

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 1

Monday 4 September 2006

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. F. J. Nile (Chair)

The Hon. C. E. Cusack
The Hon. R. M. Parker
The Hon. P. T. Primrose

Ms Lee Rhiannon
The Hon. P. Sharpe
The Hon. I. W. West

PRESENT

The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, *Minister for Education and Training*

Department of Education and Training

Mr A. Cappie-Wood, *Director General*

Mr K. Dixon, *Relieving Deputy Director General*

Mr C. Taggart, *Relieving General Manager, Finance and Administration*

Board of Studies

Dr J. Bennett, *General Manager*

Mr D. Murphy, *Director, Corporate Services*

TAFE NSW

Mr A. Cappie-Wood, *Director*

CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of budget estimates for Education and Training open to the public. I welcome Minister Tebbutt and accompanying officials to this hearing. At this hearing the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education and Training. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. In accordance with the Legislative Council's *Guidelines for Broadcast of Proceedings*, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photos. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what they publish or the interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. The *Guidelines for Broadcast of Proceedings* are available from the table by the door.

In relation to the delivery of messages, any messages from attendees in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, you and your officers who are accompanying you are reminded that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers while at the table. I ask that Hansard be given access to material placed on the public record during hearings. This is the usual practice in the House and is intended to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. I ask that all mobile phones be turned off, please.

The Committee has agreed to the following format for the hearings. We will proceed through your portfolio with 20 minutes of questions by the Opposition, 20 minutes by the Government and 10 minutes for each member of the cross bench. We will have a break at approximately 4.00 p.m. for 10 or so minutes. Do you anticipate any problems with that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No.

CHAIR: I advise the Committee has resolved to request that answers to questions on notice be provided with 21 calendar days of the date on which they are sent to your office. Do you anticipate any problems with that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No.

CHAIR: All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. The Minister does not need to be sworn as she has already sworn an oath to her office as a member of Parliament. For all other witnesses I ask that in turn you state your full name, job title and agency and indicate whether you will take an oath or affirmation.

Dr JOHN BENNETT, General Manager, Board of Studies, and:

Mr KENNETH DIXON, Relieving Deputy Director General, Corporate Services, Department of Education and Training, and:

Mr ANDREW CAPPIE-WOOD, Director General, Department of Education and Training and Director of TAFE NSW, and:

Mr DAVID MURPHY, Director, Corporate Services, Office of the Board of Studies, sworn and examined, and

Mr CHRISTOPHER TAGGART, Relieving General Manager, Finance and Administration, Department of Education and Training, affirmed and examined:

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. I want to put on record some brief comments with regard to the 2006-07 budget. The Government has provided a record \$10.7 billion Education and Training budget which demonstrates once again the Government's commitment to education and training in New South Wales. In 2006-07 the Government will dramatically increase the number of school maintenance projects, boost vocational training, make schools safer and improve learning environments for students. The record level of funding represents an increase of \$518 million or 5.1 per cent compared to the 2005-06 budget. The budget includes an additional \$120 million over four years for school maintenance, which brings the total State expenditure on schools maintenance to \$587 million over the next four years. That will allow 1,000 additional maintenance projects to be undertaken each year and will provide a significant boost to classroom presentation, school playgrounds and preventative maintenance works.

The budget also allocates \$485.8 million for the construction and redevelopment of school facilities and for major enhancements of information and communication technology in schools. The 2006-07 infrastructure program also includes additional funding for the construction of new school halls, the renovation of toilet facilities and the installation of 67 new security fences. In addition, the Government has also provided extra funding to establish trade schools in New South Wales. The budget continues the Government's successful class-size reduction program and targets funding of \$616 million over four years to continue literacy and numeracy initiatives.

The Government will also provide extra support to address Aboriginal outcomes. The Government has announced a \$65 million package over four years as part of its response to the Aboriginal education review that was released at the end of 2004. The Government is also providing record funding for students with special needs—\$3.3 billion over four years—and \$87 million to improve TAFE capital works. Overall the budget is focussed on additional funding for maintenance and capital works programs to improve the Government's ability to respond to the skills shortage, and to also make sure that the Government continues to support quality teaching in our schools to improve learning outcomes for students in New South Wales.

CHAIR: Budget Paper No. 3, volume 1, on page 7-3 refers to a range of initiatives designed to improve learning outcomes for Aboriginal school students. Would you update the Committee on the current position? As you know there have been concerns about the non-attendance at school of Aboriginal students. What steps have been taken to encourage their attendance at school? What are the results in relation to the retention of Aboriginal students in the high-school age group?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I can. The Government is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students. The gap between the performance of Aboriginal students, on average, and non-Aboriginal students is both well-known and also unacceptable. I was at Glebe Public School this morning to announce a further 20 schools that will be part of our Schools in Partnership Program. But, before we get to that, as I said in my opening comments, we are investing \$65 million, over the next four years, as part of our response to the Aboriginal education review, the report of which was released at the end of 2004.

I am sure you would be familiar with the review. There was extensive consultation, over a long period of time, about the types of initiatives that will work to improve Aboriginal educational outcomes, including things like attendance. Very clearly, poor attendance rates impact on educational outcomes as well as retention rates. The review found that Aboriginal students have lower literacy and numeracy results, lower school retention and completion rates, higher levels of absenteeism and higher suspension rates.

In direct response to the review, the department developed the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy. It is a comprehensive response. There is a copy of it available here if the Committee would like that. Under the strategy, additional preschool places will be made available, to make sure children get the best start to their schooling. We are putting in place personalised learning plans for 10,000 Aboriginal students. An integral part of the strategy is the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006 – 2008. This plan outlines initiatives to attract and retain Aboriginal teachers and other staff, to create a critical mass of Aboriginal people in public education and training. We are also building on the skills, capacity and capability of current Aboriginal employees and supporting a strong understanding of Aboriginal culture across the department.

The plan builds on other successful initiatives that are already in place, for example, the number of scholarships available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to train as school teachers in 2006 has been doubled. But, to go to the heart of the question that you asked, Chair, with regard to both improving attendance rates and also improving other educational outcomes for Aboriginal students: the Schools in Partnership Program commenced this year with 10 schools. Those schools had to agree to develop a plan, with targets, in consultation with both this students and their local community. Through that process additional funding is provided to the schools to assist them to implement their plan and in that way deal with the very issues that you have raised.

All of the partnership schools have set targets for improvement in literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention, and the schools are already reporting significant improvements — for example, in student attendance. The formal evaluation of the first 10 schools in the partnership program will occur after the first year of the program — so, at the end of this year. But, as I said, schools already are reporting that they are getting improved attendance, a reduced incidence of suspension and better literacy and numeracy outcomes as well. A key feature of the initiative is trying to connect the school to its community. I give one example. Dubbo West is one of the first 10 schools in the partnership program, and Dubbo West principal, Mr Glen Morrison, commented:

Our school is becoming more of a community school. We are involving elders and other agencies to help us to support the students. We were surprised, when we did a survey, that many Aboriginal parents did not know about the preschool services available here. It's been good to help the parents with support.

So the aim of the program is to give schools the flexibility they need to develop the types of initiatives they believe will make a difference in their local school community. There are some common elements across all the schools, but the plans will not be the same for every school. For example, some schools are establishing homework centres because they know that is an area in which they need to provide extra support to their students. Some schools are very much focused on the Transition to School initiatives. Some schools are focused on other aspects, like how to make sure they retain their quality teachers.

The plan provides for additional funding for things like being able to pay the principal at those schools at a higher level, to retain those experienced leaders. Everything points to the need, particularly in schools in more remote and rural parts of New South Wales, which often have high Aboriginal student populations, to be able to retain in those schools experienced leaders who are able to put in place the kinds of programs that will support the students to get better educational outcomes. There is also funding to schools so that they will be able to retain experienced teachers, with a particular focus on professional development, and the program rewards school achievements. So, schools that demonstrate they have reached the targets that they have set in the school plan are eligible for incentives of up to an additional \$50,000. That is, if they can demonstrate they have reached their targets, they can then use that funding for further professional development to continue the programs they have in place or to enhance other programs. We have announced today a further 20 schools will be part of the Schools in Partnership Program.

CHAIR: I note reference in the budget papers to the Non Government School Assistance Program. As we know, the great majority of funding for non-government schools comes from the Federal Government. However, I note this budget allocates \$734 million for non-government schools, an increase of \$36 million. Is the allocation of that funding for any particular purposes?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The \$733 million that is being provided?

CHAIR: Yes. Is it broken down into any particular categories?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The largest component of it is the per capita grants scheme. That is \$631.3 million in 2006-07, and that funding is calculated at 25 per cent of the equivalent cost to the State of educating a student in a government school. It is based on the regimen, which I think we have had discussions about previously in this Committee. The increase in funding to the non-government school sector in recent years is as a result of increases in student enrolments, increases in the cost of funding for educating a student in the government school sector, which then flows on to the non-government school sector, the inclusion of superannuation costs and arrears of maintenance funding in the per capita regimen, and the inclusion of the technology for learning strategy expenditure in per capita calculation. I have a breakdown here. The other aspect of the program is the intra-subsidy scheme, the supervisor subsidy student conveyance. That is about it.

CHAIR: You mentioned the 25 per cent per capita calculation. Is there any plan to review that? And does it have any relationship to the higher level of attendance in non-government schools, which is getting up to 33 per cent? Was there ever a link between the 25 per cent and actual attendance?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is not my understanding, and the Government does not have any plans to change the 25 per cent. We are committed to maintaining the 25 per cent payment of the cost of educating a government school student to the non-government school sector.

CHAIR: I note that you have programs dealing with English and literacy. There has been some debate, even this week, about the need to help people from other countries who come to our land to learn English. What is the priority in the State school system, particularly with Muslim students, to assist them to learn English?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We have a commitment to providing support for students who are newly arrived in Australia, irrespective of where they come from. This is to enable them to learn English. We call it our English as a Second Language Program. We are committed to addressing the educational needs of students who need that support. We recognise that if these students are to succeed as members of Australian society and the Australian community, they need to acquire English language skills. The Government provides over \$100 million in targeted funding for the English as a Second Language Program to support ESL students. We do that not only in government schools but also in intensive English centres, which provide support for more newly arrived students. The funds are used for the employment of specialist ESL teachers, to support ESL students under the ESL targeted support and ESL new arrivals program.

Under that program, 876 specialist teacher positions are provided to support some 85,000 ESL students across 750 schools. This is a program that is supported by both the Commonwealth and the State Government. In fact, the Commonwealth Government has primary responsibility and provides the bulk of funding for the program, because it controls Australia's migration program. We have for some time had concerns that the Commonwealth is not satisfactorily meeting its responsibility to provide for the ESL learning needs of school-age migrants. There is an increasing number, for example, of temporary residence students who enrol in New South Wales government schools.

There is also an increasing number of refugee students, particularly for example from diverse African countries, who have high support needs, and these our appropriately recognise under the funding that the Commonwealth Government provides us. I have raised this on numerous occasions, as have other State and Territory Education Ministers, with the Commonwealth at our regular State-Territory-Commonwealth meetings. We are pleased to see in a recent Federal budget that additional funding has been provided by the Commonwealth, but we believe that it needs to go further.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Could you provide for the Committee the annual salary of each of the 10 bureaucrats you have here with you today, supporting you to make you look good?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is a big ask, making me look good. The details of the department's SES are provided in the annual report.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Will you provide that information to the Committee? We do not know each of these people here.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We can certainly make that information available.

CHAIR: Take that on notice.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, we will take that on notice.

CHAIR: We appreciate their attendance. Usually it is to assist the Committee in its inquiry.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I think that is absolutely right.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: However, a one to 10 ratio is a lot better than your Government currently provides teachers to students in ED/BD schools, is it not?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That actually depends on what sort of class you are looking at. Some of those ratios are on one teacher and one teacher's aid to six students. It really depends. You would need to be more specific with what classes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Behavioural schools.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Behavioural schools have a ratio of one adult teacher and one teacher's aid to seven students.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Why do you need so many spin doctors here today?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not think I do, but it is usually the case that we have the extra support here because sometimes Committee members ask detailed, technical questions and the department's staff, and I point out that we also have two representatives from the Board of Studies, are able to provide that sort of detailed information. It is usually to support the Committee. It certainly is not any great need on my part.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: There will be no problem getting direct answers today then, will there?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It depends on the questions.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: What was the cost of the Grimshaw report, which went over a long period of time and which was commissioned by your Government?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have the cost of the Grimshaw report here, but we can certainly provide some further details to the Committee about the Grimshaw report.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Perhaps one of the bureaucrats can come up with that answer.

CHAIR: Take that on notice.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: We have not been introduced to all of the support staff you have behind you. Would you please identify each one, and perhaps they can tell us how much their salary is just to save time?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Committee members have been sworn. You have had them identified. The Committee members—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: There are a number of people behind you. Could you identify them, so that they can tell us their salary?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: They are not sworn in to the Committee.

CHAIR: The persons behind the Minister are not sworn in as witnesses.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: No.

CHAIR: But they could advise the Minister of the answer to questions you are asking. The individual can tell you the answer.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Perhaps they could tell us who they are.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We said we are happy to provide you with the details of the salaries of the staff who are here with me, who have been sworn in. We have said that we are happy to provide that information.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Could they introduce themselves to us—

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Who are you talking about?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: —so that we know who they are?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Who? These people behind here?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: They have not been sworn in to the Committee.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You could introduce them. You have been sworn in.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You can go around and say "hello" to them, if you want to.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You have been sworn in. You could introduce them to us.

The Hon. IAN WEST: What about the people behind you?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Perhaps they could tell you how much they are paid.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are these people on your 29,000 tick list?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I think we are asking questions—

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have no problem with introducing them. These are people from my ministerial office and people from the department. But the people who are here—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: It would save a lot of time of the department if you could introduce them now.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It may be you could introduce some of the people behind you, too, instead of providing you with the question.

CHAIR: The Minister is giving us an answer.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I did not recognise you.

CHAIR: Perhaps the director general could answer. Are they in your office?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am happy to introduce them. Behind me I have three members of my staff and one member from the department.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: There is some guy called Hazzard behind her.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: They do not know who they are.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am just checking their correct titles. Chris Ryan is the Executive Director of the Director General's Unit, Mal Larsen works in my office, Michael Refshauge is my Chief of Staff and Geoff Taylor also works in my office.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: None of the 10 people here can tell us how much the Grimshaw report cost?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Is there a reference to the Grimshaw report in the budget? Would you like to refer to the line item that you are talking about?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Members of the Committee ask broad and general questions in relation to the portfolio. If you do not know—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: And were entitled to put issues you are interested in a couple of days ago.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: If the—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: If the Committee member has issues, he or she may ask those, surely, in the allocated time?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You had a chance. You were invited to put these issues down, but you did not bother.

