

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Friday, 7 September 2018

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

EDUCATION

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The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Lou Amato (Chair)

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. John Graham

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones (Deputy Chair)

Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile

The Hon. Mark Pearson

The Hon. Lynda Voltz

The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

Mr Rob Stokes, *Minister for Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into the Budget Estimates 2018-2019. Before I commence I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present. I welcome Minister Stokes and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education.

Before we commence I will make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing. So I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any message from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the website tomorrow. To aid the audibility of this hearing, I remind Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. In addition, several seats have been reserved near the loudspeakers for persons in the public gallery who have hearing difficulties. Finally, I ask everyone to please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. I also remind Ms Leslie Loble and Ms Georgina Harrison from the Department of Education that you do not need to be sworn as you have sworn an oath at an earlier budget estimates hearing.

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DAVID MURPHY, Executive Director, Corporate Governance and School Standards, NSW Education Standards Authority, sworn and examined

DAVID de CARVALHO, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, sworn and examined

MURAT DIZDAR, Deputy Secretary, School Operations and Performance, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARK SCOTT, Secretary, Department of Education, sworn and examined

PETER RIORDAN, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education, sworn and examined

ANTHONY MANNING, Chief Executive, School Infrastructure, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

GERARD GIESEKAM, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Education, sworn and examined

LESLIE LOBLE, Deputy Secretary External Affairs and Regulation, Department of Education, on former affirmation

GEORGINA HARRISSON, Deputy Secretary, Educational Services, Department of Education, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education open for examination. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, I will begin with questions from the Opposition. We will move to the Hon. Lynda Voltz.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, what is the utilisation rate at Birrong Boys High School?

Mr ROB STOKES: Birrong Boys is one of the schools that we have announced planning for an expansion, which I am very pleased about. In terms of the utilisation rate at present, I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What additional systems have you provided to help address underutilisation at Birrong Boys High, which is at 52 per cent?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is, as mentioned, one of the schools that we are looking at in terms of a potential upgrade. Where are you going with this line of questioning? Sorry, that is what I can say at this stage.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is easy. I am asking what additional assistance have you provided? He has got utilisation at 52 per cent. What have you provided him?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am puzzled at your line of questioning because there is additional capacity at that school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, that is right, it is underutilised, so what additional assistance have you provided to improve the utilisation at Birrong Boys High?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am certainly not proposing to direct parents as to where they can send their children. Obviously we embrace the idea that parents should have a choice obviously where there is capacity and certainly in accordance with enrolment policy and the catchment area of schools.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What about Riverstone High School, which is at 42.2 per cent. Have you given them any specific and additional assistance?

Mr ROB STOKES: The general comment I can make in relation to capacity issues around schools, as I mentioned, is we certainly do not make directions where parents must send their children to school. We recognise that choice is an important element of our educational system and it is enshrined in the Education Act. Obviously, where we have challenges in terms of enrolment growth we need to respond with infrastructure solutions. Where we have additional capacity, certainly where there might be surrounding schools where enrolment growth is strong, we will look to the enrolment policy to help to guide parent decision-making but also within the framework of recognising that parents have choice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: On that basis there are eight primary schools in the Seven Hills electorate that are at over 95 per cent capacity. Why is Toongabbie East Primary School at 20 per cent capacity?

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Mr ROB STOKES: I add further to my earlier answer that this is what school community planning is all about: recognising that schools work in concert with one another and where for a variety of reasons parents are choosing particular schools over other schools. That is why we plan for a series of schools in a community working together. Changes to enrolment policy that have already been referred to obviously will take some time to flow through. This is in relation to circumstances where parents are preferring to choose out-of-area enrolments for their children.

We have recently instituted a policy of ensuring that principals communicate with one another before out-of-area enrolments are taken to ensure that parents recognise that their local school offers excellent education with excellently trained teachers. But obviously this will take some time to flow through, part of the reason being that we need to recognise the fairness of ensuring that siblings have the same opportunity to attend the school that their brothers or sisters are already attending. Over time, a focused enrolment policy will ensure that we continue to rebalance where students are going. I say again, as an opening comment to that, we recognise that parents have choice and that is an important element of our education system. I am not sure if the secretary has more to add.

Mr SCOTT: I can add to that, Minister. Of course, we are looking closely at the schools around the Toongabbie school that you referenced. Part of the interesting briefing I received recently was that one of the schools there that is very large, Westmead Primary School, has had significant growth but it has not been driven by out-of-area placement, it has been driven by growth within that community without even a change in the mix of housing stock within the feed-in area of that school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Which is the point I started with—that there are eight schools within that electorate that are over capacity. Rather than going over what we have already said—

Mr SCOTT: No, I am giving you some factual context around that. I think it is quite interesting because the assumption seemed to suggest that there had been a movement of parents outside the school's zoned area.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: When was that suggested? There was never any suggestion. In fact, my question was that there are eight primary schools in Seven Hills that are at over 95 per cent capacity and Toongabbie East Public School is at 20 per cent capacity. So what exactly have you done to provide additional assistance to Toongabbie East Public School?

Mr SCOTT: What I was saying was that we continue to look closely at the enrolment patterns around that school. One of the things we are clearly doing is providing additional support to schools and school leaders under our school leadership plan. We have a director who is involved in working with the schools in that area. Under the initiatives the Government has launched in the last year or so, those directors have significantly fewer schools that they are looking after. They once looked after 34 schools—some looked after more than 40 schools—and now they look after, on average, 20 schools.

The director of that school—and Mr Dizdar can give us more detail on this—will be spending more time with the school leadership and the school principal. Of course that school will be seeking more enrolments. How do they more effectively engage with that community? How do we ensure that parents who have children in the feed area of the school go to that school and take a look at that school and exercise a judgement of that school before they look elsewhere? How is that school using its resource allocation funding to most effectively ensure that the teaching and learning needs of students are being met and that parents and school communities effectively understand the achievements of the school? I am not sure if Mr Dizdar wants to add to that?

