place for the next rollout of funding?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The CESE evaluation did show that the students from the program moved forward in their learning. That was a pleasing result, given the circumstances. Some of the things that were in the evaluation included the model of the program. Schools obviously were—there were different models, it was a very difficult time for them and they were trying to implement what they could. What we are looking at is a model that provides them with a 10-week program of tuition. That was the overall aim in the first program but not delivered as tightly.

The other thing we are doing is delivering them a really consolidated set of assessments that they can use within that. We are really focusing on our check-in assessments, phonemic awareness assessments and so on, so they actually have the tools in the classroom to be able to measure the improvement of the kids as well. We are also providing that range of staffing that the previous program also had so that they can actually have those classes managed. One of the issues they found previously was that often the teacher doing the program was the one called off to do casual. The other strategies we have in place to consolidate and solidify schools will help with that too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's using SLSOs and that sort of program as well?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned check-in assessments and I'm keen to know about measuring outcomes for the students who are in it. From my reading of the CESE report there was some indication that they couldn't see a tangible difference between those students who did it and those who remained in the classroom in some year groups. However, I'm curious about the methodology because having been the Minister at the time I know it was schools that identified children who needed to be in the tuition programs that were doing it. What methodology will be used going forward to capture that lift for students who are part of that small group tuition? Is it check-in assessments and some of the phonics checks? What is the process?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The supports targeted those who are listed as needing additional support under NAPLAN. The first thing is that we are targeting that group with the funding so they have the service. Ultimately, those children will be retested on NAPLAN. That's every second year. But in the interim we have the check-ins that are available for every year between years 3 and 9, and they're done in term 3. We have a suite of online assessments that schools can use at their own time so they can measure the progress. There is a balance, which was one of the issues in the evaluation. If we tested every kid every day and we did that then maybe we'd have better evaluative information but the administrative burden for schools would be enormous. We are trying to balance our ability to know that it's working with the professional judgement of teachers and so on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think particularly the CESE data is reflecting that both the teachers and students talked about better confidence in their learning. I would imagine that over time you would expect to see that then reflected in outcomes.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, it was strongly supported. Even the students reported their stronger engagement with learning, which is hard to achieve.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Graham, I think you said about \$50 million—

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MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, \$53.5 million in 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was a media report recently—and it might have been an error—where I think the Deputy Premier talked about \$280-odd million being allocated. Is there some Federal money that's coming in addition to that \$50 million? I think Minister Clare has also spoken about it.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That might have been a four-year figure, which was part of the election commitment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's my understanding that the Federal Government recently announced some support for small group tuition. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's been one of the evidence bases that they have been looking at and it's in line with the negotiations of the new funding agreement wanting to back in the evidence base.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that will be part of the school reform agreement going forward?

MURAT DIZDAR: It could be, with what's struck as a deal.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Depending on where it lands.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But there's not actually any money flowing at the moment from the Commonwealth to the State to support small group tuition?

MURAT DIZDAR: Not at the moment. Mr Graham described that well. There is \$278.4 million over four years and that first-year figure—this is only public schools—is \$53.5 million.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any going to non-government schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: This is public schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Previous rounds of the funding that was the COVID-intensive program also went to some of the non-government school sectors as well, but that's not continuing.

MARTIN GRAHAM: This is public schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was an innovative teacher training fund which was an election commitment of \$20 million. I have not seen any specific announcements about where that money is going and if any has gone out the door. Is there any update that can be provided in relation to that?

SHAUN RUMING: Thank you for the question. We are actually just scoping those works out at the moment. You're quite right when you say it's a \$20 million election commitment. Let me just grab my notes.

MURAT DIZDAR: While Mr Ruming is doing that, it is going to some of the things that I spoke about by way of Teachers Re-engage and by way of Grow Your Own and its expansion. While we're still developing the full suite of what we might attack with that money to break the back of teacher shortages, there are some things already in play.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know that there is, I think, a third stage of Grow Your Own but that was already in place previously.

MURAT DIZDAR: But the expansion of that.

SHAUN RUMING: We're starting to scope out an early career academy for teachers, which would be considered a single entry point around a centre of excellence, looking at expansion of professional experience, learning models, pre-service teacher enhancements—preparation before they start—enhanced induction support for beginning teachers, the development of a teaching career pathway that includes innovative mentoring initiatives, and early career teachers. But, as I said, we are just starting to scope out those works. We will probably be in a better place to update the Committee in a few months, but that team is starting to model that now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you say a centre of excellence? Could you repeat that part?

SHAUN RUMING: We're talking about an early career academy, which would be a one-stop shop for that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that like bricks and mortar—

MURAT DIZDAR: No.

SHAUN RUMING: No.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —or is that more like a statewide provision of something? Okay.

MURAT DIZDAR: One of the things we need to get better and stronger at, and it's a national issue as well, is how do you support beginning teachers so that they remain in the profession.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, of course.

MURAT DIZDAR: So we want to solidify our support structures.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You just mentioned, Mr Dizdar, the Grow Your Own program. I'm sorry, you might have done this before in response to the Chair's questions. But do you have any numbers in terms of how many participants there currently are in that program?

SHAUN RUMING: Certainly. Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: If Mr Ruming has got the details?