CHAIR: Can other Committee members not interrupt? The Minister has agreed to take a question on notice, unless somebody on the panel or advisers knows the answer.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Grimshaw report was released in October last year, I believe—certainly towards the end of last year. It is certainly not part of the 2006-07 budget papers. As I said, we are very happy to provide you with the details of the review. I am very happy to talk at length about what the review resolved and what the Government's decision was. I am very happy to do that, but if you want an actual figure—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: If you would take that on notice and provide that, that would be great?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have already said I would do that.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In terms of the recommendations in the Grimshaw report, can you please tell us what proposals the Government has taken up and what your actions are in that regard?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: You are talking about the Grimshaw report part two, I take it?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: In that regard the Government has decided to resolve that it would maintain its existing funding formula for non-government schools, but that we will update it because we use a Commonwealth funding formula that has not been updated for a number of years. We did not go with the formula that was proposed by the Grimshaw review. We have decided instead to stick with the 12 categories that we currently have.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In the mini budget of 2004, the non-government schools that were in funding categories 1, 2 and 3 were locked out of the interest rate subsidy that has been going for some time. What evaluation has been undertaken since that time to assess the impact of this policy change on those school communities, and potentially boarding schools and those located outside of Sydney?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We have not done a formal evaluation of the impact. We did not say that we would at that time. That was a decision that was taken based on making sure that we could more equitably provide funding for non-government schools. It was felt that those non-government schools in those categories were the more wealthy non-government schools, and that we would limit the interest subsidy availability to those schools that were more in need.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you plan any evaluation at all?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will get the Director General to respond.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: At this point in time we continue to monitor the situation. The capital interest rate subsidy bill continues to grow each year. We are making sure that, in terms of the distribution of that, the Association of Independent Schools participates with us in the consideration of the performance of that particular subsidy. They are keen to see it continue, of course, but we also want to make sure that it is appropriately directed. We have ongoing discussions with them on a regular basis.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: A number of those students attending the schools we have talked about are from rural areas that are suffering from the drought. Why is the Government unwilling to increase assistance for rural families, particularly at this time of need?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Are you talking about schools in the 1, 2 and 3 category? If you are talking about general assistance to families in drought-affected areas, the Government provides a range of support, but it is not through my portfolio. You would need to ask the Minister for Natural Resources about that issue.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you had representations from parents saying they are having difficulty with schooling costs?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not sure if you are talking about parents who have students in non-government schools, or government schools. Exactly what are you referring to?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: New South Wales rural school communities and parents who have difficulties facing the cost of schooling, whether that be at a local school or at a school further away. Have you had representations, and are you prepared to provide some assistance to some of those families?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We provide an enormous amount of support to schools in rural and regional New South Wales. Of course I am aware that, with the drought, families and schools are doing it tough in particular areas. I met with the parents who have children studying in isolated areas, but if you are asking whether the Government is going to review the provision of the interest subsidy to schools in the categories of 1, 2 and 3, no, we do not intend to review that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, I would like to ask you questions about behavioural schools. Budget paper No. 3 Volume 1 page 7-5 refers to the \$65 million that your Government proposes to spend over four years "to continue to provide a wide range of ... support options for students with disruptive behaviour". Can I ask, firstly, which ED-BD schools you have visited? Can you tell the Committee your Government's justification for constructing more ED-BD schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I can. I have visited a range of special needs and behaviour schools. I have been to the Niland Special School, I have been to the Flame Tree complex down in the Illawarra and I have been to the tutorial centre at Blacktown. Of course, my former experience as

Ministers for Juvenile Justice meant that I visited every school in the juvenile justice centres on many occasions, and as the Minister for Community Services I also had, I feel, a good appreciation of the needs of students who are often struggling in a mainstream school environment. With regards to the Government's initiatives, the rationale is very simple. We recognise that for some students, either for a period of time or sometimes for a longer time frame, the mainstream school environment does not suit those students. They are disruptive. They can sometimes be violent and be a threat to other students. The aim of our behaviour initiatives is to provide alternatives for those students so that they have the opportunity, whether it is through something like a suspension centre or a tutorial centre, or if a longer term plan is required, a behaviour school, to get the specialist support that they need, address their behaviour, and come back into a mainstream school environment.

I want to address the issue that in some way the schools are dumping grounds for students who do not fit into a mainstream school environment. Our aim is twofold: it is to provide support for those students who are struggling in a mainstream school environment. I more than anyone recognise that for those students, unless we can keep them connected to education, unless we can address their learning needs in a way that works with them, we run the risk that they disengage from school forever and we lose them. But at the same time we also need to make sure that the majority of students who are attending high school—or primary school, but it is mainly high school—are wanting to learn and are wanting to learn in an environment that is free from disruption and, for the teachers who want to teach them, in an environment that is free from disruption. They deserve to have that opportunity. So the behaviour schools, the tutorial centres, and the suspension centres provide for that need. They provide the ability to meet the needs of students who do not fit into a mainstream school environment and they mean that our mainstream schools can be kept free from disruption.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is it the objective of these schools to provide an alternative schooling for students, or is the objective to return them ultimately to the mainstream school system?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sorry, I missed the first bit of your question.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is the objective of these schools, the behaviour schools, to ultimately return the child to the mainstream school system?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, that is the objective, but not in all circumstances; sometimes it is for the student to go to TAFE, sometimes it is to move the student into full-time employment. It would really depend on the age of the student. Many of the programs—I was recently at Canterbury Vale, which is another behaviour school that I have visited. What they were planning there were programs whereby the student would spend four days a week at the school and one day back in the original school, so that they do not lose that connection with their original school. So one of the great benefits of these types of initiatives is that, because the schools are much smaller and because the teachers have less of a teaching load, they can actually put in place individual plans that suit the need of the student. But for the majority of students, the goal would be to return them to the mainstream school environment or to some other form of training or education.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, internal advice indicates that in two of the ED-BD schools, Lomandra School and the Campbell House School, only one child has returned to his or her mainstream school, and that another ED-BD school reports that most of the students who commenced in year 7 or 8 proceed through their entire education at the same school. Can you explain how this can be occurring?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sorry, what were the two schools that you referred to?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Lomandra School and the Campbell House School. Only one child has returned to the mainstream school.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: And they were ED-BD schools. I am just checking my list.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: We have advice from another school, which I would prefer not to name, that basically the expectation of the year 7 and year 8 students who begin there is that they are looking at their entire education being in that school.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: You need to appreciate that within the behaviour schools category, and we will have 35 of them by the start of next year, there are, I think—I would just need to check the number—14 schools for ED-BD students. These are schools that require a diagnosis to go to those schools. They are students who have much higher support needs than what you would expect at some of the other behaviour schools, and they operate in a somewhat different way because of the needs of those students. You will find that there are students who go to those schools who are not going to return to a mainstream school environment. A mainstream school environment just does not have the specialist support and resources that they need to be able to cope, but I am happy to follow up the detail of those two particular schools.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, just carrying on from what you said—that many of these students have a specific diagnosis—do you think it is financially justified for your Government to have merged classes at ED-BD schools such that children with emotional disturbances and mental illnesses are in classes with children who have behavioural issues? How do you think teachers can adequately teach students with such differing and challenging behaviours, all in one classroom?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sorry, are you referring to a situation in an ED-BD school, or are we now talking about special classes in the mainstream school environment?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No, in ED-BD schools where classes for emotionally disturbed students have been merged with classes that have students with behaviour issues.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Without more detail, unless you want to provide me with the actual examples, it is difficult to respond to the issues that you have raised. Certainly there is always a focus on what the needs of the students are. In an ED-BD school it may not make sense to separate students according to their diagnosed disability. It may well make more sense to group students according to their learning needs. I would not like to try to respond to what you are raising without more detail.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Okay. Perhaps in principle can you tell us if you think it is inappropriate for students with mental illnesses to be merged with students with behavioural issues, which are quite different problems for teachers to deal with?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I said, it would depend on the circumstances. It is not possible to give some sort of blanket response to that. But what a school and a teacher and a principal would look at is what are the learning support needs for the individual student and group their students accordingly. The director general might have more detail to add to that.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Only to the extent that great care and attention is taken, such as at the Campbell House School, which I have been to, in terms of how those classes are formed and the supports that are available to them in the formation of those. I know that it is very difficult if we generalise. I join with the Minister in saying that if there are individual instances you would care to provide us with, we would be more than happy to respond.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But no guiding principles?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Well, you are talking about very complex issues here with regards to a student. Students do not always have a clear diagnosis with regards to their mental health needs. There may well be other issues that are happening as well, so therefore schools need to be able to group students according to how they can best support them. To have some sort of blanket provision in this very complex area would, I think, not be doing justice to the needs of individual students.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, when do you undertake diagnosis of their mental health needs? At what age?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That would depend on the students and their needs and what the parent has identified and what the school has identified. There is no whole-of-school screening for students for mental health issues, as you referred to, if that is what you are asking.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: It is ongoing at a certain point.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right. It could be something that a teacher identifies; that a student has some extra support needs. It may be a parent who goes to the school and indicates that they need extra support. It may be that a counsellor identifies a difficulty. You would be aware that recently we changed enrolment procedures for students and asked parents to provide greater information about a student and any prior history at the point of enrolment. Really, it is ongoing throughout a student's time at school.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you had any objections from parents to the department about the merging of classes for mentally ill children with behaviourally challenged students?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Not to my recollection. There has been a lot of discussion about changes with regard to special education classes. With regard to classes in some EDBD schools, I would have to check my correspondence. I cannot recall.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Would any of the 10 advisers have that information?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: There have been some discussions, obviously at the regional level, because a number of placement committees that operate at regional level have to consider all of the educational settings and individual diagnosis and other issues that would impact on the best educational placement for students with disabilities. That is an ongoing process and the matters are appropriately dealt with as close to the educational setting as possible.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: You have no further advice on that issue?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I have lots more advice about behaviour schools and special schools if you would like. I am happy to share it with the Committee.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you advice on objections from parents?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: In what circumstances?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In relation to the parenting.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Parents of students at behaviour schools or special schools?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In relation to the specific issue of the two categories being merged, behaviourally and mental health issues with students?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I cannot recall receiving any specific correspondence from parents. I am happy to come back to the Committee on that.

CHAIR: Minister, would you table the Aboriginal report that you mentioned earlier, it will be included in your evidence.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

Document tabled.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, what steps have you taken to ensure that students attending behaviour schools have access to the full range of the curriculum?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Behaviour schools have qualified teachers who teach the curriculum. They have the capacity to put in place a tailored program for students that may well meet the specific needs of that student. It is based on the school curriculum. We aim to make sure that

students who spend time at a behaviour school are able to be reintegrated into the mainstream school environment.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: How many qualified English, secondary maths and secondary science teachers are there in each behaviour school?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have that information.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Will you take that on notice please?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, we can.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What facilities exist at each of the behaviour schools to teach science? You say you have been to some of them. Do they have a specialised science laboratory?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, not usually.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: How can a secondary science teacher teach the curriculum and have access to the full range of the science curriculum if they do not have access to a science laboratory?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: You need to appreciate that there are safety issues with regards to the schools, and also risk issues that need to be taken into account. As I pointed out, a student would spend one day a week back in their mainstream school and four days in the behaviour school. It is through those programs that the school would ensure that that student has access to the full range of the curriculum. We need to be aware as well that for many students they are at the point where they have significantly disengaged already from schooling and their mainstream school environment. The goal of those schools is to ensure that the students can develop the attitude and desire, plus to make up some of the schooling that they may well have missed through truancy and other factors, to ensure that they are able to continue with their education. I ask the director general to add to that.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Recently I visited the Dubbo behaviour school. One of the main focuses of that school is to make sure that educational deficiencies, particularly literacy and confidence in numeracy, was made out. They saw that as one of the issues about expanding the educational opportunities in the future, including the life opportunities, without confidence in the basics of literacy and numeracy. Some of the future educational opportunities for those kids were very limited indeed, including going confidently onto TAFE or other forms of learning. A lot of the time is spent assessing what they can do to bring them up to speed in terms of the basics, because they will not be able to access secondary science or any range of the others unless some literacy and numeracy issues are dealt with up front.

The class sizes are very small there and it is very much one-to-one arrangements in terms of how their educational plans are delivered and dealt with. To that extent a number of students were attending other schools for a variety of their educational needs as well. It was very much a tailored educational program, which is being dealt with in a very careful manner.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, earlier you said that some students had four days at the behaviour school and one day back in their original school. I got the impression, and maybe I am wrong, that you are relying on their original school to look after the curriculum needs. Is that correct? I appreciate what the director general has said about building up confidence in literacy and numeracy. Clearly a science education for some students is essential. If they are missing out on that we are left with the impression—and I am sure you understand where I am coming from—that the schools are often a holding operation rather than an educational institution.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Not at all.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is what I am trying to dispel.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right, I am sure you are, but that is not the case at all. As I and the director general pointed out, many of these students are at a point whereby their literacy and numeracy needs are so great that to think—I would not put every student in this category—that for

many of them they will be unable to effectively participate in some of the activities that you are talking about, until their attitude to learning and their literacy and numeracy needs can be addressed, it is very difficult to engage them in some of those other subjects. Behaviour schools have the capacity, particularly for individual students depending on their needs and interests, to link them back to their mainstream school environment. That would provide one option; for example, for students to be continuing their science studies. Based on my experience, having talked to principals in those schools, often they are really focused on getting students to the point where they can lift their self-esteem, address their often violent, if not aberrant, behaviour, convince them of the need to stay connected to education, that will make a long-term difference in their lives. Many of those schools focus particularly on the VET subjects because for the students that provides something that they see as practical and will meaningfully fit them out for later life. They are the things that the principals in those schools focus on.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: To build on that, of the students attending or who have attended behaviour schools, how many have reintegrated into mainstream high schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have made it clear on other occasions that we will evaluate the behaviour schools next year. We have not yet established all 35 of them but they will be up and running by the end of this year. At this stage all I can provide is information that I have for individual schools. For example, a school in the Southern Highlands indicates a 70 per cent success of students either going back to mainstream school or onto TAFE or employment. We will evaluate that program next year.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Does that mean you do not have numbers at the moment? Are you saying that you do not have numbers at the moment?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I said that we would evaluate the program next year.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Do you have numbers? My questions were: How many have reintegrated into mainstream high schools, how many have gone on to TAFE, how many have completed their school certificate, and how many have completed their Higher School Certificate? Can you supply those figures, or will you take that question on notice?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We can certainly provide you with some information. However, I make it clear that the formal evaluation will be next year. In addition, you are talking about a group of students that sometimes moves around more and that is more itinerant than other groups of students. Therefore, we will not necessarily be able to provide the Committee with a complete picture. We certainly can provide some information.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: To help complete that picture—I appreciate that things are just getting going—can you give us the total enrolment for schools that have been established? I also require a follow up on the figures that I have requested.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will come back to the Committee on that. The only point I make is that with some of these behaviour schools students spend some time at them and they then move back into mainstream TAFE or into employment. I want to ensure that we are able to provide what Ms Lee Rhiannon has asked for. We will certainly provide Ms Lee Rhiannon with what information we can about the destination of students moving through behaviour schools.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You might be able to provide me with information now. What are the education qualifications of teachers at these behaviour schools? It has sometimes been reported that the majority, or perhaps all, of the teachers at behaviour schools for secondary students are teachers that have been educated to teach primary schoolchildren?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The teachers are appointed to the school based on the needs of the school, as identified by the principal. They may be either primary or secondary teachers, subject to the needs and the student population.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Is it correct that all students at behaviour schools are secondary students?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Generally speaking, yes, although obviously at special schools there are a variety of learning ages as well as calendar years, so it does vary.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: It seems as though the majority are secondary school students. Why do you then have primary schoolteachers at these behaviour schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I did not say that we did. I said that it could be either secondary or primary teachers. I do not have any information on the make-up of teachers at individual behaviour schools. I simply say that the teachers who do this work are teachers that deserve our support as they do a fantastic job under difficult circumstances. The teachers and principals that I have met who work this area have a real dedication to making a difference in the lives of students. At some of these schools you will have students with particular support needs, which might make a mix of teachers the most appropriate. I am happy to come back to you on that issue.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would you take on notice that part of my question relating to the education qualifications of teachers at behaviour schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, will you update the Committee on the progress of the class-size reduction program?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: One of the Government's great success stories with regard to primary education is its commitment to reducing class sizes in the early years. We all know the importance of those early years, as it lays the foundation for a student's later learning. The Government is committed to maximising the educational opportunities for students. Smaller class sizes in the early years are helping to maximise students' academic, social and emotional development. They are also helping to make the transition to school easier. They are supporting the improvement of learning outcomes for students, in particular those from low socioeconomic status communities and students who require early intervention.

We are spending \$710 million on the program over four years. By the end of 2007 we will have reduced class sizes to a statewide average of 20 for kindergarten students, 22 for year 1 students and 24 for year 2 students. The program has the support and commitment of teachers and parents. The plan has been developed in conjunction with an advisory committee that includes representation from the Primary Principals Association, the New South Wales Teachers Federation, and the Federation of Parents and Citizens Association. I am pleased to inform the Committee that we have made substantial progress under the program. More than 550 extra classrooms have been provided to schools across New South Wales and so far we have created an extra 1,200 teaching positions.

We are now in the process of rolling out classroom and teaching positions for 2007. By next year this program will have provided an extra 1,500 teaching positions and 600 extra classrooms. So this is making a huge difference for students in those early years. Whether you talk to parents, teachers or principals you hear the same message over and again: The class size reduction program has made a significant difference for students in those early years.

The Hon. IAN WEST: I understand there were some articles in today's media relating to the lack of Federal Government funding being provided to government schools. Will the Minister advise us whether there is any New South Wales Government response to that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will respond to the article in today's *Australian* about the schools resourcing task force. I point out first and foremost that, despite the article, this report of the task force has been on the web site for a number of months. No new information has come out today; it has been on the Internet since May this year. Nonetheless, just to give some background, in 1999 education ministers from across Australia made an important declaration when we established the common national goals for schooling. The national goals at their most fundamental state are that every

child should leave school with basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy—the skills they will need for life.