Mr DIZDAR: The secretary has covered that strongly. The level of support is multifaceted, as the community would expect. We work strongly with each school leader and I can assure the community that that has been the case at Toongabbie East Public School. Having visited a number of those schools and worked with the Director, Educational Leadership [DEL], our first line of support is around the school's school improvement trajectory.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sorry, say that again.

Mr DIZDAR: The school's school improvement trajectory. Every public school has a public facing school plan. It is a three-year plan and it is the key driver in engaging community, staff and students for school improvement. We have certainly revisited that plan to see what support we could provide to strengthen its operations as it works to enhance—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What support did you identify?

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Mr DIZDAR: —the outcomes for students. Often it is the case in growing to know about how to best utilise the resource allocation that we provide to that site.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: At Toongabbie East did you do an assessment that looked at the resources?

Mr DIZDAR: We work daily through the Director, Education Leadership, with the principal and the entire executive and school community to keep—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many staff are there at Toongabbie East Public School?

Mr DIZDAR: —our support strong to that school and to keep building community confidence in the school. In terms of the number of staff, I would have to take that on notice. I do not have the exact figure in front of me. I am happy to provide that to the Committee. Toongabbie East is not unique. We are a large system of 2,200 schools. We work with all our schools to support their growth in students numbers, community confidence and execution as we best provide outcomes for the young learners we provide for each day.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So Toongabbie East is not unique. Can you tell me of another electorate where there are eight schools over-utilised and one school sitting at 20 per cent? Can you give me another example of where that is happening in such a tight geographical location?

Mr DIZDAR: What I mean by "not unique" is that across the 2,200 schools across the entire State we have schools whose enrolments will fluctuate, will grow and will decline for a variety of reasons. It is incumbent on us to support all of those schools and to support all of those eight leaders because it is an independent provision where it is not just strengthening one site; it is strengthening all of the eight sites that you are referring to.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What physical support have you given to Toongabbie East? You have spoken about it but you have not given me one example yet.

Mr DIZDAR: I was indicating the senior officer support that we have provided to the leader and the leadership team. I was also going to indicate to the Committee that we have a communications and engagement team that works with schools like Toongabbie East about how to best promote their fantastic education provision on a daily basis in a stronger fashion to their school community. That support is also available, along with significant support from our educational services division, whether it be in the area of literacy, numeracy or professional learning requirements for the staff in that school community—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, are you happy to table that new enrolment policy that you referred to earlier in your answer?

Mr ROB STOKES: Sure, I am happy to table documents relating to our enrolment policy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that. I want to ask about the consultancy spend by the Department of Education. How much did the Department of Education spend on external consultants in 2017?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think it was around \$5.6 million, as disclosed in the annual report. That represents, in a \$15.7 billion budget, about 0.03 per cent of the budget.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a very impressive answer, Minister. You have got it almost entirely correct. That was up significantly though. Maybe you or the secretary could tell us why it was up more than \$1 million from the year before?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, there are some consultancies there that I am really happy to talk to and they are spelt out in the annual report. If you have any questions on that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, they are all there: Deloitte, Ernst and Young, KPMG, McKinsey and Company and PwC.

Mr SCOTT: Shall we talk about what they are delivering?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The question is, how many consultants does more than \$5 million buy the Department of Education?

Mr SCOTT: Of course it varies—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Just give us a ballpark figure.

Mr SCOTT: Let me explain to you why it is a complex issue. Take that Deloitte report, for example—

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The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a very specific question, Mr Scott. If you want to take it on notice—

Mr SCOTT: I am trying to draw the distinction between consultancies—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand what you are trying to do.

Mr SCOTT: No, I am trying to draw the distinction between consultancies and consultants. You asked me about consultants; consultants come under consultancies. Take that Deloitte report, for example. That Deloitte report—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy for you to take your answer on notice.

Mr SCOTT: No, I have to have an answer for you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand that. I will take that on notice. Minister, I understand that there are about 90 people employed by the Department of Education Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. Do you believe that figure is about right?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer to the secretary for the precise number. I am not sure of that off the top of my head.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that sounds about right. I can get the precise number to you on notice, but it is over 90.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The specifics on notice would be helpful.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about one specific consultancy that caught my eye—the principal workload and time use study. It cost more than \$700,000. My question is: You have got more than 90 people in this particular directorate providing information and you have got senior education leaders right across the education system in the department and in schools, so why is the consultancy budget going up by such a large amount? Can we not do this work with the education workforce you have got?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will make a couple of preliminary comments and then I might refer to the secretary. Certainly in relation to consultancies my directions in relation to these matters is obviously that if the competency is in-house we will always prefer the considerable resources we have within one of the finest public education systems in the world. Nevertheless, in terms of looking at issues of workforce planning and, in particular, some of the concerns raised with us by the Secondary Principals Council and Primary Principals' Association in relation to workload issues, it is important that we also look outside of New South Wales to see world's best practice in other jurisdictions as well. Some of the work that is necessary is actually comparative work that looks outside the jurisdiction. Yes, there are superb resources—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What sort of message does it send to the senior educators in your department that you have rolled in all these consultants—and I ran through some of them before? Surely, particularly for something that really is asking principals how they are spending their time—this is not a bad report but it essentially says what principals have been saying to you, to us and to others for many years. Why can you not simply work with the educators that you have got?