SHAUN RUMING: As of 2023, we had 179 in the Grow Your Own program and in 2024, 223. So a cumulative total of 402.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there an intention to have further rounds of that throughout this year as well to continue to grow that?

SHAUN RUMING: It's certainly very popular and has exceeded our expectations in terms of what principals are saying to us. So the idea is to grow that program over the coming years. But I think, for 2024, that 223 we'll be working with this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The original program had SLSOs who were studying their teaching degree.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you just clarify? The second cohort—does that open it up more broadly to the community or is that also another round of people who are already employed as learning support officers?

SHAUN RUMING: Learning support officers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been an opportunity for people who aren't currently working at a school as a learning support officer and who want that support to come in through Grow Your Own? Is that on the table at all?

MURAT DIZDAR: These are the things we want to consider with that innovative teacher fund. Do we go there? Do we broaden out? At the moment the thirst and appetite amongst that workforce is really strong, so we want to meet it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not surprised. I always knew that that would be popular, because if people are already working at a school and you give them a chance to upskill, I think that's a very valuable thing to do.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're really proud of this one because, having met SLSOs who did it of their own accord without our help in the past, I think this is a strong fillip. Also, we're not ruling in or out but it's certainly worth examining how to broaden that out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. I think one of the challenges—and, indeed, one of the original intentions—was, as you said, Secretary, to have those already working in schools. But if you've got people already living in some of these communities—

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —in hard-to-staff schools that you can retrain or skill up to become a teacher, then you're ahead of the battle of trying to get them to move somewhere if they already live there. I hope that that's is in your deliberations.

MURAT DIZDAR: I would just say, Ms Mitchell, in line with the earlier questions around incentives et cetera, incentives are designed to try and get people there. I think you raise a very pertinent point. How can you support people in situ who are part of community, who always want to be part of community? I think they're things that we're considering.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. That's great. Did you want to add something?

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SHAUN RUMING: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The mid-career initiative—can you tell me how many participants are currently in that program?

SHAUN RUMING: Seventy-eight are currently in that program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any more coming in throughout this year? Are there any further rounds of that underway?

SHAUN RUMING: I think the 78 is the figure that we've got for this year. We're looking to take more in 2025 and '26.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there plans to expand? But, yes.

SHAUN RUMING: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So for 2025 and 2026 you'd look to do more—fantastic. Jumping back to a different area now, there was some work that was done prior to the election from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute—the question was taken on notice—particularly around developing social and wellbeing initiatives. That work was completed in March 2023. That was the response I think I got back on notice. Are there any updates on the findings, the outcomes, the recommendation that came from that and whether any of those were implemented in schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham might have more detail.

MARTIN GRAHAM: This was the quality assurance process by the Murdoch institute?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, they gave us the evidence threshold against which to assess programs, and those programs have been made available to schools. I can get back to you with some data on which programs have been used, but that checklist is now being used by schools and those QA programs are out there for them to use.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that they were also doing some work that was very school specific, based not just about quality assurance but around how they could be tracking and measuring wellbeing. Are you aware of any work in that space that they did?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'll have to get back to you with detail of any of that work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The School Breakfast 4 Health program—again, last time I asked on notice for a list of schools that were taking part in that and how many new schools had been added, and I didn't get an answer. Are there any updates in terms of how many additional schools have been added to the School Breakfast 4 Health program?

MURAT DIZDAR: As a result of election commitments? Let's come back on notice. We'd definitely be able to follow up on the election commitment side. And you'll know, Ms Mitchell, there is a range of things here where schools initiate their own breakfast programs. We don't keep data on that front, but by way of election commitments we can have a look at that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because the Government said that they were going to increase the number of schools that were receiving that program but, when I asked for how many additional or where they were, I didn't get a response. I just wanted to make sure that it is expanding and how many and where they are. If you could provide that on notice, that would be appreciated.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, let me come back.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm going to go back to the childcare fund. The budget talked about—I think it was \$3 million for research to investigate delivery models and strengthen the workforce pipeline.

MARK BARRAKET: I'm not sure if that was a fund initiative. That might've been an election commitment under workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Regardless, in terms of looking at that system stewardship piece and what is happening around workforce, is there any update that you can provide on that, Mr Barraket?

MARK BARRAKET: We're still scoping out the election commitment, which is the \$3 million workforce commitment. In terms of workforce with the fund, there are a couple of test and trial initiatives that relate specifically to workforce. The business capability development program, which looks at how we build

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business capability within the workforce—we hope that that will reduce workload because people are more proficient in managing their centres. We expect that that program will go live in May of this year and will be trialled in three parts of the State, which are still to be determined. There's also work that we're currently scoping through the fund of the trial of free or low-cost ECEC for children of teachers and educators. That is still being scoped. There will be a range of other initiatives that will be embedded into the strategic investment plan, which is due to the Deputy Premier and Treasurer by the end of this financial year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any indication in terms of that workforce issue—I think you might have mentioned it in a response to the Chair. I think you said before that you may be looking at other workforce—I don't know if it was retention or support. What is happening in terms of that space for early childhood staff, specifically?