Any differences between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories were put aside in the process of agreeing to these important goals. They are ambitious goals. Our national literacy and numeracy benchmarks already show us that. They demonstrate that we still have some way to go in meeting the goals that were set seven years ago. About 10 per cent of students right across Australia are at risk of leaving school without the basic skills that they need for life. So the national goals were ambitious. Nonetheless, they were significant because they set out a clear commitment that goes across Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

As part of the commitment to meeting the national goals the schools resourcing task force was asked by Ministers to tackle the question of the resources that were required to give every child a realistic chance of meeting the national goals for schooling. The initial report of the task force is the report that was quoted in today's *Australian*. As I said earlier, it has been available for some time. The report established a national schools resourcing standard that could act as a guide for governments to work towards in meeting the national goals. State and Territory governments have not yet endorsed that guide and the national resourcing task force must do quite a bit more work.

In total, the report found that approximately \$2.4 billion would be required to give the best chance for every government school student to meet the ambitious national goals for schooling. Like the national goals themselves, the idea is that the standard will be something that will be reached over time. The report in today's *Australian* reflects only the first stages of the work of the task force. So the task force needs to do quite a bit more work. The \$2.9 billion, which is an inflated figure, is not something that has been endorsed by the task force; it is the figure that was used in the article in today's *Australian*.

The amount of \$2.4 billion is a significant sum of money to meet the resourcing standard. However, that must be seen in the context of the significant resources that State and Territory governments are already providing to their schools. It must also be seen in the context of the \$30 billion or so that is provided from the Federal, State and Territory governments to government and non-government schools every year. The record \$8 billion in funding is the latest New South Wales budget for government schools. It is a doubling of spending in 10 years that Government has provided for schools in New South Wales.

That sort of increase has not been fully taken into account by the task force because its work was completed, or its most recent iteration was completed, prior to the handing down of this year's State budget. We also know that there is an \$11 billion Commonwealth budget surplus, which cannot be forgotten in this whole equation. As I said, the national goals for schooling and the work that the resourcing task force is doing are things that must be looked at over time. Everyone is committed to lifting investment in school education. We need to work out how we do that. It is not an easy challenge. Certainly one of the things that we are very conscious of in New South Wales is that government schools serve many of the neediest communities and yet we do not see Federal funding provided to schools based on need. The Commonwealth has provided disproportionate increases in funds to non-government schools and we have not seen the same level of funding coming to government schools.

I will give you an example. In 1995 non-government schools received \$3.61 for every \$1 that a government school child received. On current trends, by 2008 this will blow out to \$5 for every non-government school child for every \$1 for a government school child. So the growth in funds from the Federal Government to the non-government schools sector has not been matched by a similar growth in funds to the government schools sector. We have concerns about this. We would like to see the Commonwealth—which has the ability and the finances given the size of its surplus—do more to support needy schools, particularly government schools.

One of the examples that I raised recently with my Federal counterpart is the situation of primary schools. Because of the way in which the Federal Government provides funding to government primary schools in New South Wales and in other States and Territories, we receive \$32 million less every year from the Commonwealth than we should. The Commonwealth makes a distinction in how it funds government primary schools compared with how it funds government

secondary schools. It does not make the same distinction in its funding to non-government schools. We are very concerned about this. I have written to the Federal Minister about it. This is an area where we believe the Commonwealth could clearly step in and rectify this inequity. That would put \$32 million extra into government schools in New South Wales. By simply applying the principle of fairness, the Federal Government could allocate almost \$1 billion in additional funds to government schools now. We know that they have the budget to do that and we would certainly like to see that happen.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: This is a detailed question so you may need to take it on notice. Can you please outline to the Committee how the current curriculum in New South Wales schools ensures that students are provided with a significant grounding in the basics and a content-rich syllabus?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is an important question because everyone will be aware that there has been enormous discussion in recent times about the curriculum here in New South Wales but more often about the curriculum in other States and Territories. There has been a lot of focus nationally on this issue. In recent times the Federal Minister held the history summit to look at how we teach history in our schools. I am both pleased and proud that in New South Wales our curriculum and syllabuses have stood the test of time. They have been placed under greater scrutiny recently and they have again been found to reach the mark. I think when it comes to the curriculum we have the gold standard in New South Wales. That is due in no small part to the work of the Board of Studies in conjunction with teachers. It has an extensive consultative process whereby teachers are involved in curriculum committees. In that way we make sure that the work of the Board of Studies is actively informed by teachers who are in the classroom. So practice informs policy and policy informs practice. I think that is a good model.

Returning to the question, students in New South Wales from K to 12 are taught according to a detailed common curriculum. It describes clearly what students should learn and be taught. The service describes the clear standards of achievement expected of students at each stage of learning, from kindergarten to year 12. The content-rich New South Wales syllabuses ensure that the same material is taught in both government and non-government schools. There has been a lot of discussion about an outcomes-based curriculum and an outcomes-based syllabus. In New South Wales we have focused very clearly on having content in our syllabus. I think that is why our syllabuses are as strong as they are. We also have outcomes, it is just that we have not gone one way or the other: we have kept a balance. Clearly, you want to make sure that your students are achieving particular learning outcomes. That should be referred to in your syllabus. But you also want to make sure that you are giving guidance as to what teachers should be teaching. That is why we are focused on having content richness in our syllabus.

Last year the Board of Studies released new foundation statements for primary schools. They place an emphasis on fundamental skills, describe common curriculum requirements and prioritise what needs to be taught in New South Wales schools. These were, in part, a response to the review by Professor Eltis and also to the need we were hearing about from teachers in primary schools, who wanted greater guidance about what the clear areas of priority were across the six key learning areas. The foundation statements have been very well received in primary schools.

As to secondary schools, we have 42 syllabuses for years 7 to 10 based on the eight key learning areas. They specify clearly essential content to be learnt. In New South Wales it is mandatory to study English, mathematics, science, technology, music, visual arts, PDHPE, Australian history, geography and language. When we move to years 11 and 12 the curriculum is broad in design and includes courses in English, maths, science, technological and applied studies, human society and its environment, creative arts, personal development, health and physical education, and languages. The standards-based higher school certificate [HSC] provides challenging courses, with pathways to further education, training and work. The HSC examination is a world-class credential.

There has been a lot of talk, particularly at the national level, about the Australian Certificate of Education. The previous Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, flagged that he was going to undertake a review. One might remember that he flagged this review with a great deal of fanfare and frequent attacks on the quality and integrity of the higher school certificate in New South Wales. Nonetheless, the review has been conducted and it mentions frequently the strength of the higher

school certificate, its integrity and its importance as a credential for our students. Once again, when we are placed under the microscope New South Wales does very well. We are very pleased at how that review has recognised our higher school certificate. As I said, it is recognised internationally for its rigour and depth.

We are preparing students to be active citizens and participating members of the Australian community and work force. I think it is quite right that there is a lot of debate about what we teach our children and what is in our syllabuses. There is no doubt that this is critical for our society and therefore should be subject to debate. However, it should not be politicised and I am pleased to see that in New South Wales I think, on the whole, we have avoided that. The debates we have had have been conducted largely at a level that is both informed and has the best interests of students at heart.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Minister, can you update the Committee on discipline and truancy initiatives?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: There is no doubt that discipline is an issue of great importance in our school system. As in the wider community, cases of unacceptable behaviour occur in both government and non-government schools. Our task in the New South Wales public education system is to make sure that the needs of all students are met. We have a clear focus on discipline and a clear focus on ensuring that students who behave in unacceptable ways are shown that their behaviour has an impact on others. They also need to be supported to take responsibility for changing their behaviour. As I have already said, all students need an environment that is free from disruption and which enables them and their peers to learn most effectively. Teachers also have the right to a workplace that is free from harassment.

We have strengthened discipline in our schools. We have developed a new policy, the Student Discipline in Government Schools, and we have also specified that all schools need to have a set of core school rules that they include in their discipline code. As part of the new Student Discipline in Government Schools policy, each school is required to review its current discipline code. They do this in consultation with their school community. It is important that a school's discipline code is both accepted and respected by the broader school community. The discipline code must set out clear expectations for student behaviour and also the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.

We have strengthened the powers for principals to be able to suspend students. Any student who is violent, threatens violence or who possesses a prohibited weapon or a suspected illegal substance will be suspended immediately. Under the suspension and expulsion of school students procedures, principals can impose a short suspension of up to four days, a long suspension of up to 20 days or they can expel a student from school.

Seventy-five per cent of government school students who are suspended for the first time improve their behaviour following suspension and are not suspended again. That is good news and shows that in the majority of cases a suspension has the desired effect; students do not continue their poor behaviour and are not suspended again. We also know that the most positive learning outcomes occur when a child is at school. It is critical for a child's behavioural development that they are connected to a school and school community and learning as far as possible. I have already talked about behaviour schools so I will not spend a lot of time on that but that is why the Government will have established 20 suspension centres by 2007. These centres provide teachers in schools with increased levels of support in dealing with disruptive or violent students. They can also provide a constructive time-out where they learn to manage the behaviours that lead to the suspension.

I have always been concerned that a small minority of students who are suspended without having anything meaningful to do while they are suspended see it has some sort of a reward rather than an impost for bad behaviour. Suspension centres are important because they tell a student that their behaviour is such that they cannot remain in the school community for the period of suspension and rather than have that time at home, on the streets or doing what they like they have to go to a suspension centre. At the suspension centre will be specialists to assist the student to turn around their behaviour so that when their suspension is up they can go back into the school environment and hopefully not repeat their behaviour. This is a successful approach with nearly 90 per cent of students who attend a suspension centre not having another long suspension.

Truancy is an important issue because students need to be at school to learn. There is a range of measures that schools have at their disposal to address truancy issues. All schools monitor student attendance and regularly report on it. On an average school day approximately 90 per cent of secondary students and 94 per cent of primary students are present at school and less than 1 per cent of students actually truant. The number of absences has remained approximately the same since 1999. Nonetheless, while a very small percentage of students do truant we still need to make sure that we focus on that activity because students who truant are more likely to become victims of crime, to be exposed to undesirable influences and are less likely to do well at school.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What are the 9 per cent of high school students doing?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, that is non-attendance so that takes into account both authorised and non-authorised attendances.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So 9 per cent of high school students are authorised every day?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, that could be students doing traineeships. That includes both authorised and non-authorised. The rate of truancy is less than 1 per cent so you could assume from that that it would be about 9 per cent of students who are at any point in time not at school for authorised reasons. Each school has a full attendance policy which sets out clear expectations for regular student attendance and also the consequences of truancy. All schools monitor student attendance. They follow-up student absences and they regularly report on attendance in their annual report.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Will you update the Committee on initiatives that ensure New South Wales public schools have quality teachers? Are there any alternatives?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: This is an important question, first, because we know that the key impact on a student's learning outcomes is the quality of the teaching which is shown by numerous reports. Recently a study from the Australian National University [ANU] indicated that the quality of teachers over a period of time was poorer rather than better, so I will address some of those issues as well. This Government has allocated in this budget more than \$267 million for teacher quality and supply over the next four years. It wants the highest quality teachers in our New South Wales government schools and that is why government schoolteachers are the highest paid public school classroom teachers in the country.

In relation to the ANU study, I point out that the use of the university admission index is a more timely measure of an individual's ability to undertake a course of initial teacher education than a test that was held several years previously, which is the way it measures the quality of people going into teaching. If one looks at figures supplied by the university admission centre students today must do far better in the Higher School Certificate today than 15 years ago in order to become a teacher. For example, in 1991 to embark on a Bachelor of Science and Diploma of Education course at Macquarie University a student needed a UAI equivalent of 67.7. In 2006 a student needs a UAI of 80.35 to undertake the same qualification. That is just one example of how it is tougher to qualify today as a teacher than in previous years.

There is a clear and direct relationship between the quality of teaching and student successful learning outcomes. One of the initiatives that this Government has taken to address quality teaching is the establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers which is a body that represents the professional interests of teachers and nurtures, supports and develops the ability of teachers. That means that all beginning teachers in New South Wales are now required to meet the standards of qualification and practise, and both the standards and the processes for meeting those standards are in place. In fact, the first group of teachers have been accredited by the Institute of Teachers. One of the standards, for example, relates to being able to demonstrate knowledge of and apply a range of literacy strategies to meet the needs of all students, including specific groups such as those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-English speaking backgrounds.

I have endorsed the graduate and professional competence standards for implementation in 2005. Recently I endorsed the professional accomplishment and leadership standards which are the

two next levels of standards for teachers in New South Wales. The Government also has a range of initiatives in place, such as the graduate recruitment program, which aims to recruit up to 1,000 of the best new graduates each year for appointment to government schools. The Government has teacher scholarships in place so that it supports teachers to particularly undertake teacher training in areas of teacher shortages. In 2006 the total number of scholarships being awarded each year increased from 200 to 230. There are up to 60 scholarships that are targeted for Aboriginal people.

The Government has a range of measures in place. It also has the \$5 million Teacher Mentor Program which aims to link outstanding experienced teachers to new recruits in schools, recognising that new teachers often need additional supports to be able to get on top of their teaching role. The program features 56 mentors who work with new permanent teachers in 80 schools and two teacher mentors working with new temporary teachers in 10 schools. The Government takes very seriously its role in making sure that it supports quality teaching and it continues to enhance the quality of teachers in New South Wales.

CHAIR: I note in the budget papers in regard to the NSW Institute of Teachers that 10,500 teachers have been accredited. Are those teachers from both government and non-government schools?

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt: They are from both government and non-government schools. I have not got a split up but I am sure I can provide that.

CHAIR: Will you take that question on notice?

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt: Yes.

CHAIR: Earlier you referred to the former Minister for Education, Science and Training federally, Dr Brendan Nelson, who promoted value documents. What is the current position with the State Department of Education and Training?

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt: It is something that the Government takes very seriously. The Federal Government and the Federal Minister is still committed to promoting values across education. I am sometimes troubled nonetheless that some of the comments we hear from our Federal counterparts indicate that while they have a commitment to values in education, that in some way government schools are lacking in imparting values education to their students. I have to say, that in my experience nothing could be further from the truth. I think that one of the reasons why this State has, on the whole, a very tolerant and supportive community in New South Wales is because of the work that our teachers are doing every day of the week in our classrooms. At many schools I visit there is a broad mix of students who come from a range of different backgrounds. We do not see the sort of issues that we often hear reported about in schools overseas but you see students getting on well together, with an understanding of each other's different backgrounds and also understanding that they have much more in common than what divides them.

So values are taught in our classrooms every day. This year the Government also introduced its Respect and Responsibility plans, to further develop a culture of shared responsibility and mutual respect from an early age. Where launched the document back in 2004 "The Values in Public Schools", and this identified our nine core values—and they have not changed: integrity, excellence, respect, responsibility, co-operation, participation, care, fairness and democracy. We believe those values are broadly shared by the Australian community. You will often see when you visit schools that they have those values written up and displayed around the school or in the classrooms. I think schools have taken this focus on values to heart. I think teachers have appreciated the extra support, and I think it is something that schools are very much committed to.

CHAIR: We keep having a debate, in the media particularly, about the State education system and the original words of Sir Henry Parkes that it would be a free, compulsory and secular education. There is confusion over the word "secular". My understanding is that originally it meant nondenominational, that it did not mean nonreligious. Is that your understanding or how the department interprets that wording?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We would certainly make provision at government schools for students to participate in special religious education. There is time set aside, and various religious faiths come into schools and teach religious education during that time. There has been quite a debate of recent times, as you may well be aware, about whether we should have ethics being taught in our schools as a separate education, perhaps at the same time as some students are doing their special religious education. That is not an approach that the New South Wales Government has supported—one, because—and this was part of the agreement that was reached some time ago with a range of religious leaders—there would not be other subjects being provided at the time that students are participating in special religious education. They need to be able to do that without fear that they are missing out on something else that is being offered at school. So our concern would be that we would not be complying with that agreement, nor with the legislation, if we were to offer some sort of ethics-based course at the same time. But, I think more importantly—and it goes back to the previous question you asked, Chair—we really want to see values and ethics embedded in everything that happens in our schools. We do not believe that you can carve off ethics into a discrete subject and teach it in that way.