Mr ROB STOKES: We can and we do. You referred to CC Consulting Services but a lot of the work it is doing does not relate to principal workload; it relates to a whole series of important initiatives for teaching, learning and pedagogical practices within schools. We use that evidence base to reflect on practice. In relation to principal workload, you mentioned that it was a good report and I agree with that. As a result, it was not just a consultancy that generated an output but also an outcome in terms of the school leadership package and some recommendations around extra support for principals to relieve them of some of the administrative burdens of running a school and running a school budget. There were lots of learnings out of the consultancy that was provided.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you seen the report—

Mr ROB STOKES: I will answer the question and then you can ask the next one.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I want to ask you this question—

Mr ROB STOKES: Are you satisfied with my answer? Would you like me to continue or do you want to ask another question?

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The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do not think you want to know my answer to that.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to keep answering.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I am comfortable that you have given us the direction you want to head in. Have you seen the Auditor-General's report to Parliament on procurement and reporting of consultancy services?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I have.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a reasonably damning report about where procurement is up to. The findings are that across the board agencies did not comply with the direction, compliance was challenging and agencies are under-reporting. Education had the single largest spend on a single business advisory service supplier in a single year, with \$96 million. It was not just on the podium but was a gold medal performance by Education—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In your opinion; not in the Auditor-General's opinion.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The highest spend in a single year was in Education. What was this report?

Mr ROB STOKES: A couple of things: There were four general areas of recommendation. It was not singling out education. It was actually broader in relation to the procurement process of Government.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree. It is—

Mr ROB STOKES: And there were a number of suggestions made about ways in which—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But education is singled out in—

Mr ROB STOKES: The particular consultancy you are referring to was a consultancy in, I think, 2011, 2012, from memory, in relation to an information technology [IT] product provided by a consultant called Accenture.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. You have announced a policy about principals' workload, a \$50 million policy to appoint business managers to take on bureaucratic load.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is not quite correct. It is \$50 million of flexible funding, which empowers principals to appoint business managers if they feel that that it is useful.

Mr ROB STOKES: How many schools have hired—

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I finish?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, how many schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will be brief.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let him answer the question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many schools—

Mr ROB STOKES: Councillor, my commitment to you is I will be clear and I will be brief, but I need to finish my sentence.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Your answer has to be relevant to the question. The question is how many schools have hired a business manager? That is the question.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: We can keep doing this, but I will continue to answer the question until I have completed it and then you can ask me a new question. The question you asked is—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: The question you asked contained an inaccuracy. I need to correct that inaccuracy because that is important for context.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have. You put that on the record. I accept your statement absolutely.

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Mr ROB STOKES: Terrific.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many schools have hired a business manager?

Mr ROB STOKES: I would take that on notice, and the reason, so I can provide context, is that of course it will depend on the size of the school as to whether they felt that they required a complete business manager or whether across a few campuses, it—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Give us a ballpark, though, Minister. How many schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will continue to provide this context. Some schools will employ a business manager across a single campus. Smaller schools may join their funding together because they do not require a business manager just for their single school. I will provide the exact number—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To that point, how many business managers have been employed, then?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide the exact answer on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is one of your signature policies. Surely you have a ballpark idea of how many business managers have been—

Mr ROB STOKES: I have just explained that it will depend on context. I am happy to refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: I was speaking to the Primary Principals Association yesterday about this. They are very grateful for this investment. But I made it very clear, it is almost precisely against the suggestion that you are making, Mr Graham. This money was provided with great flexibility. We said to principals, "You spend this money in the way that you want to spend it to best support your efforts to leave teaching and learning in schools," and what has been noteworthy for us is the different—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Scott, in this conversation did the number of business managers who have been employed come up? How many business managers?

Mr SCOTT: I discussed, yes, because in the conversation—I am happy to give you detail—it was the great diversity of responses that schools had made that I think was noteworthy. You have case studies of a number of smaller schools that have banded together to get a business manager or a large school that has one.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you cannot tell us the number, we might move on, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: But also there were other very significant—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I welcome you providing the number, but if you cannot provide the number today—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It was a very specific question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but I want to present the views of our principals because this money was for them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Take it on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, we want you to answer the questions that we are actually asking you, and the question was how many?

Mr SCOTT: We have taken that one on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, when will the New South Wales public school enrolment form be changed to allow parents to select ethics when enrolling their child?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are currently consulting on that with the special religious education consultative committee. I am not sure if the secretary has further evidence.

Mrs HARRISSON: We can—

The CHAIR: Time has expired.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: When? She can finish answering. That is all right. We will come back to it.

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Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Minister, you would have seen the articles in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday and today, and the quote by the Prime Minister. I am pretty sure you know him well, too, Scott Morrison. He stated:

We do not need 'gender whisperers' in our schools. Let kids be kids.

And there is a report in the previous day of this lady, who is called Elizabeth Riley. She is supposed to be a gender support expert and is going into State schools and apparently has been to a large number of State schools.

Training by independent experts in public and private schools under the guise of professional standards development has contributed to a surge in the number of children who say they are transgender ...

And this lady doing the training, supposedly a gender counsellor, Dr Elizabeth Riley, said she had advised 40 schools in the past three years, and that a number of the children believed they were transgender. I have never met this lady. Has she been given approval to conduct this training in public schools, apparently in 40 public schools in New South Wales in the past three years?

Mr ROB STOKES: Obviously, this is an area that is complex. It relates to children who, for a whole variety of reasons, are going through significant issues in their personal lives. I should indicate at the outset that there is no New South Wales program within public education that is sponsoring Dr Riley or any of her work and she is not, as I understand, working directly with children in any of our public schools. Rather, as part of the—as I understand—selection of professional development, we require robust professional development for our teacher workforce, and teachers, in terms of their professional development, are exercising their choice to receive some advice from Dr Riley in relation to identifying and supporting children who may have a range of anxieties or be confused about issues relating to gender.