MARK BARRAKET: I did provide a list of some of the initiatives that we have in place at the moment and we are looking to expand upon that. We do have the IPART report that talks about some recommendations to do with workforce and we are in the process of assessing that and then determining what will be the next steps in response to that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The fund this year, I think, had \$100 million allocated as per the legislation that was passed. Do you have detail, Mr Barraket, on how much of that has been expended thus far?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll have to take on notice how much has been expended so far, but the payments for those test and trial initiatives won't all be expended in this financial year because some of them will carry forward over future years. We'll take on notice how much has been expended this financial year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sector support funding—I did ask the Deputy Premier about this. Have there been changes—I've been advised that a number of organisations who used to receive sector support funding are now no longer. Can you advise any information about that?

MARK BARRAKET: I know the Deputy Premier took on notice those two examples you provided this morning. But my understanding is that they were subject to procurement agreements. When the department has the procurement piece in place or a contract in place, that expires and we then go back out and tender again. All of our guidelines adhere to the department's procurement policy around work that we put out there for agencies to support us with.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know whether that has gone out to further procurement—and I appreciate what you are saying, if you have a sector support for a period of time and then you need to refresh and make sure you are getting value for money and what not—but is that happening for early childhood education sector support currently?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll need to take on notice to see what we do have in place currently.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And whether or not any other organisations received that sector support funding. I did mention CCSA and CLO.

MARK BARRAKET: I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am going back to School Infrastructure now. The community group renewal project, there was Bathurst Secondary School Community Group, Dubbo Primary School and Leeton Primary School. Are there any further updates for the Committee in relation to the status of those projects and the consultation with the school communities?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's get those for you. There were several sites there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, Leeton, Dubbo and Bathurst. There were three that were regional. There was a \$750,000 allocation in the budget but I want an update in terms of that work.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, let's grab that for you, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: While you're doing that on notice, secretary, also, particularly for Dubbo public, can you provide any information in relation to their capacity? My understanding is that there was previously conversations about expanding them back onto a site where the conservatorium of music was, which adjoins that school site. I think there has now been some information to parents that that won't be happening. I understand that that school is very crowded and I would like some further clarity around the plans for that site, if someone's got it now or on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure. We can give you their enrolment cap and what their assumed population is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Particularly in terms of expansion.

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MURAT DIZDAR: And what the plan is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that they were going onto that site or expanding back, which is department owned, but now they have been told that that's not happening.

MURAT DIZDAR: Do you have any further details?

PAUL TOWERS: I know it's ongoing. I think the secretary is correct. To give you the answer you need, Ms Mitchell, we will need to come back to you with the information, check it first before we give anything else.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Any information that you can provide would be fantastic. I want to go now to the issue of vaping in schools. The vaping round table that was held in November 2023, which area of the department is leading that work?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was in Mr Graham's area at the time, hosted by us in conjunction with Health.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you tell me how many school students were at that round table?

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to get that detail. I was in attendance. I will say there was at least two.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how many adults were there?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to give you the list, because it ranged across—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. If you can give us the list on notice, that would be fantastic.

MURAT DIZDAR: It ranged across the experts that we wanted to bring together through Health, through academics, through education.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am keen to know the proportion of student voice versus other experts.

MURAT DIZDAR: Outside of that forum we've also met with the DOVES—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Excellent. I love the DOVES. I'm pleased they get a shout out. They do good work.

MURAT DIZDAR: —to get their views on this hot topic as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: At that round table, were there any framework actions that were committed to in terms of implementation going forward?

MURAT DIZDAR: My recollection, it was a very productive forum. There was the academics and experts who presented the evidence base on why this is a societal issue, what the health impacts are, what the prevalence is. The health Minister and the education Minister, who is the Deputy Premier, chaired those proceedings. Then there were discussions around the mixed tables across—like I indicated—across those groups, including principals from across the sectors, including the principal associations, around what are suggested solutions that we need to tackle, what are things that we need to consider. Mr Graham might have more of the detail. That was my recollection of how it ran.

MARTIN GRAHAM: And the question of it. The actions will be published on the department's website shortly. There will be a list of the actions that are taking place, as the secretary indicated.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: "Shortly" meaning weeks, months?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Shortly, yes. There's already information out there. We've got a toolkit for principals. It's the work with Health. A lot of the stuff's already public.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I'm trying to get to is that there was obviously already work done some time ago with Health about the "Do you know what you're vaping?" and there have been communications out to students prior to this round table. What else beyond toolkits to principals and those conversations with Health, which have been ongoing for a period of, I'd say, years now? What's new from the round table? What should parents, students and schools be looking out for?

MURAT DIZDAR: The school folk that were in the room were very appreciative of the material that has been given to them so that they can promote the right advice in their school community. What I do recall is frustration around regulation—and the proliferation of these vape shops, and is there anything that can be done to help in that space? The frustration around the marketing element that would appear that these things look like lollipops or fruit for kids—that was tabled. Certainly, vape detectors were discussed, where principals were saying that they don't see that as a solution; it just moves the problem. It's around the education, the concerted societal

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effort around it, the regulation aspect and the proliferation aspect of it. They were the things that were being discussed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that, but I would also put to you that that's not new—those concerns about how easily accessible they are, looking like highlighters so it's hard for parents to detect the fruity smells and all the things that make it appealing to young people. I want to understand—other than information, in terms of a toolkit and the work with Health, which is ongoing—whether there was anything else of substance out of that particular round table that will be new or different that the department will be undertaking, based on that feedback?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like Mr Graham said, we'll make sure we put those actions out. We'll continue to work closely both with the Commonwealth at a national level and NSW Health here. We don't solely own this issue; it's a whole-of-society issue. I do recall the participants all really valuing the opportunity to come together and to discuss the challenges on the ground. They went to areas that I just tabled.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there an intention to bring that group back together again or was that round table a one-off?