CHAIR: My next question relates to religious instruction. Some parents are a bit confused about the form that is being used. I am not sure whether it is a new form—the impression I get is that it is—asking people to answer a question on the issue of religious instruction. The question is, "What is the child's religion?" I understand that it was formerly worded more generally, so that the question was more along the lines of, "What is your Christian denomination?" So the parent would put Catholic, Baptist or Presbyterian. But, when they see the question, "What is your religion?" they are not sure whether to put Christian, Anglican or Catholic. I wonder whether it is the Board of Studies or what body that produces these questionnaires to be filled in parents. Does it come from any particular department? I am making the point whether the change in the question was deliberate in order to change the emphasis. I understand it is causing confusion in schools. If the schools put that question, they do not know what religious instruction class they go to, whether they are Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian or any of the other denominations. It needs to be Christian denomination, and then provision to have, for example, Catholic, and then they would put the name, and then below that "or other religion" and they can put Islam, Hindu or Buddhist.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We have introduced new enrolment forms at our schools, so it may well be it refers to that.

CHAIR: That is the form I was referring to.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Although they are not coming until full use until the start of next year. Can we follow that up and come back to you? It may well be that some further advice needs to go out to schools to make sure they collect the right information on enrolment so that they can have students attend the appropriate special religious education.

CHAIR: Yes. The form just needs, I think, to have provision for more detail to be entered by the parent. Another issue that has been raised regarding emphasis on values and so on is that some schools are appointing at the cost of the community, not the department, what they are loosely calling chaplains. Are you encouraging that development, or are you aware of that development in some suburbs and areas?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I have not come across any school that I know has appointed a chaplain. It may well be happening. Schools raise additional funds and will often use those for a whole range of purposes that the school community decides are appropriate and necessary. I am not aware of schools appointing chaplains, but there may well be some.

CHAIR: I think it is coming mainly through, again, the RI area, where the churches are actually combining to employ someone. As I said, chaplain is a loose term. It might be called full-time religious instruction.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: And they are actually undertaking religious instruction?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not aware of schools that have done that. But it may well be the case—I am sure it is the case if you are aware of it happening.

CHAIR: They are using qualified teachers, and I thought it might improve the quality of the RI as well as helping to support values and so on in the school, and they could even help with counselling if there is a problem with counselling and so on.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We have always taken the approach that it is up to the various religious bases themselves to determine how best to deliver the special religious education. Obviously, they need to meet the minimum requirements with regard to child protection concerns, but, beyond that, we have not sought to impose too much constraint on the provision of special religious education. But it may well be one way that works effectively for the schools if they can group together and provide someone who moves across a number of schools.

CHAIR: So there is no policy within your department or of yours to discourage or stop that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I think they are funded by the churches.

CHAIR: Yes. They are not funded by the schools. But they need the co-operation of the department because they are working within a school. I was just wanting to make sure there was a co-operative spirit on this matter operating between the department and the church groups. Another matter that has been coming up—and you would be aware of it—is debate about the record of a student's achievement—A, B, C, D and E. I think you are in constant debate about this with the New South Wales Teachers Federation.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: On that and many issues.

CHAIR: The federation issues directives that teachers not co-operate. I note lately that the New South Wales Principals Association seems to have been issuing a lot of statements on this issue opposing the department's policy. What is the current situation? Is it working, or are the teachers not completing the forms?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We have given a commitment that the new student reports will be introduced by the end of this year. So, at this stage, that is when we will have a clear understanding of the issues that you have raised. But I would like to go through why we have done this, and then talk a bit more about some of the issues you have raised. The commitment that the Government has given is that parents need clear and easy to understand information about how their child is progressing at school. A number of parents who have spoken to me have said they find the current reports they are getting from their school hard to understand and, perhaps more importantly, not giving them the sort of information that they feel they need to know whether their child is doing well or is doing poorly. It is really that issue that we are seeking to address.

CHAIR: I agree with that. I am not criticising your role in that.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Thank you. It is a good opportunity to put some information on the public record, because it has been a matter of great debate. We are also having to comply with the requirements that the Federal Government has put in place as part of the schools funding agreement, and we are also responding to some earlier work that we had done looking at how our student reports were structured. With the new reports, on which we have given a commitment that they will be introduced by the end of this year, we are looking at a child's overall achievement, using five grades of A through to E. I want to make absolutely clear that these are not grades that do not mean anything. These grades very clearly stand for something; so that A is outstanding, and E is limited. We have put out a little booklet to explain to parents very clearly what the gradings A through to E actually mean. There is quite a bit of detailed information. A is outstanding achievement, and we go into the detail of that; B is high achievement, and we go into the detail; C is sound achievement; D is basic achievement; and E is limited achievement. So people need to focus on the fact that it is not just an A that stands alone; that A is a shorthand way of describing to parents what we mean—high achievement. And similarly with B, C, D and E.

With regard to other aspects of the reports, we are providing modified reports for students who learn English as a second language, students who have special needs, students in kindergarten and students in years one and two. For example, with regard to students in years one and two we will use the five standards to report their performance in English and maths, but in other subject areas teachers can use a comment. They will not be restricted to the five standards in that subject areas outside maths and English. That is for students in years one and two only. The reports will make it easier to track the progress of students throughout their school life. They will provide consistency in reporting throughout New South Wales, which has been another big issue that parents have raised. When they move schools or when they move from primary to high school they have to get used to a new way of reporting. That can be very confusing for parents, and it can mean that they constantly have to readjust the information they are provided with about their child's school and their child's progress. As I said, the reports also comply with the Federal Government's legislative requirements. We are providing significant support to schools. We recognise that this is a big challenge for schools. The timeframe of having to implement it within one year is not a timeframe of this Government's making; it is a timeframe that has been imposed by the Federal Government. But we will meet that timeframe because we have given a commitment to the Federal Government that we will do that.

We are providing support, such as regional information sessions and workshops, web site information on the new reports including sample report formats, and we are developing computer software to assist schools to create the reports. There has been some excellent work done by the Board of Studies on work samples so that teachers can go onto a web site and have a look at the type of work that would be a year four student in maths that would be of the A through to E standard. Some great work has been done to further support consistency of teacher judgment. Support has been provided to parents, as I have mentioned. Training has been provided to schools. More than 4,354 principals and teachers attended the workshops that have been held right across New South Wales. As I said, I certainly accept that there is a challenge in implementing this. Change always brings concerns. We will work with all the stakeholders. We will work with the primary principals, the secondary principals and the Teachers Federation to try to address their concerns. But our commitment is to introduce these reports by the end of the year so that parents, when they get their child's report, can clearly see how their child is progressing.

CHAIR: Obviously, the New South Wales Teachers Federation is a recognised trade union that is involved with education. Is the New South Wales Principals Association recognised officially?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is not a trade union. It is a professional association.

CHAIR: It is recognised by—?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. It is on all of our committees, so the primary principals and secondary—

CHAIR: It seems more active, or it is making a lot more statements opposing Government policy recently. What has happened?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sure that it is—

Ms LEE RHIANNON: It has always done it. Just because it was not in the media does not mean that it was not active before.

CHAIR: I do not mean that it had not been active. It seems to be more active in opposing Government policies.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The A to E reporting and new student reports have caused a lot of debate. There has been lots of discussion. One of the more positive things I have had said to me is that teachers are sitting down and talking about how they communicate with parents. We are not asking teachers to change the way they teach. We are not asking teachers to change the way they assess students. All we are asking teachers to change is the way they report to parents. It is causing a great deal of discussion and debate in schools between teachers as to how they assess and whether there is some consistency with the way they assess. All of that is a good thing.

New Written Reports for Primary and Secondary School Students tabled.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Why has your Government twice failed to right the software for the A to E reporting?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, that is not right. We have always said that the software would be available at the start of term four for schools. Primary schools in particular will be the ones who will be more reliant on using the department-provided software, because many secondary schools already report using an A to E framework or similar. Working on the software and making sure that it can do what we need it to do has been a challenge, but we have given a commitment that it will be in schools at the start of term four.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Would you tell us what the cost has been so far?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: For the development of the software?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have those figures. Can we take that on notice?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: If A to E reporting is so important, why can you not get the software right?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have just explained, we have given a commitment that the software will be available to schools at the start of term four. The department has been working assiduously on developing the software, working with both primary and secondary principals to make sure that the software meets the needs of schools.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: If you will not have the reporting system until term four, how will teachers be trained in that software?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will ask the Director General to talk about the training that is being provided to teachers. Obviously, the software is only one part of that.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The first versions of the software were made available to the 100 schools that report in the first semester. It was used as a test bed to improve later versions of the software. Because the first round had been completed there is clearly no need for this first version of the software to remain. It would always be in the process of being improved, which is exactly what happened. We are looking to ensure that it is not a stand-alone version, but one that can be networked, which means that it would be easier to not only update the student enrolment and student information databases to get accuracy, but it would also link to the software that we already have available in the department, the smart pack that is used to assist in diagnostic undertakings within the classroom. All this means that we will have a very useful and very robust form of software available in time for the second semester reporting.

To assist in that there already have been a range of discussions with principals across the State, and those numbers will increase in terms of the look, feel and operation of the later version of the software. All of this is developmental. It builds on what was learned in the first round, and builds on the understanding and improvements we hear back from the schools. We see this improved form of software as being vastly superior to the first version. I would like to think that we would always continue to improve it. But we have to understand also that schools are not being mandated to apply this form of software. Many schools have chosen to use commercial software or even forms of software that they have developed in their own schools and have used for some period of time. We are making sure that there is consistency in terms of reporting and use of the assessment criteria.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How can you explain that non-government schools have been able to get their software up and running, their reporting up and running when the Government has failed to do so?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Clearly, non-government and government schools quite often (a) develop their own, (b) use commercial software, or (c) rely on systemic software where it is available. Systemic software is not available in any of the other systems. We are trying to use that as a means of support for the schools at which to use it. It is not being mandated, but we see this as a very useful adjunct to be able to increase the usability and the connectedness of the system. One of the good things about our public education system is that it has a very good Internet capability, and we are trying to see how that can be utilised to assist in the student reporting arrangements.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: At the beginning of today's session I asked you about the 10 blokes you have here supporting you, the bureaucrats who are here are on their huge salaries to support you and give you answers to questions when you have difficulty. Are you us telling us that you have no-one who is able to tell the Committee of the cost of the software, given that you have already commented that it is such an important issue and that it has been debated so much? Is there no-one here who is able to give us that answer?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is appalling. That is absolutely appalling.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: You could have asked her two days ago and given her notice.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Can I just point out that in relation to the issue of the A to E reports, the importance of providing clear information to parents is the important issue. The development of the software is just an enabling device to support schools to be able to provide that. I have already made it clear to you that the software will be in place in schools by the start of term IV. I think people would obviously know that we are not at that point yet, so we would not even be able to give you a full costing until we are at the point where we roll the software out. So we can only really provide you with information that you ask for that would be accurate until we are at the point where the software has been provided to all schools. I am happy to take the question on notice, but I just want to make clear that the importance of these new student reports does not lie in the provision of the software.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Perhaps if you will take that on notice and give us an update of how much you have spent so far, that would be useful. Minister, you have been talking at length about teachers having qualifications to teach various subjects and providing adequate support. I wonder if you could tell us please in relation to science and maths teachers how many teachers in secondary schools in New South Wales are teaching science or maths and are not qualified to teach science or maths?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will take that question on notice and provide that information to you. I take it that you are talking about teachers who are teaching science and maths, for which that is not their primary training. Is that the question you ask?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is right.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will take that on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is it possible to get a breakdown of that across regions where the teacher shortages are?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We can certainly look at that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We will certainly look at that.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, you recently announced proposals to increase science in primary schools. Can you advise how you propose that teachers who have not been trained in science will teach science in schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Well, they do that now.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Director General, have you got some further comments?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Only to say that in the primary school which you are referring to the education that they receive in universities in terms of the teaching covers the full key learning areas and, as a result of that, science is dealt with in terms of their teaching expertise.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The issue I actually announced was a review of the syllabus for primary school science.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: When providing information about science, perhaps you might be able to tell us now: Are there more teachers in the western area of Sydney than in any other area of New South Wales teaching science and/or maths without qualifications to teach either?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I said, we do not have that detail, so we would need to take it on notice and provide that information to you. I have said that we will provide the number of teachers who are teaching maths and science at the secondary level, for which that is not their primary training, and also if we can, we will provide a regional breakdown, so I assume that will cover that question.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, are you saying that you are unaware of how big this problem is in the high schools and that you cannot give us any indication of the extent of the problem?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Look, I do not have actual figures, but if you are talking about its being a huge problem, no, that is certainly not the case. I recall earlier this year when we were dealing with this issue that we found in fact there were only a small minority of teachers who work in the situation that you have referred to. Of course we know that maths and science are two areas of teacher shortages and so we have in place a range of strategies to address teacher shortages in those areas. For example, the teacher scholarships that I referred to in a previous answer is one way that we are trying to ensure that we get teachers to teach in those areas; other ways, as you have correctly identified, are to focus on developing students who have an interest and a love of science from a very early age, and that is one of the reasons why we are reviewing the primary syllabus. Certainly it is not my understanding that there is a major problem with regards to teachers teaching maths and science when it is not their primary area of study. But, as I said, we have to get that information for you.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, I noticed while you were trying to answer that question that you were provided with briefing notes by the Director General from one of the bureaucrats from the back and also Mr Dixon. Could you please table those briefing notes for us?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am happy to respond with further information, but it is my advice that we are not required to table our briefing material. In fact we have Crown Solicitor's advice on that point.

CHAIR: That is correct.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, you were talking before about principals and discussions with the Public Schools Principals Forum, et cetera. Do you think it is important to meet with school principals who want to discuss issues with you?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, of course I do.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: If that is the case, then, Minister, why did you fail to attend a prearranged meeting with the principals from the Public Schools Principals Forum in April and have your chief of staff advise the principals that meeting with the Minister is a privilege?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I meet regularly with the Primary Principals Association and the Secondary Principals Council. They are the two peak bodies that represent the interests of principals in New South Wales, and I meet with them on a regular basis. From time to time I have met with the Public Schools Principals Forum when they have had particular issues that they wanted to raise.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: And it is usual, then, to cancel meetings, even although they have been arranged to come in?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I would have to check what happened with regards to that April meeting. I am not sure of what the circumstances were, but, yes, from time to time Ministers do need to cancel meetings, as do other people because other commitments interfere or Parliament is sitting or something else occurs that requires your attention, but I am not sure about the April meeting.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I can provide you with some more information on that. I have a copy of an email that has been provided to me which comments on your staff member talking about its being a privilege to meet with the Minister. It reads as follows:

Jacinta/Michael

Cheryl and I were extremely disappointed with the conduct of yesterday's meeting.

This is from Brian Chudleigh, who is the deputy chairman of the Public Schools Principals Forum—

As you know, we both travelled for well over an hour from our respective schools only to discover that the minister was unavailable to meet with us. A phone call during the day to alert us to this situation would have been a basic courtesy—

CHAIR: Do you have permission to read the letter?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes, I do—

... and also given us the opportunity to decide whether or not to proceed with a meeting with yourself and Michael.

In retrospect the 'meeting' now appears to have been a planned 'ambush'. As Cheryl and I both indicated we totally reject Michael's allegations of breach of confidence and also of course the manner in which the issue was raised. What a pity the minister was not able to raise this matter with us herself.

We also find Michael's assertion that, "meeting with the minister is a privilege" an interesting interpretation of the minister's function and status. We had hoped that the meetings were of mutual benefit - in particular ensuring that the minister is informed of priorities at the 'school face'.

We do hope that the minister will see benefits in continuing to meet with us.

Should this be the case we would expect that future meetings will be initiated by your office at times when the minister is available and prepared to meet.

Minister, do you agree that it is a privilege to meet with the Minister?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Look, you must know that I am not surprised that you have chosen to take up the case of the Public Schools Principals Forum in the way that you have because I know that they regularly appear on platforms with you or your shadow Minister with regards to announcements of the Coalition. I just simply say that the Primary Principals Association is the body that I meet with on a regular basis that represents the interests of principals in New South Wales. The Public School Principals Forum I have met with from time to time, either when they have requested or I have requested it, on issues that they have wanted to raise, but the Primary Principals Association is the main vehicle by which I establish the interests and needs and issues that are impacting on primary school principals.

I am not sure about the April meeting. It may well be that I had some other urgent pressing business. That happens from time to time. These are in the nature of being a busy Minister. I meet with many, many, many principals and other stakeholder groups. I think you could ask any of the stakeholder groups in education, and they would attest to that fact. I meet with them both on a regular basis and also meet with them when requested if there are particular issues. I quite clearly have stakeholder groups that I see that represent the interests of particular stakeholders within the Education portfolio. The Primary Principals Association is one, as is the parents and citizens association, as is the Teachers Federation, as are the various representatives of parents in the non-government school sector. I meet with them all on a regular basis. The Public Schools Principals Forum is not one of those groups that represent principals across New South Wales. It is a group I have met with from time to time.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, are you going to chastise your staff member in terms of his attitude, or do you support that attitude?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not going to take your word for the attitude of my staff member.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Right. It is the word of those people.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I have not seen that letter before. You just read something out and you expect me to agree with it. I have never seen that letter; I do not know what meeting you are talking about. I find it extraordinary that you think it worthwhile to take up the valuable time of the estimates committee by representing the interests of a group that, as I said, had regularly appeared on platforms with your shadow Minister.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Chair, I am happy to table this email.