I accept that these are difficult issues to manage and to understand, but I also accept that my primary responsibility is to ensure, firstly, that our teachers are well supported and well trained and, secondly, that our children have access to the support they require. Certainly, if there was any evidence that anyone was in schools proselytising a particular view in relation to these matters I would be concerned that that would be inappropriate. That is not the evidence that I am aware of. I would ask Mr Scott if he has any further details.

Mr SCOTT: No, I think the Minister covers it well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What is very concerning is that this year New South Wales hospitals have referred 74 children aged 6 to 10 to gender dysphoria clinics to help them in their transition. In 2015 there were only two. It looks to me as if this propaganda is having, I think, a negative impact on students and confusing students about their sexuality. They were not confused until they had this input.

Mr ROB STOKES: Reverend Nile, I note the link you are making. The challenge I have from my position is I have no evidence to correlate a link between a particular individual providing professional advice to teachers and that translating to children feeling a particular way about their identity. Just in terms of the correlation between the two, there is nothing—I have no evidence to suggest that there is a link in relation to any program running in New South Wales public schools because there are no programs running in public schools that would be proselytising this sort of view.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What is your explanation, then, for that increase? There were 74 children this year aged 6 to 16 and in 2013 there were two. Something is happening.

Mr ROB STOKES: I accept that there is the evidence you provide in relation to the rising numbers of children seeking these sorts of supports and transitioning. Nevertheless, I am not an expert in these matters so I am not qualified to provide an opinion as to why it is occurring. What I can say, in terms of the resourcing for schools: There are no programs running in New South Wales schools that are proselytising any of these sorts of views. But I will say that it is appropriate that we provide counselling support to students and also professional support to teachers to advise them how best to support children who might be going through a whole range of different anxieties or concerns. Schools are places of intellectual development, of physical development, but also of spiritual and emotional development. We need to recognise the central role of teachers and recognise that they have to work in workplaces that are incredibly complex, and support children with a whole range of different needs.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Leaving aside that particular person I quoted, Dr Elizabeth Riley, because of this situation have you sought any advice within your department from Western Sydney University Professor of Paediatrics Dr John Whitehall, who said, quoted in this article, "... there has been little research into

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the effects of transitioning on young children", and that the age people were allowed to start should be raised to 18. "What happens", he says, "when these vulnerable young people in the cold and lonely years of adulthood have left the arms of gender dysphoria experts when they felt that they had changed their sex?"

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Point of order: I appreciate the line of questioning from Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile but I am not sure that is a question for the Minister for Education and the Department of Education officials here. That seems to be much more related to Health questions and I ask that you rule that question out of order.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am asking: Has the Minister or anyone in his department sought advice from this professor, who is one of the experts on this problem of children transitioning?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The Minister before us is the Minister for Education.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Not the Minister for Health.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: No, but the children are in the schools and they are the ones that are affected.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: All children are in schools.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: To the point of order—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It is not happening in hospitals; it is happening in schools.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: To the point of order: If the Minister or the Department is happy to answer the question we can probably move on.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to provide an answer. I am aware of the work of this paediatrician. I have not sought specific advice from him. However, I refer to the secretary as to whether the Department of Education has.

Mr SCOTT: I cannot add to the Minister's comment. In the wellbeing division of the department we will have experts who will engage with experts in Health and Family and Community Services and other areas, but I cannot add specifically to the Minister's answer at this point.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Will you or the Minister have a meeting with Dr Whitehall and let him share his concerns with you so that you have it firsthand?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice. I will take advice from the department whether they have already met with him.

Mr ROB STOKES: I can offer further; if this gentleman would like to meet with me I would be more than happy to meet with him and hear the advice he has to offer.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for that. I will pass your comment on to him. Transgenderism, it is called. A lot of people say it is just a modern fad and it should be very carefully considered and controlled. One of the issues that concerned me, I read a report of a 15-year-old girl who thought she was a boy and then got approval from the courts to have her breasts removed. What will that girl do when she gets to 20, 25 and feels, "Actually, I am a girl"? Do you anticipate there may be some court cases of children, people, seeking damages?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Point of order—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Because of the advice they were given?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: There is no way that the Minister can offer a legal opinion on this scenario. It is well outside the realms of budget estimates for the Minister to be answering questions about medical procedures that are undertaken, and possible future court cases. I ask you to bring the member back to the questions.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: The question is based on what has happened to the girl in our State schools to get to that situation to want to remove her breasts.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Mr Chair, the Minister has already made it quite clear from the original questions that the member asked that there was no proselytising happening in the schools and the reports were not being undertaken. The member is now talking about a girl who has undertaken a medical procedure and future legal cases. I appreciate that the member may have questions but there is no way that this Minister can answer a

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question that asks whether there will be a future court case if a person who has had a medical procedure changes their mind. I would ask you to bring the member back to the relevant questions for this portfolio.

The CHAIR: On the point of order—

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It would be if she had that advice from a teacher in a New South Wales Government school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are just making things up now, Fred.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is where she is—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are just making things up now.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is where she learnt about it.

The CHAIR: On the point of order, the previous question by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, and the invitation by the Minister to meet with the professor, perhaps that line of questioning could also be raised with the professor and the Minister.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Minister, the basis of my concern is that 236 per cent increase. Something is happening and I believe it is quite damaging to the children. There is a problem. I am not trying to create a problem but there is a problem.