MURAT DIZDAR: We didn't run it as a structure that would be ongoing but, if we needed, it's certainly something that could be entertained, yes. It has given us a body of experts to tap into.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I look forward to seeing that detail shortly when it is provided. The Government also committed—and I'm happy to be advised otherwise, if it's not within Education's remit. In relation to screen-related addictions, I think there was a \$2½ million fund that was announced through the election period to help with screen-related addictions in young people. Who does that fund sit under?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's an election commitment that's owned by us. Ms Read has the detail.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Ms Read, if you could give me some detail as to where that's up to, that would be great.

CHLOE READ: Yes. As you mentioned, a fund for screen addiction research applications were opened on 27 November 2023. They closed at the end of January, and so we're working through looking at those applications. They'll be awarded through March and April, and then projects will commence, we think, from May.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What was the criteria for those applying for funding? What sorts of projects could they put forward?

CHLOE READ: There are a number of criteria. There are five different statements. One is research that explores the evolving links between screen use, wellbeing and learning; statement two, research that investigates the impacts of screen use on teaching and the influence of teaching on screen use; number three, how schools and school communities might use initiatives and interventions to support appropriate screen use and reduce problematic screen use; number four, research that can help us define, measure and improve screen use and screen time in education contexts; and, number five, other research that strengthens trust and respect for the teaching profession and school support staff that advances equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences for students. Obviously, we're working through processing the applications, but we've got applications that aligned across all of those areas and some saying that they aligned across multiple of those areas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just to clarify, you said that you would anticipate those being awarded and announced in about May?

CHLOE READ: I think we want them to start work in May, and notifying and awarding through March and April.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I apologise that I'm jumping all over, but I have been given much more time than I thought I was going to get so I'm taking advantage.

The CHAIR: You're doing very well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can keep going. The Brighter Beginnings, the developmental checks—Mr Barraket, can you provide an update? I think the announcement or the advice to the Committee last time was that it was going to start to roll out across six local health districts. Can you provide any information about the status of that?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes. The health and development checks in the early childhood education that looks at delivering health and development checks for four-year-olds in preschools. You're correct, we did commence with six local health districts. As of December 2023, the program is available in 12 out of the 15 local health districts. We anticipate that the remaining three will come online this year.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know which three are yet to come online?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll need to confirm that for you and take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: The 12 are?

MARK BARRAKET: I've got the 12, if you want me to give you those?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I'll take those.

MARK BARRAKET: Central Coast, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Hunter New England, Mid North Coast, Murrumbidgee, Nepean Blue Mountains, South Eastern Sydney, South Western Sydney, Southern NSW, Western NSW and Western Sydney.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data in terms of how many children or families have utilised those development checks so those far?

MARK BARRAKET: I don't have data on how many children have utilised it, but we know that it will be available to around 85,000 children.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to take on notice—and I appreciate that it's a collaboration with Health—in the time that those services have been offered or that those checks have been offered, if it's possible, to get an overall figure of how many children have taken up that opportunity and possibly a breakdown by LHD?

MARK BARRAKET: Happy to take that on notice and see what we can get you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that work largely being led by Health?

MARK BARRAKET: Brighter Beginnings is being led in its entirety by Education, but we are working very closely with Health on that piece.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The capital works for preschools, as well, I note that there was an announcement recently about Eugowra getting their permanent build, which I know was welcome news for that community after, again, quite a bit of upheaval post a flooding event. Have there been any other capital works projects announced for other sites across the State for the not-for-profit community preschool sector?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes, the capital works grants round three were recently announced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How much was allocated in that?

MARK BARRAKET: Seventeen million dollars was allocated for that. There were a number of grants that we handed out in all three categories: in the crisis category, in the minor capital works and in the major capital works.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you able to provide on notice the breakdown of those that were funded and which are the categories they fit under?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes, I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did Eugowra fit under the crisis capital works; are you aware?

MARK BARRAKET: I need to double check that one for you. I think it was there, but I want to confirm that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I am happy for you to take this on notice because I know it is quite specific, but the previous Eugowra children's centre offered both a long day care and a preschool component. Obviously the capital works is usually just for preschool provision, but will they be able to use that capital funding to be able to support the service in its entirety? Is that the intention?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll need to check that and provide it to you on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a little bit specific so I understand that. Coming to some of the rural and regional education programs. Is there an update on the Rural Access Gap program that was rolled out by the previous Government, that technology piece, and whether there's been any additional funding or further support to schools through that program?

MURAT DIZDAR: As at 19 December last year, when we closed off the school year, the program had delivered support to 1,058 rural, regional and remote schools. The original plan was to deliver to 1,003 schools, plus an additional 55 schools on top of that that we went to. The final benefit realisation report is due at the end

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of March. We're proud that there were 22,255 additional student devices and 18,020 teacher devices. In those schools, it brought down the ratio of device to student to one to four, from one to six, so a significant improvement, and a teacher ratio of one to one. In that program there were 5,596 upgrades to learning spaces. There were three internet upgrades for 1,027 schools. It provided the largest target connectivity speed of five megabytes per second to more than 200,000 students across the State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You said that there would be something that would be finalised in March?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're asked to produce a benefits final realisation report; what were the benefits of the program. That's due to Government at the end of March.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will that be made public?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll have to find out how those reports work. I imagine we'll be talking to the benefits of the program.