CHAIR: I will seek advice on that.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, you made it fairly clear about your attitude with the association.

CHAIR: Before you continue with that, I am awaiting a decision. The clerks are checking whether you can table the letter. You may ask another question.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, in regard to testing year 7 students, it has been shown that one in ten do not attain national literacy benchmarks and that one in four do not attain national numeracy benchmarks. Can you advise whether the results are the same for government and non-government schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The figures that you are referring to, I assume, are the regular reports of the basic skills tests in year 7, the English Language and Literacy Assessment [ELLA] and the State Numeracy Association Program [SNAP] tests. We publish an aggregate figure, we do not provide a figure for the non-government school sector and the government school sector.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Do you have that information?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am not sure, I can check. The basic skills test is not compulsory for non-government schools, so not all non-government schools take that basic skills test. When the national assessment program comes in, which will be in 2008, it will be compulsory that there be national testing in both year 7 and year 9, along with year 3 and year 5. That may well change things at that point. At the moment what we publish is an aggregate figure.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, in terms of the response to the question about the principals' groups, are you telling the Committee that if the Liberal-National Coalition consults with groups such as parents and citizens associations, that your attitude is negative and obstructive? Will you not extend the same privilege to them, perhaps after they have consulted us or shared a platform with us?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Not at all. I was making the point that the groups I meet with on a regular basis are the groups that are representative of the stakeholders in education, New South Wales wide. The Public Schools Principals Forum is not such a group, it represents some public school principals. The Primary Schools Principals Association is the major representative group of primary school principals in New South Wales. I simply made the point that I understood why you thought it was important to advocate on behalf of the Public Schools Principals Forum rather than the broader Primary Schools Principals' Association, because I know that you have shared a platform with the Public Schools Principals Forum, that has nothing to do with my attitude to whether I meet with groups or not. I meet regularly with the stakeholder groups in education. The groups I meet with that represent principals are the two major representative groups that have membership of principals right across New South Wales.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: The Coalition represents all groups in relation to education, not just some. Clearly you do not have the same view.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My question relates to the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board [VETAB]. What assessments have you undertaken on the progress of VETAB in registering training organisations in New South Wales?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: VETAB has three main functions: It registers training organisations, it accredits vocational courses, and it approves persons to provide courses for overseas students. The department has a memorandum of understanding with the Australian Council for Private Education and Training [ACPET] and meets regularly with that organisation to discuss matters of mutual interest that include members' concerns. At that forum, ACPET members can raise issues of concern. With regards to VETAB, the Department of Education and Training and VETAB and throughout the department provide the services to ACPET members along with other registered training organisations. They have established communication channels. VETAB has a strong focus on improving processes for all registered training organisations. VETAB's performance in meeting processing times for training provider applications is measured monthly. Customer service standards specify standard time frames and have been in place since 1 January 2005. VETAB strives to meet those standards in all areas of its work. The board of VETAB has commissioned a review to look at how VETAB can further improve its efficiency.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If I tell you that in Victoria and Queensland, private training organisations can be registered in two weeks, can you explain why it would take VETAB between 14 and 22 months in New South Wales for the same registration or scoping of new courses?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I cannot comment on the particular case that took 22 months but I would be happy to if details were provided. Certainly we take seriously the process of accreditation in New South Wales, the process of registration. We are interested in quality. We also have a lot more registered training organisations. As I said, there will be a review. The board has commissioned a review of VETAB to look at whether there can be further improvements in the way it operates.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, can you table information that tells us what those time frames, those standards, are at the moment?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes I can, because they have been in place since January 2005; they specify standard time frames.

[Short adjournment]

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, the Productivity Commission report on government services for this year highlights that the Government's funding of preschools in New South Wales is falling and, per child, it is the lowest level of funding of all the States. Given research on the importance of preschool education, how do you justify the declining funding for preschools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I point out by way of introduction that my colleague Reba Meagher, the Minister for Community Services, has primary responsibility for preschools in New South Wales. There are 100 Department of Education and Training preschools in New South Wales but the bulk of them are funded through the Department of Community Services. Ms Lee Rhiannon would be aware that the Government recently announced a plan to increase funding for Community Services preschools. Obviously that was done after the Productivity Commission report to which the honourable member referred.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would the Minister consider adopting the Council of Social Service of New South Wales recommendation for two free days per week of preschool for all children a year before they start school?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That question would be better directed to the Minister for Community Services. She made certain commitments on behalf of the Government about what the

Government's extra preschool funding commitment would provide with regard to universal access to preschool.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Moving on to the issue of school counsellors, I am aware that there is a shortage of counsellors in public schools. Can you outline what this Government is doing to increase the number of counsellors in our public schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: There are 790 counsellors located across the State. They have a specific role in providing psychological services, but they also contribute to student welfare through their membership of school-based voting support teams and student welfare teams. School counsellors are only one part of a very extensive network of support that is available for students. With regard to the training of school counsellors, it is a lengthy process. They need to be experienced teachers and possess a degree with a major in psychology and a post-graduate qualification in school counselling. But there are several pathways in school counselling.

The typical period to prepare a school counsellor is seven years, via the full-time teacher retraining program. To become a counsellor via the part-time teacher retraining program requires eight years. The department recently looked at some other initiatives to see whether it could have a different mix of qualifications with regard to school counsellors. The director general could provide some more information if the member is interested.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am happy for the Minister to take that question on notice as I have a lot of questions and I might run out of time. In relation to the school counsellor issue the Minister said that a counsellor had to be a schoolteacher. Has the Minister considered having counsellors that are not teachers? The Government could take a more innovative approach and bring youth workers and trained community counsellors into the school environment.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is precisely the initiative to which I referred earlier, so I will get the director general to talk about it. Community workers and youth workers are also involved in our schools in different capacities. They would not be called school counsellors but they are often there as support staff, funded through things such as the Priority Schools Funding Program. The director general can talk in more detail about what we are doing with school counsellors.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Clearly, the issue of double degrees and 7½ to eight years for the current pathways for school counsellors is not an attractor as much as we would like it to be. We certainly need adequate numbers of school counsellors in our schools. The initiative is look at other forms of qualifications, to trial them, and to see whether they work, be they youth workers or other people with a variety of qualifications who will be able to assist us in that area and ensure that we have a continuing supply of counsellors that also meets appropriate school settings. We will be looking at this issue because we have to be innovative in this regard.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, I recently read a report investigating a complaint against a school principal over the use of a time-out room. Can you provide a list of the public schools in New South Wales that use time-out rooms as part of their disciplinary mechanism?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: This was a special school—a school for students who have a disability. I can certainly get a list of schools that use time-out rooms but I imagine that it would be a list of our special schools in New South Wales. I am happy to provide that information to the honourable member.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are you saying that they are provided only at special schools? Do such rooms not exist at regular schools?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Specifically, I have seen a number of time-out rooms. In all the instances I have seen they have large perspex panels, so that the people in the time-out rooms can be observed at all times by staff. They serve quite a useful function. I have seen other settings in which students in mainstream schools can go to cool down and to consider their situation. But they do not have the same types of arrangements as formal time-out rooms in behaviour schools.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: My next question is in two parts as it sounds as though we have two types of time-out rooms—those in mainstream schools and those in special schools. Minister, have you conducted any assessment on the benefits or otherwise of time-out rooms as a disciplinary measure in schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The department has a policy on the use of time-out rooms in schools. As part of the review of the broader disciplinary policy, that policy is also being reviewed. I think the review is still under way. With regard to the particular incident to which the honourable member referred, the department is undertaking an investigation to ascertain what happened and whether it was done in accordance with the department's policies.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What is the arrangement with the time-out rooms? Is there only one student in a time-out room at a time?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, that is my understanding. I do not have the policy in front of me but I am happy to provide that to the honourable member. My understanding is that students are supposed to be in a situation where staff members can observe them. They are used as a way to manage inappropriate student behaviour.

CHAIR: Will you take on notice that part of the honourable member's question relating to procedures?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, to provide more detail about time-out procedures.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Did you say that you were conducting an inquiry into this specific complaint or overall into time-out rooms?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, into that specific complaint.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would it not be warranted to have a full inquiry into the merits or otherwise of time-out rooms, considering the fact that this complaint is not isolated?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is your understanding but it is not my understanding. As I said, the department will conduct an investigation into this complaint. At this stage I cannot comment on whether the allegation has grounds. I cannot comment on whether what is alleged actually happened. Clearly, if what comes out of the investigation in this individual complaint is that there are concerns about broader systemic issues the department will look at that. As I said, at the moment the department has a time-out policy and that is now being reviewed as part of the department's broader review of disciplinary policies.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, I understand that you have approved plans to amalgamate the National Art School and the University of New South Wales. You would be aware that the Friends of the National Art School are quite concerned about this. Do you guarantee the ongoing viability and independence of the National Art School?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I make it clear at this stage that nothing has been approved with regard to the National Art School. The Government has been going through an expression of interest process to see whether a university is interested in taking responsibility for the National Art School. The Government is currently in discussions with the University of New South Wales as part of that process. But there has been no final Government approval of a transfer to the University of New South Wales. The Government made certain commitments at the time that it went into this process, including that the integrity and unique nature of the National Art School be maintained. We continue to stand by those requirements.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What is the timeline on these discussions? When do you expect to have made a decision?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am awaiting a final report from the department on discussions and negotiations that are being held with the University of New South Wales. It is my expectation that there should be a decision in the near future, but I cannot give you an exact time frame.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: So you cannot say whether it will be before next month, before the end of the year, or after the election?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I certainly expect it before the end of the year.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are you talking with anybody from the University of New South Wales?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I said earlier, the Government sought expressions of interest from a number of metropolitan universities. A process was put in place to evaluate those expressions of interest. There was a strong probity framework. The Government made certain commitments as part of that, including that it would maintain the National Art School as a separate entity at its present site and that it would maintain the school's artistic philosophy and the Italian model of educational instruction. It is understood that those were fundamental to negotiations. The process has been that we are negotiating with the University of New South Wales as a result of those expressions of interest.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Does that mean that no other body expressed interest?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Macquarie University expressed interest originally and it was the preferred proponent. But it then pulled out of the process earlier this year.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: So it just leaves the University of New South Wales.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is exactly right. They were the only two bodies that put in expressions of interest.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Thank you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you please provide an overview of the new trade schools initiative?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Thank you, I can. As I mentioned in my opening comments, the Government has provided additional funding in this year's budget for trade schools. We will be establishing 10 trade schools across New South Wales over the next four years. We are investing \$18 million to create the 10 trade schools. These trade schools will have a focus on vocational education and training. They will be able to offer school-based apprenticeships and traineeships for higher school certificate students. It is part of the effort to tackle skills shortages. We recognise that skills shortages are confronting the whole of Australia not just New South Wales. They are obviously different from State to State, but we also recognise that there is a range of things that we can do at the State Government level to address the skills shortages in this State.

The trade schools provide a real opportunity for students who have a particular interest in the trade area to undertake the first year of their apprenticeship while they are still at school and to be able to leave school with the higher school certificate as well as the first year of an apprenticeship under their belt. It is a great opportunity for that group of students who have that level of interest and dedication to a trade career. Trade schools will provide industry-standard training in construction, electro technology, commercial cookery, automotive, metal, engineering and health care. They will be attached to existing high schools and TAFE colleges. Five will be attached to high schools and five will operate in conjunction with TAFE colleges. As I said, students will be able to undertake a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship. School-based apprentices will be registered to certificate level III apprenticeships. The students who successfully complete part of a trade course while at school will be given credit towards the early completion of their apprenticeship.

The first six trade schools that have been announced are at Colyton High School in Western Sydney, which is focusing on construction training because it already has a partnership with the Housing Industry Association, of which the Hon. Penny Sharpe will be familiar; Ballina High School on the North Coast, where the focus is going to be on the region's thriving hospitality industry and on construction; and at Campbelltown in south-western Sydney, which is a TAFE-school partnership that will be work with Campbelltown TAFE and four local high schools: Thomas Reddall High School,

Campbelltown Performing Arts High School, Eagle Vale High School and Mount Annan High School. The trade school at St George TAFE will focus on nursing and electro technology in partnership with local schools. Glendale TAFE in the Hunter region will focus on manufacturing, engineering and health care, in partnership with local high schools. Queanbeyan High School will also have a trade school that will focus on automotive and metals and engineering.

As I said, this is a great example of how the Government can work with local industry to provide opportunities for students. It is also part of what is happening under the COAG reforms—it is part of what the Government is doing to contribute to those reforms. I make the point that trade schools will be important in addressing skills shortages but they are certainly not in any way, shape or form the overall answer, and the Government has a range of other strategies in place to address the skills shortages.

CHAIR: Will those trade schools work in co-operation with the Commonwealth, which also planned to set up trade schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Commonwealth made a commitment to set up Australian technical colleges [ATC] but unfortunately it was so wedded to its philosophical industrial relations agenda that it did not put to work the very good proposals that were put forward by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to establish those trade schools in this State. Of course, we have now seen that many of the Australian technical colleges that the Commonwealth promised in New South Wales have not come to fruition. That is because the Commonwealth did not want to work with the very good proposals that we put forward. We have decided that we cannot wait for the Commonwealth Government and its ATCs to come to fruition. They may never happen in New South Wales. That is why we have set up our own trade schools. We are working with our public education system and our TAFEs and we know that they will deliver good results for students.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In light of the Minister's answer to the last two questions, I ask her to elucidate further on the strategies that the Government has for addressing skills shortages in New South Wales.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I said, the trade schools are an important part of what we are doing to address skills shortages but we certainly do not see in any way, shape or form that that is all we need to do. We would like to see a greater commitment from the Commonwealth Government with regard to skills shortages because it is certainly not something that can be addressed by State governments alone. We work in close co-operation with other State and Territory governments through meetings of the Vocational Education and Training Ministers. As I said, we are giving a high priority to addressing industry skills shortages. We know that in New South Wales they are impacting both in areas of traditional trades and in areas such as hairdressing, child care and hospitality.

We have seen a growth in traditional apprenticeships. This was reported in the "Getting It Right" report, which was published in October 2005. This report was commissioned by the Australian Industry Group, the Dusseldorf Skills Forum and Group Training Australia. It has pointed out the need to sustain this growth in order to be able to address the shortfall in skilled labour. For example, the Australian Industry Group report "World-class Skills for World-class Industries" found that almost 75 per cent of firms surveyed indicated that an inability to get the staff they needed and an inability to secure skilled staff was a barrier to their company's success over the next three years. The Government has worked with the Council of Australian Governments working group to look at ways that we can overcome the skills shortage.

In 2005 we had 18,519 people start apprenticeships. This is a significant increase of about 33 per cent in apprenticeship starts since 1995. We have also seen recent increases in the total number of apprentices training in New South Wales. As at 1 August 2006, the total number of apprentices in training had increased to 51,438, and that was up 4.3 per cent over 2005. We have announced a range of initiatives to be able to secure a skilled work force for New South Wales. We are spending more than \$7 million in extra funds for apprenticeship training and incentive programs. These new programs provide incentives for young people to take up apprenticeships, particularly providing pre-vocational training for people who are thinking about taking up an apprenticeship. That means that they get the opportunity to complete some of their formal training before they take up their apprenticeship. They get to see what it is like and to see whether it is an area they are interested in. It

also means that employers will get a would-be apprentice who is much more job ready than someone who has not done pre-vocational training.

We are also supporting about 5,000 apprentices who need to travel from regional and rural areas by doubling their accommodation allowance when they have to be away from home for at least two days. We are providing first- and second-year apprentices with a \$100 rebate on the cost of their vehicle registration and we have invested additional funding in group training to place 800 new apprentices with employers in small businesses and in regional and rural areas. Group training is a great way for employers to take on apprentices because it means that they get the benefit of having an apprentice without necessarily having to undertake all the responsibilities with regard to some of the requirements of an apprentice. It also means that if for some reason an apprentice cannot complete their apprenticeship with one employer, there is an opportunity for them to finish their apprenticeship with another employer. Group training companies have worked very well and that is why we are investing more resources in them.