Mr ROB STOKES: Perhaps the best way I can answer this line of questioning is to point out that there is enormous complexity in our society that is reflected in our school communities. This means that our teachers—and this is across New South Wales public schools and also our partners in Catholic schools and independent schools; there is a lot of complexity in society, there is lot of anxiety, there is a lot of confusion—are at the front line of dealing with all these complexities. Teaching is fundamentally relational. Teachers are expected to do a huge amount of work, not just as leaders in teaching and learning but also as counsellors, and supporters. It is a difficult role and it points to the extraordinary work that our teaching workforce does and the extraordinary demands placed upon them.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: A follow-up question, because this involves the Department of Education, not the hospitals. Teachers are now being taught to spot potential transgender students in the classroom, with experts claiming that move has contributed to the 236 per cent surge in the number of children wanting to change sex in the past three years. That is happening in the schools in New South Wales. What are you doing to ensure teachers—is that their role: to spot potential transgender students in the classroom?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, it is not, and I do not concur with your characterisation that that is what is happening in schools. Rather, the characterisation of what I understand to be the support provided by counsellors in schools is to help teachers identify a range of issues of concern, issues that might be raising anxiety, concern and confusion in young people, and that is as it should be. There is a variety of issues. I would say it would be a tiny minority of students who would be going through those particular concerns. There are other concerns facing students on a day-to-day basis, whether it relates to challenges at home or challenges with friends, that teachers are trained to help to identify and help to support.

Yes, I accept there is a tiny minority of students who are questioning issues around their gender. But, again, that is a tiny minority. First, I think we need to do everything we can to support those students, but I also do not think it should be taken to suggest that this is a dominant issue of anxiety and concern among the students at our schools.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It is among the parents. That is the reason why I am raising these questions.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. But, again, I say when I am in schools—and I am in schools frequently—the issues of concern that students, teachers and parents are raising with me around anxiety are not specifically about that issue. That relates to a very small minority of students. By saying that, I am not downplaying for a moment the challenges that those students might face. It is just to say, in terms of the proportion of issues that are causing anxiety in society more generally and among students, age-old issues that have always been with us about problems at home or problems among friends would be far more common.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am pleased that the Government has removed the Safe Schools program from State schools, whereas in Victoria, as you know, it is now compulsory for every Victorian child in

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State schools. Is it possible, from what I have been saying and what we are seeing, for teachers without approval to be introducing or bringing some of that Safe Schools content into the classroom?

Mr ROB STOKES: It is not content that is in any way supported by the Department of Education. We have replaced Safe Schools with a much broader anti-bullying approach recognising that, yes, there are bullying issues in schools relating to issues of sexuality but there are again, as I mentioned, in terms of the weighting and the concerns around bullying, a range of reasons that have been with us since time immemorial to single out particular children for discriminatory treatment. The issue of bullying is far broader. We have a panel of world-leading experts to advise us on how to roll out this strategy and have a much broader, inclusive approach to support every child because every child at certain points may feel isolated or victimised and we need to support every single child. In relation to State school resources, they are not supported in any way by the New South Wales Department of Education. We have a far better resource.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for that. I appreciate your diligence in ensuring that happens. Have any departmental memos been circulated to teachers so that they understand what you are saying and the Government's policy, and so that they cannot say they did not know?

Mr SCOTT: There is clear advice about the new programs. Principals have been advised that the curriculum content that I think you are referring to is not to be used in schools.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am very pleased about the updated or upgraded anti-bullying program. I was bullied regularly at Mascot Public School, so I know all about bullying. I was quite a small, slim boy and the big boys would take advantage of me, push me around and threaten me. It was not teachers; it was other students.

Mr ROB STOKES: They would not be doing that anymore, Reverend Nile.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Can you update the Committee on the progress of the Department of Education's digital upgrade?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer that question to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: As far as Special Religious Education [SRE] is concerned?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: I may have to take that question on notice. Ms Harrison may be able to assist.

Ms HARRISSON: We continue to work with all our stakeholders around the provision of SRE within schools. However, I am not clear about the element to which you are referring.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You are not sure whether there is an impact on SRE?

Mr ROB STOKES: Which particular digital upgrade or what element?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In regard to religious education.

Mr ROB STOKES: As part of the review, recommendations were made in relation to providing access to curriculum content. If that is what you are referring to, we are working with the SRE providers to ensure that occurs.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: That is the point I was making. What is your plan to ensure that important information regarding parental choice in SRE, regardless of the family's faith, and Special Education in Ethics [SEE] is maintained?

Mr ROB STOKES: I understand. This continues on the line of questions pursued by the Hon. Lynda Voltz. We are working cooperatively with the providers of SRE and SEE in clarifying parental choice. The important thing, and one of the peculiarities of the New South Wales education system—I think it is a great peculiarity—is that it also reflects and embraces religious freedom and diversity in our society. It provides parents with a choice in special education in religious ethics or secular ethics. We are now consulting on the best way in which to do that. There may also be a way in which we can do that to reduce the administrative burden on schools in terms of the information collected. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I will continue with the line of questioning I was pursuing about when the ethics forms will be changed.

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Ms HARRISSON: As the Minister has already said, we are in consultation with stakeholders to review the enrolment process for Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics. The options for student participation in SRE and SEE vary from school to school. Specific advice about these options is always available to parents from their local school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But, Minister, you said in June that you support changing the enrolment form. It is now September. When will it be changed? Enrolments are happening now, or the process is being undertaken.

Mr ROB STOKES: First, I have met with ethics providers and also several of the leading scripture providers about this. We have consulted and we are continuing to consult. We want to ensure that we get broad agreement about the changes that are brought in. We also want to ensure that they work to ease administrative burdens on schools. One of the challenges we face is that, of course, not every school offers every different variety of SRE or SEE. We want a way in which to reflect the choices that are available. There is no point in consulting on choices that might not be available in a particular school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I do not understand why that is complex on an enrolment form. It is a simple question: Do you want your child to attend religious education classes if they are available or ethics classes if they are available?

Mr ROB STOKES: I started in the same position that you did, but you quickly realise it is complex when you recognise that there is a variety of different providers, and not every provider works in every school. There may also be changes in providers from year to year. Developing a standardised form can become very complex very quickly. The better approach is to consult broadly. Everyone is supportive of the concept of embracing the choice that is available while recognising that the choice will be different in different schools.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The forms already have the option for children to attend religious classes. It is not complex at the moment. I do not understand why it is more complex to add ethics classes to the forms.