MARK GRANT: Could I just interrupt for a second?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of course.

MARK GRANT: There's a typo in your pack. It's 15,596, not 5,596 upgraded learning spaces.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There you go.

MURAT DIZDAR: Thank you for the correction.

MARK GRANT: It's a much better correction, but it's a correction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll take it. It was a good program from the former Government, so I'm happy for it to be even better than was indicated.

MARK GRANT: Apologies.

MURAT DIZDAR: Thanks, Mr Grant, for picking that up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The work around the Auditor-General's report into rural and remote education, when that was released, the Deputy Premier said that she had tasked you, Mr Dizdar, with providing updated advice to her about what the department could do to better close that gap. Can you provide any update as to any new initiatives in regional communities that the Deputy Premier has asked you to put in since that report was provided?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm happy to. Ms Read and I took carriage of that. We hosted a round table of all the partners and stakeholders. We're happy to tell you who was in the room around discussing that openly. We've had rural and remote blueprints across our time period in Education and the ground's been awfully confused about what we're aiming to deliver for, so we wanted to solidify that in that work. We went in with a mantra of, "What are the hottest topics for rural and remote that you want us to move the dial on? Let's zoom it down into 2024," which is this school year. We had great input and great consensus.

We narrowed it down to three areas that we want to move the dial on. From recollection, housing was a big issue, around teacher housing and housing affordability; it goes back to the incentives work. A second topic was around professional learning—that in the COVID years in particular we deviated to a lot of online, and they were yearning for more face-to-face professional learning in the regional and rural and remote areas. The third one was around workforce, understandably. They want us to bring down the vacancies in those areas. That's what we're concentrating on. We've been going back to Government to show them what that game plan looks like for a 12-month period to win back confidence on the ground. Strategy plan after strategy plan—and I've seen some of those in my time—in the eyes of the ground has not delivered, so we wanted to zoom in on those three areas.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to talk to you about the teacher housing issue and housing more broadly. That's one of the focuses, you've just said, for this calendar year. How are you going to measure a positive outcome in that space? What are the parameters that you're putting around how you'll improve that this calendar year?

MURAT DIZDAR: They respectfully understood that that wasn't all in our purview, but they wanted us to work across the whole of government to make sure we can deliver greater access, greater affordability.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My point is, if at the end of the 2024 you want to look back and say, "That was an area of focus", what does success look like? How do you know that you've moved the dial, to use your terminology, in relation to that? What happens now?

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MURAT DIZDAR: Sure. Let me get Ms Read to dive into further details on those three areas for you, if you like?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

CHLOE READ: There was an implementation plan released a few days ago—I think over the last weekend—which has a range of measures in there. You were asking about the housing one, I think, in particular. We've obviously heard that there's a range of considerations around housing. One of them is about both the condition and the maintenance of the housing stock and also, for want of a better term, the kind of customer support of the ease of access to facilitate that maintenance. The things that we'll be measuring is that we prioritise work in regional, rural and remote locations; that we facilitate faster identification management and remediation of crisis maintenance issues; and that we want to streamline the process of accessing that maintenance.

People are giving us anecdotal suggestions that you ring and someone doesn't know about it and they don't ring you back, and then when they do it's someone else, and those kinds of things. We want a single point of contact for staff during the application process for housing so that we really get that service in place. Then of course we are working on future housing strategy and a business case that's been developed to put to Government, which is about broader issues of supply. There is also, I think, a budget commitment from 2022-23 that the Teacher Housing Authority are leading that is delivering new key worker housing under that program. The update that I have from them would be 83 delivered to date out of a target of 221, so we're trying to improve supply at the same time as maintenance.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The focus on housing is predominantly on teacher housing not, for instance, helping a teacher in a rural community use incentives to purchase their own home? Is that on the agenda or not at this point?

CHLOE READ: I think we have some incentives in Mr Ruming's area. The specific initiative that I've got carriage of is as I outlined, but Mr Ruming has a number of things in the rural staffing and incentive spaces.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know that is something that was looked at before. Is there an update on that?

SHAUN RUMING: We'll give you an update on the actual number of teachers that have taken up the stamp duty incentive, which is \$10,000 towards stamp duty if they purchase a home in the local area. I was out at Nyngan talking to our principal, Ben—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you go to the Big Bogan while you were there?

SHAUN RUMING: I did see the Big Bogan.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's great. I highly recommend it, if anyone hasn't seen it.

SHAUN RUMING: It is right in the dead centre of town. Talking to Ben, he has taken up that provision of stamp duty and he was very positive around buying in the local area and taking that up. But I can come back to you with the exact numbers. He was one of the first to take it up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Obviously if people are putting down roots in a community that's going to help you with retention. Sorry, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: I was going to say, Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it about the Big Bogan?