The Government has also placed renewed emphasis on guidelines for training on its own construction projects. These guidelines require that building construction projects worth more than \$2.5 million must have 20 per cent of the trade work undertaken by apprentices. The Government has also introduced a new reporting system to better manage compliance with the policy. As at 28 August 2006, the Government and its agencies employed 1,462 apprentices. In all, 7,955 government employees are now involved in established apprenticeships and traineeships. Of course, there are our trade schools as well.

CHAIR: Is the Commonwealth contributing any money towards those trade schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is not contributing to our trade schools specifically, although obviously the Commonwealth provides funding for TAFEs so some of the trade schools that are operating through TAFE will take advantage of that. The Commonwealth Government has its own program of Australian technical colleges.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Will you talk about TAFE value-added to the New South Wales economy?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am very pleased to because recently a very innovative report was undertaken to look at TAFE and quantify its value. Anecdotally we all know that TAFE does a fantastic job. More and more in recent times when you talk to employees and people who train at TAFE you will hear very positive stories about the support that TAFE can provide in a work force development sense. But the Government was looking for something that could appropriately document and measure that. Recently I released the report, "The complete package: The value of TAFE NSW" at a business leaders' forum. The report was produced by the Allen Consulting Group and provides an independent and expert assessment of the economic of TAFE NSW.

The assessment includes both qualitative and quantitative analysis of both the direct and indirect impacts of TAFE NSW. A major strength of the report is that it adopts a best practise modelling methodology to assess the value of TAFE NSW. According to the Allen Consulting Group this report is the first of its kind in Australia, if not internationally. The key finding of the report is that TAFE NSW will contribute \$196 billion to the New South Wales economy over the next 20 years. The figures are derived from economically modelling that measures over time how the New South Wales economy would respond if the funding for TAFE was withdrawn and if that funding were provided to other training providers.

It is an important study because it actually measures the intrinsic value that TAFE is adding. The study assumes that the funding for training in New South Wales would continue along projected levels and that private providers would progressively fill the gap created by the absence of TAFE. This really is the best measure of the value of TAFE because it actually looks at the value that is lost and not recovered, despite ongoing funding being provided if that ongoing funding were to go to private providers. There is a range of reasons for that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How can you possibly measure that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The second finding is conclusive proof of the extent to which TAFE NSW training enhances industry productivity. The Allen Consulting Group estimates that without TAFE NSW the gross State product would decline 3.6 per cent by 2024. Output from trade industries would decline by more than \$2 billion and likewise the output of the service sector, transport, metal products and construction industries would decline by between \$500 million and \$1 billion each. The third major finding is that investment in TAFE generates a 640 per cent return on investment. Investments in TAFE NSW generate significant direct benefits for employees, industry and the communities in which it operates.

The Allen Consulting Group estimates that for each dollar invested in TAFE NSW it will generate benefits worth \$6.40. That is very important information. This Government and the Federal Government invest a lot of funding in TAFE, and we need to know that it is well invested and is actually getting the results that we expect. Clearly this evaluation shows that that is the case. It also shows that TAFE NSW is critical to regional economies. Regional economies benefit particularly from TAFE NSW compared with the financial services based economy of metropolitan Sydney. Productivity in regions such as the Hunter, Illawarra and the Riverina would decline more dramatically without the support of TAFE NSW.

The report describes TAFE in such a way that it can provide the complete package. It is the only training provider that has the resources, systems, record, reputation and breadth of capability to be able to meet the diverse requirements of individuals, employers, communities and regions. That is something for which the Government already has a feel. We know that in thin markets TAFE is the major training provider and that many regional communities depend upon TAFE to be able to provide the training that they need to keep their industries going. There are many examples of that in regional New South Wales. This report demonstrates that this Government's investment in TAFE is investment that is well worth the money and it is multiplying it many times over through that investment.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you update the Committee on the provision of computers and the use of technology in New South Wales Government schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Certainly this Government has had a strong commitment to improving computer and information technology in our schools. The commitment of the Government is demonstrated in a number of ways. It was the first Government to connect all schools up to the Internet something from which our schools continue to benefit. This Government has responded to the demands of the information age that we live in and has given a high priority to investing in technology ever since it was elected in 1995. The Government knows that computing skills are one of the basic essentials for the future success of children. Currently it is expected that when students leave schools they have very good computer literacy skills, and certainly New South Wales students can demonstrate that.

This Government has been providing computers to public schools since 1996. As part of this investment in continued access to state-of-the-art information technology this Government has committed \$295 million over four years to the Technology For Learning Program. By the end of this year the Government will have delivered a quarter of a million computers to New South Wales public schools over the past decade. That is equal on average to 68 new computers being delivered to our schools per day every day for the past 10 years. That extraordinary achievement continues to revolutionise the way our children learn at school. It is amazing now to visit kindergarten classes and see five year olds who are so comfortable with computers. It is a daily part of their learning now, and it is something that we build upon throughout all their years at schools.

Last year 39,000 computers were provided to New South Wales schools. That is the largest ever calendar year allocation of computers to schools by the Department of Education and Training. Another 20,000 computers will be delivered to schools this year. The Government is also constantly updating the technology. For example, the Government has committed \$262 million in recurrent funds over four years to broadband services that will increase the speed of access to the Internet for schools, TAFE colleges and other departmental facilities. This has also brought about a fundamental change in the delivery of education.

The Government has a pilot program in Western Sydney with seven schools networked. Ancient history is being delivered over a computer-based program so that students benefit from a

broader range of curriculum choices, and expertise that might be available in one school but not in another, than what they would otherwise be able to do. We know this is the way of the future and particularly the case in regional and rural areas where it is often difficult to get teachers in the town. This will never replace having teachers in front of the classroom but it does provide some real opportunities for interactive distance education revolutionising the way kids are learning particularly in the Western New South Wales region.

I want to touch on what the Government is doing in regard to its e-learning accounts, another area where there has been significant progress and something about which the Government is very proud. The Government has earmarked \$75 million in recurrent funding over four years to support the implementation of the e-learning service. The Government wants to enhance the security and services to students and staff by providing authenticated filtered use of email and Internet technology in schools and TAFE campuses. The Government has implemented a system that provides access to the Internet and individual email accounts for teachers and students within an authenticated environment.

Schools were advised of the new system at the start of this year. Parents have also been advised of the plan. The new system has been progressively rolled out to all schools since April 2006. The Government wants to make sure that the public education system in New South Wales has all the benefits of modern technology. It also recognises that it needs features in place to protect against the inappropriate use of Internet sites and also cyber bullying about which we have heard more and more. There is no doubt when our email educational system is complete it will be the largest of its kind in Australia. It is not a requirement by the department for teachers to use the email service should they choose not to do so, but there are enormous benefits for teachers and students in rolling out our e-learning accounts. The Government has recognised that all of this is a part of taking our schools into the twenty-first century.

The Hon. IAN WEST: In relation to the ongoing issue of maintenance, would you provide the Committee with an update on how you are addressing that never ending ongoing issue?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is exactly right; it is a never-ending, ongoing issue. There is no doubt that maintenance of our schools is a very important issue. Local school communities want their school environment improved. It can cause enormous angst for a local school and local school community if they feel an issue is not receiving proper attention. That is why the Government, as part of this budget, has invested an extra \$120 million, over four years, for maintenance of schools in New South Wales. This funding will go to addressing the backlog of maintenance issues. We have now got substantial funding. We have also put in place a range of contract and organisational reforms to ensure our schools have the best possible facilities and that those facilities are maintained to the highest standard. I would point out that, of course, with \$15 billion of built assets across 2,200 schools, maintenance will always be a challenge. It is a bit like painting the Harbour Bridge: you get to one end of it, and you have to start again.

We have spent \$1.5 billion on school maintenance since 1995. This year, the school maintenance budget is more than \$214 million. That includes the \$30 million that I just mentioned. As I said, that will go to address the backlog that has been reported by the New South Wales Auditor-General. That will bring the total State-funded school maintenance budget over the next four years to \$857 million. This extra funding will see the completion of a thousand outstanding maintenance projects every year—that is, painting classrooms, replacing carpets, repairing roofs, and upgrading stormwater pipes. I have said to the department that the particular focus of additional funding for maintenance has to be on painting, carpeting and also school playgrounds, because those are the issues that schools raise with me regularly. Of course, we have also put in place a range of reforms that came out of the task force review of maintenance that took place and is reflected in the new maintenance contracts, which commenced in July 2005.

CHAIR: Minister, I would like to follow up your report about the excellent work in regard to computers. There has been some controversy about the mandatory computing skills test introduced for year 10 students as part of their school certificate. It is a bit like the earlier question I asked about the new reporting method in that I gather the Teachers Federation was not very happy with this program coming in, in the mandatory way, in 2006. Has that issue been resolved, and is the program going ahead?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That issue has been resolved. As you have intimated, Chair, the Education Act provides for a mandatory computing skills test from 2006. This is the first year it has been mandatory. Schools have done this test previously, but this is the first year it has been mandatory. The award of the school certificate includes students sitting for the statewide test of computing skills.

The test was originally trialled by 1,500 students across 20 government and non-government schools in 2001, so it has been around for quite some time and schools have been dealing with it for quite a while. More than 164,000 students have taken part in the trial tests since 2001 but, as you have correctly indicated, some concerns were expressed earlier this year by the federation. Those issues have been resolved. We have had ongoing discussions, and the schools will be administering the test at the end of this year. Schools have the option of either doing the pen or paper test, or the online form. So schools can choose which one they want to do.

CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned a moment ago the problems with Internet bullying. What provision do you have now for filtering pornographic and other material coming into schools on the Internet? What protections do you have in place for schools and school libraries?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will have the director general respond to that question in more detail. However, as I mentioned, with the rollout of our e-learning accounts, we have been able to put in place even stronger controls. We had quite strong controls in place prior to that, but, because the e-learning accounts mean that access to the Internet has to occur within that authenticated environment, we have a much greater ability both to protect students and also to track what schools and Internet access users are actually doing. The director general could speak in more detail about Internet security.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I thank you for the opportunity, because this is a very important matter for us. We have such an investment in the Internet as a fundamental learning tool that we have to make sure we have a secure browsing environment for the school. The school environment goes from kindergarten right through to year 12, and we are making sure we can tailor the filtering that we need as circumstances change, because students in the TAFE environment will need different access to the Internet as compared to primary schools. So we are making sure that we can set the filtering requirements, which are the world's best filtering requirements. We use Unisys as the firm that is doing this for us. It is undertaking all of the activities associated with the rollout of the email environment as well, to make sure that we get the very best.

So, even when we come to this issue in say years 11 and 12, the question is: What form of access should they have to the Internet, as compared to say years 6 and 7? So we are varying that to make sure we have that tuned exactly right. To make sure it meets the school needs as well as paying an appropriate degree of care and attention to what the Internet can get access to, not only primary school teachers but second school teachers are assisting us in fine-tuning the filtering, making sure that we have got the very best system.

I would have to say that this is something to which we have to constantly pay attention. Because of the innovate means of the Internet, we have to be on our mark at all times. We must have the capacity to block sites immediately if they do get through the filtering systems. However, the filtering systems are particularly good. We rely upon them immensely. But we are trying to make sure that it is not a one size fits all; that we tailor it to individual educational settings.

CHAIR: Were you also able to monitor the problem with chat rooms? Are you able to filter out a chat room where adult paedophiles could pretend to be a child and communicate with children in the school?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: We are trying to make sure that that is filtered out. We are looking at a secure environment within our Internet system within the school education environment where students can talk to each other. But that is different from commercial chat room arrangements, which we see as inappropriate to be allowed access through our filters.

CHAIR: So it is only within the school setting?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: That is right.

CHAIR: The other problem that has been coming up is bullying over the mobile phone, or SMS bullying. There has been some suggestion that the school should confiscate mobile phones when the children arrive and return the phones when they leave, to avoid them using their phones during a school day. Has any consideration been given to that problem and how to solve it?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The department recognises that for many students having a mobile phone is both beneficial and often what their parents want so they are able to contact them, to know where they are. But we are also very conscious that mobile phones can be used inappropriately, and can be disruptive in a classroom if students do not turn them off. It has been made clear to schools that they need to develop a policy around the use of mobile phones with regard to student welfare and their policy documents. It really is up to the school to determine how best to manage that issue. Some schools, for example, require students to hand in their phones to the office when they get to school of a morning, and to pick them up of an afternoon. Some schools require students to turn off their mobile phones during classes. So schools have different arrangements. The Government is also introducing a mobile phone register, because we feel that will assist us in being able to track incidents of cyber bullying should they occur.

CHAIR: You mentioned earlier the successful TAFE programs and so on. There have been indications that many students cannot access TAFE. Do you have figures on how many students apply for but cannot access a TAFE course? In other words, are sufficient TAFE resources available to meet the needs of students in New South Wales?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I can see what figures we have available. I believe 513,000 students are enrolled in TAFE this year. If students are studying in an area of skills shortage, or undertaking apprenticeships in an area of skills shortage, we will always endeavour to make sure their needs are accommodated. It may be that sometimes a student cannot complete the type of training that the student wants at the local TAFE, and sometimes need to travel a bit further afield, but every effort is made to accommodate students, particularly in those skills shortage areas. With regard to the unmet demand, my understanding is that there has been a reduction as at March 2006 as measured by course standby lists. That is a reduction of 5.9 per cent on last year's figures. The figure was 10,968, but that takes many things into account, including students who indicate an interest in a course but end up doing something else.

CHAIR: They change their mind?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is exactly right.

CHAIR: It is a standby list?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is exactly right.

CHAIR: Within that list would be students who want to get in, but who cannot get in?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is still fairly high.

CHAIR: There has been a reduction. The Director General can add to this.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: One of the things we try to do is try to identify not only where the demand is, but if also to line them up to run these programs efficiently, which is also a requirement of the Federal Government and what we are looking at is classes of 15 or more. Quite often the term "thin market" is used: students who want to do a particular course are so thinly scattered that we have to rely upon them either coming to an area where it is delivered to get that number or delivery through OTEN, which is a distance vocational education and training service, to try to deliver that via distance education as well. We always look to try to find a means of getting their vocational education and training.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: A couple of other questions have occurred to me while other members have been asking questions. Are you aware that most government and non-government

schools do not have a key learning syllabus for information technology [IT] for all children who are doing year 10 computing exams this year?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: They do not have an IT syllabus?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Not all of them.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: You mean the physical document? Is that what you are talking about?

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Yes. I am informed that many schools have told their students to teach themselves by going to the Board of Studies web site and practising questions because that is the only way they will learn how to use the computers to take the test. What allowance have you made for students in that position with no formal computing lessons?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will ask John Bennett, the General Manager of the Board of Studies, who will be able to talk about the syllabus provision because that is the responsibility of the Board of Studies.

Mr BENNETT: All would have received syllabuses in computing studies. The new year 7 to 10 syllabuses have skills in ICT embedded within the curriculum. By studying their English, their maths, their science and so forth the students develop skills in computers. There are also mandatory courses in computers, so that all students who completed the year 7 to 10 curriculum will have had a good grounding in ICT, or at least through the provision of the curriculum.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Did the Government make submissions to the TAFE Futures inquiry?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, we did not make a submission as such. We facilitated the TAFE Futures inquiry to have access to TAFE colleges and TAFE teaching staff, but we did not formally make a submission, just as we did not formally make a submission to the Vinson inquiry. We took the same approach to both of those inquiries.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: A number of submissions to the inquiry have talked about fees being difficult for many students and increases in fees at TAFE. What is your Government doing to ensure that these remain affordable?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have said on many occasions, we have one of the most generous exemption packages for students of any State or Territory with regard to fees. We have also capped fees for apprentices and trainees, currently at \$370 per annum no matter what level of course qualification. We have a generous exemption policy in place.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: In February the COAG agreed to remove legislative regulatory and educational barriers by December 2006 so that school-based apprenticeships are nationally available as a pathway for school students where there is an industry demand. I note your Government has not been awarded a further new apprenticeship contract. Why was that contract lost?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: If only we knew, is all I can say. Despite the fact that we have entered into correspondence with the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, we have failed to get a satisfactory response to the failure to renew the contract for the Department of Education and Training New Apprenticeship Centre [DETNAAC]. I will provide a little bit of information about the DETNAAC because it is a very poor decision and a great shame that the Federal Government has failed to renew its contract, and has given it to a Victorian-based organisation. The contract to provide apprenticeship support in New South Wales has been given to a Victorian-based organisation. The Department of Education and Training New Apprenticeship Centre has successfully tendered for the program twice since 1998. It was the largest new apprenticeship centre provider in Australia. It provided support and advice to more than 37,000 employer clients and more than 100,000 apprentices and trainees. Recently I attended training awards for group training organisations, and the disappointment of the group training companies that the contract had not been renewed was profound. It is very unjustified.