Mr ROB STOKES: It is not, if the ethics classes are available. You must recognise—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Why is including "if available" a problem?

Mr ROB STOKES: These are the issues we are working through. Part of the reason is that there is an argument as to whether you require a specific enrolment form at all rather than have it generated at a school level—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You have already said that you support that.

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me finish—in relation to the offerings at a particular school. I am happy to get back to you about the work underway now. However, it is my intention to come out with a position as quickly as possible, but also to ensure that we have consulted widely and that there is broad agreement.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In June you said you support changing the enrolment form. Now you are saying that you will consult and then make a decision. Do you or do you not support changing the enrolment form?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Will it be changed for the next year?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is our intention.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: When will it be changed?

Mr ROB STOKES: When it is ready. We have already consulted—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Is this a question of how long is a piece of string? There must be a cut-off date—that is, the time by which schools need to start getting their enrolment forms ready and by which your consultations must end. What is that date?

Mr ROB STOKES: We will make sure it is done before that time.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is nice, but I would like to know when it is.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that question on notice.

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The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You have no idea?

Mr ROB STOKES: In terms of the final cut-off date for enrolment, I will provide that on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are undertaking to ensure that ethics classes and the options will be on those enrolment forms and that you still support that?

Mr ROB STOKES: My view has not changed.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You will undertake to ensure it is on—

Mr ROB STOKES: My view has not changed.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You will undertake to ensure that it will be on enrolment forms?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I am happy to make that commitment.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In mid-2017 there were 24,391 enrolments in support classes and schools for specific purposes. In your view, how many more schools for specific purposes are needed in New South Wales?

Mr ROB STOKES: Your colleague just referred to how long is a piece of string. It depends on the number of enrolments. My vision is to make public education as inclusive as possible, while recognising that that needs to be balanced against parental choice and respecting that choice. It must also recognise that there are some schools for specific purpose that have particular infrastructure that cannot feasibly be rolled out in every comprehensive school across the State, and hydrotherapy pools are a good example.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand. The department provides two training modules on disability standards that cover legislation on discrimination and teacher responsibilities. How many teachers have completed both modules?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to provide the precise number on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No worries. It was a very low number, but we would be interested to know how many have completed it.

Mr ROB STOKES: I agree with the premise of your question. This is an issue that was raised in the upper House inquiry into education for children with a disability. I have also spoken to the teacher education providers about their courses.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you can update us on that number. Is it compulsory for principals now to receive disability training? They are encouraged to do it; is it compulsory?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: All right—as surely it should be. If you could take that on notice as well.

Mr ROB STOKES: In principle, I agree. My only caution in saying that is principals have a lot of administrative tasks and duties. I would be very wary about adding to that burden.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When will the assisted transport review be completed?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will defer to the secretary.

Ms HARRISSON: Could you clarify which review you are referring to, please?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about the assisted transport review. Do you want to take that on notice if you are uncertain which review?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes. I would welcome clarity on the review you are seeking if there is a specific review you are seeking.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No worries. I might move on to this question. It is about the provision in schools for specific purposes [SSPs] about careers advice, counselling, physical education [PE], school laboratories and kitchens. Many of these things are not provided or they are provided to a very low level in those schools. In a comprehensive school they would be provided. Students have access to them there, but in these schools they are simply not provided under the funding formula. The department's argument is that every school

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is funded and resourced differently and they argue the case that the provision of support to students is different but substantively equal under the disability discrimination framework. How is that substantively equal when some kids in some schools are getting careers advice, getting physical education, getting counselling, school laboratories, kitchens, and some kids are not? Are you comfortable with this arrangement?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I accept the fundamental premise of your question. We accepted all the recommendations in relation to the upper House inquiry into the provision of education for students with a disability. We are working through that. That has some quite big resourcing implications for us. One of the reasons as to the differential you are pointing to is schools for specific purpose often have quite a small student body and so the funding reflects that. Of course, you are quite right: We also need to reflect that every student needs to, as far as possible, be given access to the same resources. That is why inclusive settings are to be preferred wherever that is a practical solution. We are also looking in terms of locating future schools for specific purpose—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept some of those complexities. I would simply say there is plenty of money around in the system at the moment so let us set that aside for the moment. But are you satisfied at the moment that this is legal under the department's responsibilities under disability discrimination? Some kids are getting these services; some kids are not. Arguably, the kids who need careers advice, PE and counselling the most are the ones who are not getting it. How is that legal? Have you satisfied yourself of the department's legal obligations in the twenty-first century to give these kids an equal chance?

Mr ROB STOKES: In terms of legal opinion, I had best take that on notice. But I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Thanks, Minister. I have spent a good deal of time in some of these SSPs. I was recently out at The Hills School, and Peter Gurrier-Jones runs an extraordinary school there. I encourage you to visit if you have not been there. He was recently nationally recognised for his leadership. I was struck visiting that school how much attention was paid to an issue like careers planning and finding the appropriate pathways for these students beyond school. They are intensely involved—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But, Mr Scott, do you concede these resources are not available? They are available under one funding model but not under the other—you concede that, do you not?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it is a different funding model but I would say that there is more intensive staff at an SSP.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, I accept that.

Mr SCOTT: If you look at the number of adults.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But no PE, no counselling, no—

Mr SCOTT: Except I would say to you that of course physical education and activity takes place in those schools.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Specific resources in the comprehensive systems but not here—how is that legal?

Mr SCOTT: Let us look at it in another way. As the Minister said, these are schools with small enrolments.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I accept some of those complexities.