MURAT DIZDAR: No. This specifically went to, on our purview, the quality and the maintenance. That's what the room was calling out—can we move the dial on those things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I go to the second piece around professional learning? You mentioned that there's a preference for face to face, which I appreciate, but obviously distance can sometimes make that challenging for being able to leave school to go and do that et cetera. Again, what sort of parameters and ways of measuring success in that space will be put in place?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, Ms Read will give some detail. At the end of last year we did a behaviour roadshow. We went across the State and we took the experts from the centre across the State. They used that as an example of a good model and good practice of big wickets on important items on big reform to make sure we are not Sydney-centric and go across the State. They spoke about the unintended benefits of coming together and collaborating but also the experts coming out there. It wasn't like they were saying to us, "You need to move the dial entirely that way." They were saying to us, "You've moved entirely that way." They were saying to us that the online provision, whilst it's just in time and they can access it anywhere, is not meeting the mark or the

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requirements and that they want to see the experts come out, whether it's in behaviour, whether it's in wellbeing or whether it's in the curriculum. They want to see them, not only for them as principals but for their key middle leaders or beginning teachers. I think they've got a lot of validity in what they say. Do you want to add to that, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: The other thing we heard was that those unintended or accidental benefits of that is that kind of professional connection piece. You would know that we ran a number of principal wellbeing days last year that won a New South Wales resilience award for them being about people coming together and being able to share experiences and connect. We're going to deliver eight of those face-to-face connection sessions for staff in regional areas, supporting the delivery of that face-to-face professional learning for that core of the work, like the behaviour strategy, as the secretary outlined, and then also tailored face-to-face and online professional learning for middle leaders through the School Leadership Institute.

One of the call-outs in the room was that it can be different to be in a leadership position in a smaller school or a regional, rural or remote school and so we wanted to make sure that that was catered for and catered for really explicitly. Then the final one is a bit about coordination amongst ourselves. My sense when I visit schools is that sometimes they say, "Oh, so-and-so was here last week too from the department." We need to coordinate ourselves better when we visit particularly rural and remote locations so that we maximise the opportunity of someone if they said, "I'm going to come out of school to do whatever this professional learning is"—that we try to put things together so that they can really leverage that opportunity.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you can all go to Nyngan together next time.

CHLOE READ: I've been. I have a great photo of myself with the Big Bogan.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a rite of passage for anybody visiting Nyngan.

CHLOE READ: It is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then, obviously, the third component, being the teacher vacancy rates and retention—again, is that just pure numbers in terms of measurement?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll let Ms Read add to it, but what they were calling out, which really resonated with Ms Summerhayes and I when we were principals, because we had this on the ground, was they wanted a relationship structure with our HR folk. Because, when we were in the principalship, we knew who our staffing officer was. That was the constant person. That person got to know our school, would come out and visit the school, so would get to know our operation. That made it a lot easier. This is what they articulated when they were looking for support on staffing—that they weren't having to start from scratch and explain the school and explain the needs.

They really hammered home to us that they wanted this customer service relationship that was stronger, and they referenced the priority recruitment teams that we'd put in place to good effect and that we should be making them all priority recruitment sites. Again, that's fair commentary. Having experienced that, Ms Summerhayes and I and even Mr Barraket when he was principal, it is something that we wanted to look at and see if we could achieve and give that stronger customer service. They're very appreciative that the teacher shortage and challenge is widespread, that there's got to be work to increase the supply but, in trying to do that, can we have greater attention on them was the call out that I heard. Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: In that vein, Mr Ruming is my new best friend because he's done a phenomenal job in bringing together a set of initiatives in that staffing support vein—so expanding priority recruitment support to another 22 regional, rural and remote schools. There are currently 78, so that takes us up to 100 schools in that program. The Grow Your Own - Local Teacher Pipeline—three locations in regional and rural areas, expanding Grow Your Own to access more beginner teachers and some mid-career pieces and some visa pieces. You pointed to a figure just before, Mr Ruming. I don't know if you wanted to—

SHAUN RUMING: It's just with Grow Your Own. It was that 40 per cent of the Grow Your Own cohort is from rural and remote, which is a fantastic result. I'll have to take the specific figure on notice. It's around 2,500 of temp to perm were also regional and remote—given permanent jobs, which was very popular.

CHLOE READ: That speaks to that other piece of work that comes from the audit, which is about embedding consideration of regional, rural and remote contexts and data in everything that we do. Under the plan for public education, having specific reporting on the rural and remote cohort in there, both staff and students—just to make sure that, as every program looks to deliver support for a particular domain area, we're thinking about regional and rural and remote locations in that.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The local teacher pipeline program that I think you just mentioned, Ms Read—I think it was extended to three new areas. Can you or Mr Ruming confirm where is it actually?

SHAUN RUMING: There are two programs under the same banner. The teacher training program, which has got the most participants, at 340, was the nearly 40 per cent of rural and remote I just referred to. That's the program where you'll do the SLSO and get your qualifications and we provide the scholarships et cetera, and you can either land at that school or a school within the State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was the first kick-off of Grow Your Own.

SHAUN RUMING: That was the first iteration, yes. The second area was what we call the local teacher pipeline, where we have 60 participants in 2024—Dubbo, Queanbeyan, and I'll have to come back to you on the other two locations, but it was specific—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that Western and south-western Sydney and Murray?

SHAUN RUMING: I'll have to come back to you on the specifics, but it was four locations where those 60 "grow your owns" were. They start at that school and they land at that school at the completion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that on notice, that would be fantastic. Speaking of teachers and great teachers—amazing, fantastic teachers—throwing to my perennial favourite topic of HALTs. Mr Martin, any update on data on how many highly accomplished and lead teachers we've currently got and any increase since we last had you before estimates hearings?