The Howard Government claims that the decision was based on unit price rather than quality or other factors. Yet the request for tender left open the option to negotiate around price and no negotiation was undertaken before the decision was made. If the issue were price, why did the Commonwealth Government not come back to us and tell us that. We might have been able to negotiate around that. Certainly, the decision cannot have been based on quality of service. The DETNAC has consistently outperformed its competitors. It achieved an above average satisfaction rating from its clients, and it met the Department of Education, Science and Training's determined quality benchmarks in all of the regions that it operates.

In fact, the Department of Education and Training New Apprenticeship Centre exceeded the Commonwealth Government's quality benchmark of 96 per cent in every region. It achieved the benchmark for retention in every region. It doubled the number of apprentices and trainees with a disability, a stated area of commitment of the Commonwealth Government. It achieved a 93 per cent client satisfaction rate, which exceeded the national benchmark of 80 per cent in every region. It also exceeded the indigenous benchmark in every region. We fail to understand the decision of the Commonwealth Government.

As I have said, I have written to the Federal Minister. The DETNAC had extensive industry partnerships. It provided specialised support for 56 national employers. The decision of the Howard Government is unfair. Dedicated and qualified people who have worked for the DETNAC for the last 90 years—262 staff—have lost their jobs. They are now looking for alternative employment. It is incumbent on the Federal Government to make clear to the New South Wales Government why it did not renew the contract and why it has given the contract to a Victorian-based company. One of my concerns is that the Federal Government intimated that it was to do with the industrial relations agenda of the Federal Government. This was never a condition of the contract.

In other cases we have seen the Federal Government use its philosophical adherence to a particular industrial relations system to preclude New South Wales from operating the Federal Government's trade schools. In this instance it was never mentioned as part of the contract, but it has been offered verbally as a reason why the DETNAC was not renewed. It is a very disappointing decision and shows that the Federal Government is not serious about addressing the skills shortage. It is prepared to take philosophical decisions over what is in the best interests of the people of New South Wales, and certainly the employers and the apprentices of New South Wales.

CHAIR: Is that the new Federal Minister?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No, it is Gary Hargraves, the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, not the new Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, the Jerrabomberra Primary School had 700 enrolments at May 2006 and 15 demountables. When it opened in 2002 it had six classrooms and around 200 students. Given that it anticipates 750 students next year, not including the impact of school closures in Canberra, are there any plans to fast-track permanent accommodation?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As you would be aware, we have a demountable replacement program where each year we fund the replacement of many demountables. With regards to Jerrabomberra, I would have to take that on notice and follow that up for the Committee.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Could you tell us, in terms of the Australian Capital Territory school closures, what has been the impact on local schools in the electorate of Monaro from the closure of Australian Capital Territory schools and which primary schools have had to take extra students as a result of those closures? Have extra teachers being employed or moved to that area?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The schools have not closed yet, so they have not had an impact yet, but we are monitoring the situation closely. As I have said on many occasions, our schools have the capacity to take extra students, but we will monitor the situation carefully.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, I actually grew up in Yass, and this is an issue of great anxiety to families surrounding the Australian Capital Territory. What do you think will be the outcome of the Australian Capital Territory Government's moves on this matter?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Well, I think you would have to really direct that question to the Australian Capital Territory Minister. I am certainly not aware of what they intend to ultimately do. My understanding is that they put in place a process and they would announce the final outcome of that process a bit closer towards the end of the year.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Have they approached you about turning New South Wales students away from Australian Capital Territory schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Australian Capital Territory Minister certainly wrote to me about the funding issues, but did not specifically say that they would turn New South Wales students away from Australian Capital Territory schools. Certainly, as I said, we will continue to closely monitor the situation and we will have a better idea when students formerly enrol, and that would be towards the end of this year.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How many students do you estimate are involved?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have figures. It is impossible to say. I do not believe that they have formally announced yet the final outcome of their reviews as to which schools are going to close.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Australian Capital Territory Government has figures on New South Wales students in their schools.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Oh yes, that is right.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you know how many students are involved?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: How many New South Wales students attend?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We could certainly get you those figures. Well, I think we could. We could get those figures, could we not?

Mr DIXON: We would have to ask the Australian Capital Territory.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is thousands, is it not?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: All I can say is that the best advice I have had from the department is that we believe that we will be able to satisfactorily meet the needs of any students who are currently in an Australian Capital Territory school, should they choose to come to a New South Wales school.

CHAIR: Will you take on notice then the number of New South Wales school students in the Australian Capital Territory, assuming that they will supply the information?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, I note in the budget there is no provision for a new primary school at Lake Cathie. Why is that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have said on many, many occasions, we will keep the situation under review at Lake Cathie. The department has land in the area to build a school, should it be necessary, but at the moment the department's best demographic advice is that a school in the area is not justified at this time and could adversely impact on the other surrounding schools. I know that it is an issue of great local interest and, as I said, we will continue to keep the situation under review.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Could you advise why Dorriggo High School does not attract funding under the Priority Schools Funding Program or the Country Areas Program?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I mean, both those programs have specific criteria. I can only assume that Dorriggo High School does not meet the criteria for those programs, but I am happy to provide some further advice to the Committee. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Thank you. Minister, the *Hornsby Advocate* on 24 August stated that, due to enrolments dropping at the Galston High School, the school has been forced to give up a demountable classroom that was used for an in-demand arts class. When will you admit that your rigid staffing formula acts to the detriment of students?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Well, our "rigid staffing formula" does not act to the detriment of students. In relation to a staffing formula, I note that even in the Opposition's commitments, it has also indicated that it would have to have a staffing formula. You simply cannot run 2,200 schools right across New South Wales without a staffing formula. Of course that means that somewhere you have to draw the line. Somewhere you have to say that once you fall below this number, you have an entitlement to certain sorts of resources. Now the department, with regard to demountables, does take a flexible view. There is a demountable review committee that can look at situations where, from the department's perspective, a school no longer has a need or an entitlement to a demountable, yet the school feels differently. There is a review process to be able to manage those situations.

But I just point out with regard to demountables that we do need to make sure that we have a steady supply of demountables ready for situations like, for example, what happened at Kelso last year when the fire burnt down the school. We had to be able to get an enormous number of demountables onto the one site in a very short time frame. So the department has to take a system-wide view of things, but that does not mean that there is not the opportunity for flexibility and for local needs to be addressed. I have seen on many occasions through the demountable review committee where decisions have been changed because further information comes to light or a school community has a very good case as to why they need to retain a demountable, even though the actual student numbers might not indicate that they are entitled to a demountable.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, can you tell the parents and students of the Endeavour Sports High School why it is that, after promises were made before the last election for the delivery of sports facilities to this specialist sports high school, the school still waits for basketball courts and other sporting facilities to reflect its status as a sports high school, and also why it has not had an adequate upgrade of its toilets and has an inadequate library facility?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: With regards to the Endeavour Sports High School, there have been some delays in implementing its capital upgrade because there were some local community and school concerns that needed to be taken into account as part of that process. That meant that getting the necessary approvals from council took a bit longer than was otherwise the case, but there is a capital upgrade program under way at that school.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you tell the parents and students of the GyMEA Bay Public School why there are no security fences, as promised, or an electrical upgrade to allow the school to function with the necessary technology?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sorry, what school was that? I missed that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The GyMEA Bay Public School.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: And what is the issue?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No security fences, which were promised, or an electrical upgrade to allow the school to function with the necessary technology.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I mentioned in my introductory comments, the Government has made an additional commitment of funding this year for security fences for schools in New South

Wales, but the provision of security fences is based on the security needs of the school. I am not sure what the situation is with regards to the Gynea Bay Public School, but I would be happy to come back to the Committee.

CHAIR: Will you take that on notice?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: With regard to the Lilli Pilli Public School, why, when it is about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2007, do they still have no idea when a school assembly hall will be forthcoming? Do you have any plans in that regard?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: No. I am not familiar with the circumstances of the Lily Pilli Public School and their assembly hall, but I am happy to take that on notice and provide some advice to the Committee.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: With regard to the Heathcote Public School, why is it that the State Labor Government has failed to upgrade the toilets and plumbing in the school; nor has it installed a covered outdoor learning area, or the requested airconditioning to classrooms, or an upgrade of the electricity supply to support airconditioning and technology?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I am sorry, what school was that?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Heathcote Public School.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Again, Chair, I have not got the details of the Heathcote Public School, but I am happy to take that on notice. But I would point out that the Government has provided record funding for capital improvements and for maintenance improvements this year. I have already provided some significant details to the Committee about the extra funding for maintenance—\$120 million over four years for school maintenance. That brings the total State expenditure to \$587 million over the next four years. We are also spending \$485.8 million for the construction and redevelopment of school facilities and major enhancements of information and communication technology in schools. Projects that will be undertaken as part of our minor capital works will include 43 toilet upgrades, 38 electrical upgrades, 18 canteen upgrades and 159 projects that improve access on school sites for students with special needs. So, this is a record capital works budget and maintenance budget this year. There are 2,200 schools and I do not have the detail of every single school.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As Wheeler Heights Public School has satisfied all the criteria for provision of a hall, can you explain when the school might expect to have the hall constructed? Why is it that you have not been able to do so to date?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I have already explained, the capital works budget for the department is a record budget this year. We have put in extra funding to be able to provide five new halls this year, but the issue always comes down to there being 2,200 schools; therefore, we prioritise our funding to meet the needs of schools that are most in demand. What is the population of the school that you referred to?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Wheeler Heights Public School?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. We prioritise all schools that have 500 or more students.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is 530 students.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Okay, that certainly falls within our prioritisation numbers. Therefore, I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You may recall that promises were made to Burraneer Bay Public School before the last election that it would be substantially upgraded. Why has the school had only minimum work done, with no new hall and no new toilets constructed? Parents from the

school state that they are angry, and ask in relation to the refurbishing of some classrooms into a library, and a half-refurbished classroom, how could that one building with some resurfacing possibly have cost \$2.6 million? The parents ask, "Why couldn't we have had a hall built first, which has always been our priority and now we are being told bad luck".

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: a previous Minister for Education and Training made a commitment to the school that \$2.5 million would be provided for capital works at the school. The Government has honoured that commitment. In fact, \$2.7 million has been allocated for stage one works at the school. In the preparation of a master plan during initial planning discussions with the school, all of the desired improvements were listed—and that is not surprising—and that included a hall. The detailed planning that was undertaken after that of individual projects to the value of \$2.5 million, which was our commitment, was chosen by the school.

The master plan listed everything the school wanted. The commitment was for \$2.5 million for the first stage. The advice I have received is that the projects were chosen to that value in conjunction with the school and a hall was not included because it was not identified as a priority over other improvements. The stage one works included a new administration and staff room building, the conversion of the existing staff room, staff study, stores and one classroom to a library, the conversion of administration spaces to a special programs room and new classroom, the refurbishment of the canteen and toilets, 10 car parking spaces and service bay for canteen delivery, landscaping and associated site works.

Those works were handed over to the school in July this year. I am advised that a further stage has been identified by the department. It includes the provision of a hall, a covered outdoor learning area and additional car parking. That will be considered as part of future budgets.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Funding has been fully spent for the work to date?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: There is no further funding allocation at this stage?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right.

CHAIR: We will move to questions by Ms Lee Rhiannon.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Minister, you would be aware that Professor Tony Vinson called for \$180 million over two years for maintenance. You have announced \$120 million over four years for school maintenance. Why have you not budgeted for the full amount that was suggested and was originally noted by Professor Vinson?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As I indicated, the funding provided by the Government is to address the maintenance backlog, as identified by the Auditor-General. The most recent figure of the Auditor-General was in the order of about \$116 million. Therefore, the Government has provided \$120 million over four years to address the backlog.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You do not accept Professor Vinson's assertion that \$180 million is needed, and needed quite urgently, for repairs to be undertaken in the next two years?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: That is right. We have provided funding on the maintenance backlog that has been identified by the Auditor-General.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What is the rate this year at which schools are having solar facilities installed under the Solar in Schools Program?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have any information. I will take that on notice.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I have a few questions about that program, so I will put them all to you together. What is the percentage of green electricity that schools are using?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Individual schools, or across the system as a whole?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Both.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The director general can respond to that.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: At this time, depending on the electricity company that has the contract with the school, that can vary from zero to quite a few percentage points in terms of sourcing green power. It is something we will look at in the future to determine the capacity to aggregate the purchasing capacity across schools for their power bills so we can negotiate potentially with a single provider and in so doing ask for an increase in the renewable energy sources.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You are looking to expand it?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: We are certainly looking to expand it. We have to do that via an aggregated purchasing arrangement.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I understand that there is a role here for the Department of Commerce. When will that department develop contracts providing for the school communities to choose greater percentages of green energy?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: As I pointed out, by far the most efficient purchasing method would be to aggregate rather than disaggregate the purchasing power around power; and that is what we will seek. We have already had initial discussions with the Department of Commerce around doing the audit of existing purchasing arrangements and power consumption arrangements. This will include TAFE, so as to try to aggregate that into a single contract. That single contract will have by far the greater purchasing power, rather than necessarily having a disaggregated approach to green power and alternative power.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When you are talking about aggregating, are you talking about aggregating across a whole area? The contract is starting to sound very big.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How big will it be?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Basically we are advised that if we can make it statewide, the purchasing power is significantly enhanced, the cost to schools will be reduced and the capacity to leverage green energy and alternative energy sources would be substantially increased. The larger the contractor, the better that would be.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I can certainly see how it would be a better deal if it goes to that level. Your language suggested you are in the early stages of negotiating.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When things are bigger they take longer. Do you have a time line of how long this will take?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: The first step is to work with the Department of Commerce around an audit of our current power consumption, and that covers offices, schools and TAFE arrangements. As soon as we have that we will know exactly in terms of power, where it is sourced from, who the purchasers are and the number of contracts and individual handling of accounts. One of the things we will be able to do is have a single account as opposed to the multiple accounts with multiple providers, provided the schools and TAFE colleges and ourselves have a disaggregated bill that can tell us who is consuming what at the same time. What they want is to have a school know what power it is consuming, because that is part of its budget. We have aggregated the purchasing, so we are getting our savings. We would like to see that returned to the schools, of course.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Some schools would be taking green power already?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Some schools do because that is the nature of the companies that they purchase power from. Some power companies have a certain percentage of green power, as you are aware, and others do not. However, a lot of this is just historical purchasing arrangements. We are looking to jump into the new power market and be able to use the purchasing power to get greater greenhouse benefits associated with that.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: When do you think you will get to that point?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: I would not like to tell you because we have not yet worked that through. The first step is to do the audit and, as a consequence of doing the audit, we will be able to understand how complex the contracting environment will be. I have had informal discussions about our intentions with a number of heads of energy companies, for example, George Maltabarow from EnergyAustralia. He said it would be highly desirable from an energy provider's point of view and that we could look to substantial savings in the consumption of power at the same time. We would be looking not only at the provision of energy saving methodologies but also how that could be built into the schools environment. So there is an educative program in it.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I look forward to hearing more about it. Minister, can you supply a list of all the State and Federal programs in schools for which a school-based application is required to receive funding?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I am sure we could do that. Are you talking about all State and Federal programs? Sometimes, in order to get learning assistance funds, schools need to be able to put in information that justifies how many students need the learning assistance. Are you talking about those sorts of programs as well?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: All those programs where they need to put in an application. I am trying to get a handle on that.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Okay.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can you indicate how many questions are required to be answered for each of these programs, and how much time it is estimated that each application would take?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: We are concerned about the amount of administration that some of these programs incur. For instance, we are particularly concerned about the increase in some of the Federal Government's requirements for reportage and applications. Recently I sent 450 pages to the head of the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training. They were the reporting requirements associated with the capped program that was mentioned earlier. That was a \$6.5 million program and 455 pages were required to report on it. So we are looking at a joint arrangement to try to reduce not only the application process but also the follow-up administrative associated with it. Too much time and effort are consumed in schools and in head office in the administration of some of these programs.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is exactly where my question was heading. Can you indicate why an application is even needed for each of these programs? Is that an assessment you have done or one that you would do? That is where I am going with this information.