Mr SCOTT: If I take you to a high school with 200 students they clearly have fewer staff than a high school with 1,800 students—self-evidently. Therefore, the professionals at that school with 200 high school students—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But there are not shared resources here; they are simply not getting this specialised assistance.

Mr SCOTT: They find a way of providing appropriate education and educational opportunities for these students. So I would say to you that, if you go to a school like The Hills, tremendous work is being done around the whole development of those children. Can I just complete—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that, Mr Scott. We are going to have to move on in light of the time. Minister, my question to you is: Would you be prepared to go away and reassure yourself that under

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the disability obligations of schools we are not massively exposed in the State of New South Wales for failing to deliver these services to these kids? Will you give us that assurance that you will seek that clarification from your department?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will obviously seek to provide answers to all the questions you ask. The secretary has already touched quite heavily on these issues but I am happy to provide further details on those.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, could you also take on notice whether the Assisted School Travel Program is under review at the moment?

Ms HARRISSON: There is work underway to ensure that the way we are delivering the assisted school transport scheme in part as an in-kind service with the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] is being consulted on at the Commonwealth level. But there is no Department of Education review into the assisted school transport scheme.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, in your capacity as Minister for Education you have promised to open 12 to 15 new schools each year. How many are expected to be completed in 2018?

Mr ROB STOKES: It is 15 now, is it? Okay.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You promised 12 to 15.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide precise numbers on notice, but since January last year I think we have had 13 new schools and major upgrades already. Work is to commence on 40 schools, major projects, this financial year out of a total portfolio of about 170-odd projects underfoot.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but how many new schools are expected to be finished in 2018?

Mr ROB STOKES: It takes longer than 12 months to build a school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, I know, but you promised to open 12 to 15. So how many are actually going to be open in 2018?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, let me be clear: As I have mentioned, there have been about 13 major projects completed so far.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But they are not new schools.

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am asking about new—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let him finish the answer.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is fine, but I am asking about new schools, not major projects.

Mr ROB STOKES: The first thing to say in relation to that is I will take one school currently underway, Manly Vale. That is an upgrade which involves 40 new classrooms. Forty new classrooms is itself larger than the average school in New South Wales. So let us be clear about the level of build that we are engaging in. The other thing I would say is: Yes, I am happy to say we have already finished 13 since I have come into office. They were schools that I would love to say I was responsible for funding and announcing in the first place but, in recognition of the fact that it takes a lot longer than a year to build a school, the schools that are commencing this year will take several years to build. On average, you have a planning process to go through, you have a procurement process to go through, then you have a construction and post-commissioning process to go through. That can take several years. But I am confident over the course of the trajectory over which that commitment was made that we are ahead of schedule in terms of delivering the 7,200 classrooms that will be required to cater for anticipated enrolments by 2031.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, according to the 2018-19 budget, the Department of Education is planning to procure an additional 520 demountable classrooms. Is that still the case?

Mr ROB STOKES: We will replace existing demountables with newer stock. Demountables are an important part of ensuring that we can cater for growing enrolments and fluctuating enrolments across the State, as every school system does across Australia.

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The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Mr Scott, is 520 demountable classrooms still the case?

Mr SCOTT: As the Minister said, we are preparing new demountables. We are discarding some old demountables, and we are using demountables in an innovative way.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is good.

Mr SCOTT: I point out the way we are using demountables at Ultimo Public School and Alexandria Park Community School. These are totally new demountable schools that pop up and help us as we are building new permanent accommodation. I would encourage you to go and visit them. They are wonderful facilities. Teachers and parents are very happy with them. Of course, we need flexibility—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is great, but my question is: The budget says that you are going to procure an additional 520 demountable classrooms, is that still the case? It is a pretty specific question.

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning runs school infrastructure and he is happy to take you through some of the details.

Mr MANNING: Yes, that is the case.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Thank you, Mr Manning.

Mr MANNING: The vast majority of those demountables are in support of capital projects, where we partially close schools down in order to rebuild them and need to temporarily house students and continue their education. Once that capital project is complete those demountables are no longer required.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Is the average cost of a demountable classroom \$131,000—a non-specialist demountable classroom?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If that is correct then it is \$682 million for those 520 demountables. Would you confirm that is correct?

Mr SCOTT: No. We will check the mathematics on that and come back to you on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Do you have a figure for how much you are going to spend—

Mr ROB STOKES: We have already said we will take it on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He has already said he will take it on notice, twice—two times. Two times he said he will take it on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is nice. I am asking him a new question. I would appreciate it if you would stop interrupting Opposition questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Two times he said that. He answered the question twice.

The CHAIR: Order! Order!

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you want to ask questions you know what you can do: You can ask them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He has answered it twice—two times.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What is the cost of demountables in the 2018-19 budget?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Where is that money coming from to purchase those demountables?

Mr SCOTT: As Mr Manning has already indicated, the utilisation of demountables—particularly the way we are doing it now—is facilitating the biggest capital works program that has ever been undertaken by any State or Territory government since Federation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Reopening schools that you closed, Lynda.

Mr SCOTT: So we are using these demountables as part of our school infrastructure plan to accommodate the students as we are building them new, permanent facilities.