PAUL MARTIN: I think there are an additional 800 in the pipeline. It's 800 and something. I'll get that on notice for you. That's a good result, if they continue to go through the process. The existing 300-odd that are there now—I can get you the numbers in just a second.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you'd like, you can make a Paul McCartney reference. We've talked about Dolly. We've had Taylor. We've had INXS. We can put Paul McCartney in as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We had Dolly Parton.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, we had Dolly. Taylor Swift. It's just great.

MURAT DIZDAR: If we can get the Wests Tigers in as well, that would be the full lot.

PAUL MARTIN: I did see Paul McCartney, as you're aware.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am aware.

PAUL MARTIN: There are 348 HALTs in New South Wales as at 1 January and there are 861 applications open.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just for the Committee's benefit, Mr Martin ended up sitting next to my mother at Paul McCartney. They made that connection very quickly, which we thought was very funny. Can't escape Gunnedah. We're everywhere.

PAUL MARTIN: There were 18,000 people or something and I sat next to your mother.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Next to my mum. It was great.

MURAT DIZDAR: How did she report his voice?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She said everyone had a lovely time and what happens in the stadium stays in the stadium, so we'll leave it at that. Can I also go quickly to some of the work—and I appreciate it's been done at a national level—around areas of reform around ITE provision and that consistency? There have been a number of different reports looking at these issues that I know the education Ministers meeting has commissioned and had provided back. From a NESA perspective, is there anything over the course of this year around that ITE provision, that accreditation consistency across the courses that are being provided, that we would expect to see improved or changed?

PAUL MARTIN: The national tertiary workforce action plan—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The NTWAP—terrible acronym.

CHLOE READ: The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

PAUL MARTIN: The teacher workforce action plan, and the TEEP process, chaired by Mark Scott—

CHLOE READ: Teacher Education Expert Panel.

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PAUL MARTIN: —there are recommendations and actions to be processed through those. You'd be aware, Ms Mitchell, that a lot of the work that other States and Territories are doing with initial teacher education had already been commenced in New South Wales. The most obvious things are the movement of the LANTITE forward so that teachers have an opportunity or prospective to pass that earlier in their qualifications so that they get an understanding of where they're up to before they go too much further. There are other actions that I'm happy to put on notice and where New South Wales is up to in relation to them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Are there any members of the NESA Board who are due for reappointment this calendar year that you're aware of? I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, I will take it on notice. There were a number of appointments that were extended for just the one year. There has been a retirement from one board member and there are another two board members that have a one-year extension that may continue, depending on the wishes of the Deputy Premier.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide on notice any detail around those positions and who they are and time frames for potential changes, that would be great. Just one more to you, Mr Martin. Was there any recognition at the HCS first in class ceremony last year? You'd recall in the previous year there was a resilience piece recognising some of the Northern Rivers schools and those who had really gone above and beyond just the traditional first in course. That was something that when I was a Minister I wanted to continue. I didn't see that occur last year. Is that not in place anymore?

PAUL MARTIN: The process still exists, but it was perceived by the board and argued that the previous recipients were schools which had come through either the floods or particular above-and-beyond efforts with COVID. Last year, we didn't have—there were, of course, always issues with particular schools that deliver to their students in difficult circumstances, but nothing that matched the previous years. The capacity for us to provide those awards is still there and the board will consider it. Hopefully—well, not hopefully—there may well be a recipient in 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it is something that the board will actively look at?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think part of the conversations in the past—and you're right, obviously COVID and the flooding events were severe and had an impact. But even things like calling out schools that had the highest cohort of Aboriginal students completing the HSC or were the first in their family, and trying to find ways to celebrate what excellence in education looks like beyond just those who are first in course—even though that's an amazing achievement—I would hope is something that NESA, the board and others, particularly the Deputy Premier, might continue to consider calling out, if it's possible.

PAUL MARTIN: I can assure you that I think that will be considered this year. Professor Shergold in particular is keen to recognise schools and students outside the highest end of academic performance. We'll be considering it again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask about selective schools and the OC classes. Has there been any work done or directive given by the Minister to look at changing the number of places available or the process in terms of selective schools and OC classes?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're always looking at our provision and what it looks like because it impacts on demand in certain locations, as you would respect and appreciate, particularly if there are any commitments to deliver—such as at Leppington, where we're going to deliver a comprehensive school with a selective stream—how we go about it and look at that. Whether it's fully academically selective or partially selective, when you create these they impact on surrounding sites.

We're also at work with the High Potential and Gifted Education Policy. We were rolling that out and we're doubling down on that. We're really proud of that piece of work because it goes to more than just academic ability. We'll have kids that are exceptional dancers, exceptional debaters, public speakers or exceptional sportspeople. How do you recognise them, as teachers, in context and support them and allow them to flourish and grow? I think the ultimate worth of a public education system, Ms Mitchell, is to make sure those students are in situ, well known and well embraced and can flourish, so we're looking at rolling out our high potential gifted education training in a much more concerned way. It was training I didn't have as a teacher and I know I would have benefited from it. We want to make sure that it happens—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But specifically—and I appreciate that—are there any bodies of work being undertaken at the moment, particularly around selective schools and OCs, to make any changes to that process, to analyse the—

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MURAT DIZDAR: It's just part of our ongoing BAU work across the State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So nothing specific that you're aware of?