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Yes. A lot of these programs are federally funded, either in part or in whole. The requirement to do individual funding is driven largely by Canberra. As I said, I have written to them and asked whether we could look at broadbanding some of the funding arrangements in these programs to reduce the administrative costs associated with them.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Obviously this will take a while if there is good intent to remove the need for so many applications. What steps have been taken, or are being taken, to reduce or preferably eliminate duplication between State and Federal programs?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: That was the purpose of my communication. I am pleased to say that just on the vocational education and training front I have received email correspondence from the

deputy head of the Department of Education, Science and Training in Canberra asking for a meeting to identify where it might be able to reduce its administrative and reporting load. So clearly it is having an impact. We are looking forward to sitting down with that department on a constructive basis as soon as possible.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: So you can obtain more information on that?

Mr CAPPIE-WOOD: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What numbers of students are receiving English as a second language [ESL]? First, what is the current ratio of ESL teachers to students?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The ESL program provides 876 specialist ESL teacher positions to support some 85,000 ESL students across 750 schools.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I understand that the number of students receiving English as a second language program support is declining, while the number of students from a non-English speaking background is increasing? Is that how you see it? What is the Government doing to respond to that?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: You are referring to the figures provided in what budget paper?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I am referring to page 7-23 in Volume 1 of Budget Paper No. 3.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The figures provided in the budget papers, which we are locating, would be based on the department's expectation of students needing ESL support. I will see whether the director general has more information on how that figure is arrived at. For primary schooling it has gone from 66,274 to 66,771, and for secondary schooling it has gone from 18,944 to 18,755. So those are fairly small declines. As I said, it would be based on the department's estimate of what is happening in those areas.

CHAIR: We will move now to questions from Government members.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, what activities are being undertaken to promote public education?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The director general has with him a whole series of booklets. I will not seek to table all of them, but they are just part of what the Government has in place to promote public education in New South Wales. We understand and respect the right of parents to choose the schooling for their children. However, we are also very proud of the achievements of our public schools and we are keen to promote those achievements. There is a co-ordinated plan to boost enrolments in government schools, which includes promoting the values of public education. We also assist individual schools to promote themselves within the community that they serve.

We have already discussed, in a couple of questions asked earlier by the chair, the promotion of the values of public education. We are also focusing on promoting to the broader community some of the benefits of Government initiatives that are in place, for example, the class-size reduction program. As I have already reported, that program is reducing class sizes in the early years. We also introduced the gifted and talented academic extension program to comprehensive secondary schools. An additional 21 preschools are now attached to primary schools and the new multi-campus colleges offer a broad range of curriculum.

In schools with multi-campus colleges we are seeing an increase in the number of students coming to government schools in order to complete their Higher School Certificate. We are promoting state-of-the-art technology that is available in government schools, we have increased the power for principals with regard to discipline, and we are taking action where students exhibit unacceptable behaviour. Earlier this year a statewide survey the Secondary Principals Council conducted a survey that showed that more than one-third of schools were reporting higher, or significantly higher, projected year 7 enrolments.

These projections were confirmed in the regions of northern Sydney, western Sydney and Sydney, which reported enrolment increases from around 400 to more than 700. For example, two western Sydney schools—Seven Hills High School and The Hills Sports High School—were reported as boosting their numbers by more than 40 per cent. Enrolments at Ku-ring-gai High School, in northern Sydney, were up by nearly 30 per cent. Of particular interest is the fact that there has been an increase in enrolments in the schools that have participated in the revitalisation of the inner Sydney program.

More than \$100 million has been spent on upgrading schools in inner Sydney including the Sydney Secondary College, Rose Bay Secondary College, Randwick High School, Tempy Languages High School, and Alexandria Park Community School. These schools have experienced an increase in enrolments of almost 28 per cent—again a significant growth. While promoting the benefits of public education is just part of the story of what is happening in these schools, some of it is also just local community knowledge about the great achievements being made by these schools. There is no doubt that the opportunity for the department to support schools in their school promotion efforts can help to increase enrolments and help the broader community understand the benefits of public education.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Minister, can you please provide the Committee with information on three of the key equity programs for New South Wales public schools: the Priority Schools Funding Program, the Priority Action Schools Program and Schools in Partnership?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. A number of questions that Committee members have asked have touched on some of these programs. I think it is important to have an understanding of the three programs and how they work together. The Government certainly recognises that there is an achievement gap between students in low socio-economic or socio-economically disadvantaged areas. I spoke earlier about the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. We are providing additional resources for government schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas to both reduce, but hopefully ultimately to eliminate, the achievement gap.

The Priority Schools Funding Program [PSFP] provides additional resources to 574 government schools. It serves students from communities with the greatest degree and concentrations of disadvantage. Its focus is to improve literacy, numeracy and the participation outcomes of students. The activities of the Priority Schools Funding Program include professional learning for teachers and community members, resource materials, research and the sharing of good practice in local networks of PSFP schools. The schools are supported by a range of regional people who give them help and advice. The total direct grants to PSFP schools in 2006 was \$20.2 million. The Government also provides funding for an additional 280 teaching programs in PSFP schools to support the initiatives.

In 2002 the Government announced an additional program, the Priority Action Schools Program. This provides an extra \$16.1 million to identified PSFP schools that have particularly high support needs. Some 74 New South Wales schools that are serving communities have additional support through the Priority Action Schools Program. The Priority Action Schools Program uses a range of innovative early intervention and prevention strategies. They are part of a plan that provides local solutions to issues that affect local schools and they use a multi-agency approach. Schools work with other agencies, such as the Department of Community Services, Health and Police to be able to develop a more automated and effective response to some of the issues that confront schools. They might be programs that support children in their transition to school. They might be programs that provide outreach activities for families who have extra support needs. They could be breakfast programs or homework centres. The range of the programs is quite broad. But it is all about trying to build both the school's and the individual's capacity to improve their learning outcomes.

The Government's ongoing commitment to the Priority Action Schools Program was announced last year. It was an important commitment because the program has been funded as a pilot so there was a lot of anxiety in the community, particularly in the schools that were beneficiaries of the program, to see the funding embedded in the recurrent budget of the department. The Government made that announcement last year. We have committed ongoing recurrent funding of \$16 million in 2005-06 and beyond to make sure that these communities are provided with these additional resources to be able to overcome the disadvantages they face.

As to the other program that you asked about, the Schools in Partnership Program, I have already provided some information to the Committee. It is about addressing the needs of Aboriginal students and making sure that Aboriginal students get the support they need to close the gap in their learning outcomes compared with non-Aboriginal students. Ten schools are already part of the partnership program this year and, as I indicated earlier, we have announced another 20 schools that will start as part of the program next year. The program is very much focused on trying to ensure that schools work with their local communities to develop the initiatives that they know will work to make a difference for their students. With the partnership program, schools have to set targets and they will be monitored on how effectively they reach those targets.

The Hon. IAN WEST: Will the Minister update the Committee on the progress of school security initiatives?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes. That issue was touched on previously with regard to a range of individual schools. The Government is very committed to continuing to put in place initiatives to improve the security of our schools. There is no doubt that if there is a fire at a school and students lose their work and teachers lose their teaching spaces it can have a devastating impact on the school community. What happened at Kelso last year—although it was not related to a security incident as such—demonstrates the devastation that can occur at the worst end of the spectrum, when a community loses its entire school because of a fire. There is no doubt that nothing is more important than the safety of teachers and students in our schools. We have allocated an estimated \$10.2 million for security fences this year. There is another \$5.5 million for security guards who patrol our schools. Since 1995 we have installed security fences at 422 schools, at a cost of more than \$42 million. This record includes progress towards the Government's 2003 commitment, when we said we would provide security fencing to 200 schools by 2007. That was at a cost of more than \$20 million.

In 2006-07 the Government announced that a further 68 schools will receive new fences, at a cost of approximately \$10.2 million. The many schools that will receive new fencing include Bomaderry High School, Glenroy Heights Public School, Padstow Park Public School, Panania Public School, Tempe Public School and Thirroul Public School. Schools that have been provided with security fencing have reported significant improvements, with a reduction in the incidence of break-and-enters and also vandalism. We know that much of the crime that occurs on school grounds is often opportunistic—people wander through and do things they should not. So a security fence provides an obvious level of added security but schools agree that it also improves the physical look of the schools.

Security fencing is really only effective if it is also part of an overall security plan. This may include security guard patrols, electronic surveillance, security alarms, lock-down devices that we have designed for computers and other equipment, or security grills on windows. Schools may have some or all of those initiatives, depending on the assessment of their security needs. We established the Safety and Security Directorate in 2002. These people have a very big job to do but they are getting outstanding results because we have seen a reduction in incidents such as vandalism and arson in our schools. For example, the installation of security fences in schools is proving highly successful, as I said, in deterring opportunistic crime. We have also contracted 24-hour mobile guard patrol services in identified high-risk areas and during holidays. This is working. A comparison of the December 2005 school holidays with the corresponding period in 2004 shows a 75 per cent reduction in fires inside school buildings. During the same period the incidence of vandalism was reduced by 25 per cent compared with the previous vacation period. That is the dividend of the Government's investment in school security: We have seen a reduction in fires by more than half.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will the Minister update the Committee on developments in teacher professional learning?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes, I certainly will. The Government has made a very clear commitment to teacher professional learning. We recognise that teachers need to be lifelong learners, and we must support teachers in their professional development. That is why we have invested significant additional funding in teacher professional development. The sorts of initiatives we are talking about have given schools greater local control over their professional development. We have been able to ensure through the Institute of Teachers that we are now accrediting professional development providers. We are making sure that the people who are providing the professional

development courses meet some standards and are accredited by the Institute of Teachers. We are committing \$36 million to teacher professional learning each year from 2004 to 2007.

Teacher professional learning is valued. As I said, it is recognised by the Government as a major contributing factor to improving learning outcomes for students. Both the increase in funding with regard to professional development and greater local school control over how that funding is used has been viewed overwhelmingly positively by principals. On many occasions they have raised with me their support for the way that we provide professional development. But we are also fully auditing it. We need to make sure that schools are using the money to improve school targets and to address priority areas—for example, literacy and numeracy, syllabus implementation, quality teaching, the use of information technology, and support for new scheme teachers. These are just a few areas of priority where the Government expects the professional development funding to be used to support teachers' professional development.

Professional learning programs include online support that is provided for more than 6,700 newly appointed teachers as well as their supervisors, mentors and principals in more than 2,000 schools in 2005-06. All 2,250 principals have been trained in the procedures to accredit new scheme teachers with the NSW Institute of Teachers. The Government is also mapping the professional learning for teachers against the professional teaching standards so the development of the standards has been a great tool for professional development because it outlines effectively what a teacher should know and be able to do and be accepted by the teaching profession.

There is a lifelong career map which is called the "Professional Learning Continuum" which outlines professional learning in government schools. It outlines the professional learning that is required for teachers, for aspiring school leaders and current school leaders. Of course we want people to be well trained and well developed in their job but the Government is looking to the future and wants to make sure that it equips them to do jobs of the future. It is developing from its current crop of teachers, people who are going to go on to be the school leaders.

For example, professional development is offered specifically to support teachers to implement and evaluate and report on the curriculum. In term two this year workshops were conducted by the Department of Education and Training in the key learning areas of English, Mathematics and Science and related areas that included gifted and talented initiatives and also school-based assessment and reporting. A lot is happening in our schools with regards to professional development.

Our leadership training is on track. Already 186 aspiring leaders have been mentored by 147 experienced principals in the Principal Preparation Program and 296 newly appointed principals have completed the Principal Induction Program. Many of the professional learning programs, such as the Principal Induction Program, are held during school holidays and are very highly evaluated and very welcomed by our principals and aspiring school leaders.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What would be impact be on the Department of Education and Training to the Opposition's commitment of 29,000 job cuts in the public sector?

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt: There is no doubt that it would have a serious impact on schools and education in New South Wales. It is impossible to see how the 29,000 job cuts can be effected—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Point of order: The point of order is in terms of relevance. I have no idea how this relates to the budget or to this department's projections. It is only hypothetical. The Committee has far more important questions in relation to students with disabilities and learning difficulties rather than going off on a propaganda exercise that is hypothetical. Please draw the Minister back.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Further to the point of order: This is completely relevant. There are many people who are employed by the Department of Education and Training who are not actually teachers in front-line services. It will have a huge impact on the way in which education is delivered in this State if 29,000 cuts are to occur. I also add, there has been a great degree of latitude in terms of what has been asked and the way in which the Minister has answered, and I believe it is entirely relevant to this Committee's examinations.

CHAIR: This morning in a budget estimates hearing this issue was canvassed with the Treasurer and was not ruled out of order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I might say, this issue precisely goes to the types of issues about which the Hon. Robyn Parker wants to continue questioning. Many of the support positions that the Opposition claimed it will reduce through this reduction of 29,000 public sector positions—this is the first time I have heard it referred to as a hypothetical number because it was certainly my understanding that this is the way that the Opposition is going to fund its range of commitments that it has already made. If it is in fact a hypothetical number—

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: That is not what I said—

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Then it leaves even more concern about how the Opposition plans to fund its election commitments. In relation to the education budget, the department has many support staff who are not in front-line teaching positions but are providing support and services to students with a disability, Aboriginal students and other students. They do the type of work that is often not immediately apparent but is critical to the education system functioning as effectively as it does. For example, in student welfare services staff are involved in special education, drug prevention programs, the healthy canteens initiative, child protection, boys education resources, special transport and living away from home allowance for students, none of which are front-line teacher positions. They are staff that will get caught up in the reduction of some 29,000 if that were to come to pass.

The teachers who write the tests, the teachers who do the assessments, the teachers who support the schools to administer the smart pack data so that the schools can get proper analysis of whether their students are doing better or worse—again they are not front-line teachers but are staff who would go if the Opposition had its way and were to cut 29,000 public servants. Teachers who are involved in professional development programs, all of which I went through in the earlier question I answered, people involved in running those programs and people who are involved in supporting schools to implement them would lose their job with the 29,000 cuts.

Staff who put together the maintenance programs, staff who work in the assets management unit and staff who liaise with schools about their capital works programs and maintenance needs will go with the 29,000 job cuts. I can only say that this would have a significant impact on schools in New South Wales and TAFE NSW. The staff that support information technology in schools are not front-line teachers but will go with jobs cuts of 29,000. It will have a huge impact in our schools if it were ever come to pass and they would not function in the way that they currently do. It will also have a huge impact on TAFE.

I point out that the Department of Education and Training already has one of the lowest ratios of corporate services to other staff in either the New South Wales Government sector or when compared with other State and Territory Education departments. The data from the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs told us that for out-of-school administrative costs New South Wales has the lowest expenditure on administration of all jurisdictions. So there is no fat in the department, it has the lowest expenditure on administration and the impact of the loss of 29,000 jobs and the share of the Department of Education and Training of that would be significant.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I have a question on behalf of parents of children with disabilities. What number of companies or individuals has contracts to deliver transport for students with disabilities from home to school and back in the calendar year 2005? What number of companies and individuals has contracts to deliver transport to such students in 2006?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I do not have the information on the number of companies but I will take that on notice and provide some further information for the Committee. Two thousand individual services, including more than 500 services where escorts are employed for students who need additional assistance, but I do not think that answers your question about the actual contracts as opposed to the number of services, so I will take that on notice.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: How many companies or individuals entered contracts for the delivery of disability transport services had their services discontinued during that period?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Have you received complaints from parents because of changed contracts and inadequate services in transport during 2006?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I think it is fair to say that the area of special transport is one where it can be very frustrating for parents. Often there is cause for parents to either contact the department or myself. To put it into perspective, the department provides free transport to some 9,000 students with a disability from home to school and back so it is a huge logistical exercise in which the department is involved. You have already been given the figures on the number of individual services. We spent \$52 million on the scheme in 2005-06—double the expenditure in 1995. So it is significant funding that the department invests in this area. But there is no doubt that it is an area where parents are under extreme pressure when they are caring for a child with a disability, and we need to be able to provide the service to parents as effectively as we can. That is why I have asked the department to have a look particularly at the area of respite, because that has been an area of difficulty, and to work with the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to see if we can improve how we provide support and services for students travelling from respite to school.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Minister, how can you justify the position that a number of those companies that were given contracts this year no longer provide additional staff on their buses or on their transport services for students with disabilities?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is my understanding that some services are contracted to provide the service without escorts and that some services are contracted to provide the service with escorts, depending on the needs of the students.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: Will you take the question on notice and provide some details on that breakdown, please?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Yes.

CHAIR: Committee members will put any further questions to the Minister on notice. That concludes the hearing. Minister, we thank you very much for your attendance and for your answers, and we thank your team from the department.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Committee members.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