MURAT DIZDAR: Nothing that we've done as a body to say, "This is what we're recommending," or not. It is just in terms of looking at the whole demography of the State—where the needs are, what the provision might look like. But we have certainly briefed on the high potential and gifted education as the way to go.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The equity cohort for the selective schools and the changes there: Is there any update that you can provide the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I think we've got some data on that. I know Mr Graham will have it at his fingertips. Under that equity placement model—sorry, have we got time for it, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, six minutes.

MURAT DIZDAR: We committed that up to 20 per cent of places at each selective high school and opportunity class were held for the four under-represented groups. Some 10 per cent will be for low socio-economically disadvantaged kids. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would be 5 per cent; rural and remote students, 2½ per cent; and students with disability, 2½ per cent. The places that we're offering for these equity groups, I'm pleased to say that many of those kids are receiving scores that are equivalent to or higher than the actual students that don't have those equity cuts. Was it specific numbers you were after?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you've got any figures, that would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll see if Mr Graham has—

MARTIN GRAHAM: Certainly. For the 2024 placement process into selective high schools, we had 360 students from the equity placement model; into the OC placement model, we had 182 students. Both of them were roughly equivalent in terms of close to half of that equity component were filled. That's similar to previous years. Obviously, if students aren't within a reach of the benchmark, we don't just fill up to that 20 per cent; we take as many as we can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That placement of those equity students, for lack of a better term—is that intended to be the policy setting going forward as well for future school years?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Certainly, yes. All the information about the current year process is informing parents of those arrangements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Did you want to add something else?

MURAT DIZDAR: I was just going to say, as secretary, that diversity and that respect for lifting that equity gap is really important to us. It's a feature of the public ed plan. We need to double down on it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think this sort of fits just in terms of school infrastructure. I was just wondering whether there might have been an update about discussions between Terrigal High School and the department relating to air conditioning.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's take it on notice, Ms Merton, and come back to you. It's a specific school. Let's take it on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. At the last estimates I put a question to Mr Manning, and it was related to selecting land for Leppington and Denham Court high schools. In response, Mr Manning thought that land would be secured sort of towards the end of last year, if not early this year, relating to Leppington and Denham Court. I am wondering what the current status might be on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can we take that on notice, too, with those specific sites and come back to you?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask about teacher workload reduction? There was an election commitment by the Government that they would ask the department to do a line-by-line audit on all policies. Has that been completed and how many policies have been removed?

MURAT DIZDAR: There has been a ton of work that has happened behind the scenes here to bring those numbers down and more in line with—make it more useful and meaningful. I can get you the exact numbers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd love the exact numbers.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we've been doing is looking at reducing something like 360, or thereabouts, policies and procedures in the department. When I started my teaching career in public education, it was something

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like 60; it has grown to 360 over time. So we've been at work to reduce that, and we're going to be considerably below that because we've had overlap and policies that are clashing. We've done a massive piece across the organisation to bring that in line. We're going to have more to say about that soon. It has been an important piece.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide on notice, if you can, Mr Dizdar, how many there were, say, at the start of 2023 in terms of policy and procedures and how many there are now? I was on the website last week, and there are still quite a few on there. Obviously, there are some that you clearly need to keep on in terms of some of the policies, but it's just hard, as a layperson, to really understand exactly how many have been removed. So if that could be provided on notice, that would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, definitely. But you're spot on, Ms Mitchell, because we haven't actually unfurled that work yet. It's still being behind the scenes. What you're seeing is that proliferation over time. In fact, our workers discovered that there are pieces that are not sitting on that website that should be. So this has been a massive exercise. But we're getting closer to going out there and advising the ground of what that work look like, what the new structure looks like, what the search and functionality of that looks like. We'll have more to say on that soon.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: One of the policy areas that the now Premier and Deputy Premier spoke about at the time—and it was in the paper—was about caring for animals and what you need to be doing. I think they used the example of a classroom pet that ran in one of the weekend papers. Surely a policy like that, though, would not be cut because schools have requirements in terms of the care and protection of animals. So that wouldn't be one that would be on the chopping block?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me take the specifics. What we've been doing in each policy, like I said—because there's overlap; there's overplay. Some of it can be very lengthy. How do we give guidance to teachers in their busy roles that they can get the key information on that policy and then, if they need to go any further, the detail is there for them? That's what we've been doing with each of those, and also amalgamating one. I mean, one that I know fairly well, as a former teacher, is the excursion policy. Teachers want to organise excursions. How can we give them the key things they need to know, and then any of the further detail can be embedded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you also able to provide, in terms of the support for school admin staff in particular—I know that online enrolment was something that became available. Is that available at all schools now? I think that work was underway by the former Government, but I'm keen to know if that's available more broadly?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. I'm just looking at my colleagues who may have detail on that and where we've got up to with online. We might take that on notice but it is still work that we have continued.

The CHAIR: Government questions? There are none. That's great. We have come to the end of a very productive day. Thank you very much for all of your time and your attendance. The Committee secretariat will be in touch regarding questions taken on notice and supplementary questions. That concludes today's hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.