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The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We have already had the example of Toongabbie East Public School, where you have 20 per cent utilisation. Down the road you have schools with 50 demountables on them. Would it not have been better to invest this money in bricks-and-mortar classrooms instead?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is precisely what we are doing in terms of putting capital investment into schools, neighbouring schools, which, for a variety of reasons—maybe it had historical selection of out-of-area enrolments; maybe it is because of a perception that that particular school provides some sort of additional advantage in getting into a selective school, for example—we are ensuring that our capital investment does not just focus on schools where we might have particularly high enrolments, but also surrounding schools, so we can manage that demand and make it very clear to parents that their local school provides the most proximate and best choice for a great public education.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many demountables have been newly placed on school sites since day one, term one of 2018?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide that on notice, but I will give you some examples. Rainbow Street Public School, Russell Lea Public School, Ultimo Public School, which the secretary has referred to—these are schools where there are considerable numbers of demountables, far in excess of what there were historically, because we are rebuilding those schools and we need to temporarily house the student body while the construction is under way.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many will be placed on schools by the end of term four 2018?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I can take that on notice, but—

The CHAIR: I am sorry, time has expired.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you, Minister. Knowing how alert you are to what is happening in the media, not only has the *Daily Telegraph* been running articles on certain subjects but the *Sydney Morning Herald* today, on the front page, has a heading, "Sydney's Empty Schools Revealed." The article states:

Recent Department of Education figures show there are 43 Sydney schools with a utilisation rate of 55 per cent or less, including more than a dozen high schools.

I know you are trying to build new schools, but what is your policy to try to fill those schools? They are there already.

Mr ROB STOKES: Part of this has always been the case. The reason is that we will build the permanent classrooms and have permanent schools but, of course, demographics will shift around those schools. So, even when you have a population increase, you might have a cohort of population increasing that is not of school age. So you may have a peak and trough in terms of enrolment, but you certainly would not respond to that by closing the school because that deprives you of flexibility into the future, at some points in the cycle.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am not advising that.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, and certainly we would not. But certainly at some point in the cycle enrolments are going to fluctuate but the permanent classrooms remain. That points to part of the utility of having the flexibility of being able to put modular buildings around the State to cater for temporary fluctuations in growth. When I say "temporary fluctuations", those fluctuations will ebb and flow over several years because kids will spend 13 years in a New South Wales public school. So there is considerable time when you will have fluctuating enrolments. Where there is a sustained increase in enrolment, and where the demographic data suggests that enrolments are going to drive further enrolment growth, obviously we will respond with building new permanent classrooms. But where there is a fluctuation which we know we are just going to have to weather, the capacity in a particular school may go down.

The other challenge that we are working with is in terms of preferences around enrolments. So we recognise that obviously parents have a role in choosing the school that is right for their child, but that has to be within the confines of the enrolment policy. Obviously, if we have a situation where parents are preferring to enrol their children at a particular school that might be outside of their enrolment area or their catchment area, we need to look at the reasons why that is occurring and make sure that our enrolment policy directs parents to make the best choices for them, and also reinforce the idea that every local public school is excellently equipped and excellently supported with well-trained teachers.

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One of the benefits of a public education system is the strength of the system as a whole—it is not the strength of any particular school, but the strength that we have of 170 years worth of experience that is collected across the State, and some incredible systemic advantages that independent schools simply cannot offer. Things like the Schools Spectacular, for example. You get that by being involved in your local public school. As to which school it is, it should not particularly matter.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Good. I am just wondering what your policy is where you have an area, such as Liverpool, with a large Coptic Orthodox population. There are no Coptic Orthodox scripture classes, where the parents would like to send their children, because they do not know how the system works. Is there any way in which the department could contact the head of that church—the bishop in charge of the Coptic church—saying, "Under our system it is legal for you to provide qualified scripture teachers who would be teaching the Coptic children about their religion."? Do you have some system where you could approach those providers?

Mr ROB STOKES: I see. It is fraught with challenge for the department to proactively seek out religious bodies and ask them to apply. I think it would work better in reverse. My encouragement would be, through my office, I would be more than happy to direct the bishop to the support he might require in terms of understanding how those procedures might best work. But I think for me to approach anyone would probably not be the appropriate way to proceed.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Okay.

Mr ROB STOKES: But I would be very happy, if I get an approach, to find those resources.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Again, in providing information to parents, you have mentioned the enrolment form, but there needs to be other information provided to parents regarding how the Special Religious Education or the Special Education in Ethics operate, so when they say they wish to make a choice they have an informed choice. Are you preparing, or have you prepared, any brochures that explain SRE and SEE—particularly SRE? That is my concern.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. I am aware of some great resources that are available. Ultimately, a lot of those decisions are, appropriately, matters for individual schools in relation to the distribution of particular literature. I hesitate about mandating any particular forms that should be distributed. This is an opportunity for the expressing of religious freedoms in schools. The moment in which the department starts to mandate what that looks like we start to limit it. So I think it is probably best for the providers themselves to engage in that process.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What training and resources have been made available to principals as they implement the outcomes of the review for what they do in 2019?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Ms Harrisson, do you—

Ms HARRISSON: All our principals will have received and engaged in the policy guidelines from the department around how to implement SRE in their schools. As the Minister has alluded to, a number of these decisions are made locally by our school principals, who will lead the engagement with community around the provision of SRE in their school and support parents in making those choices locally.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Under the department's policy concerning employment of teachers, will they be required—and I have not heard of anything being done by you so something may happen in the future—to sign any statement or commit to any values that may go against their personal, religious or cultural beliefs?

Mr ROB STOKES: No. There is a policy in relation to values of New South Wales public education that is part of the fabric of public education. These are values that are consistent with the general values of our society and our community relating to democracy, excellence and all the sorts of things that you would expect a public education system to be upholding. But we also recognise the importance of religious freedom and religious expression and we will meet all our legislative obligations in this regard. I am certainly not looking for more forms for teachers to fill out.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Good. Is any parental consent required for Christian groups in relation to voluntary student associations that meet in the lunchtime—for example, Inter-School Christian Fellowship [ISCF]?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that on notice.

UNCORRECTED

Mr SCOTT: I think it is the same for all religious groups that voluntarily meet, Mr Nile. There are not separate rules for Christian groups. Yes, they need parental consent and also that there is an adult from the school who is in attendance as well. These are longstanding policies and guidelines, and they apply to all religious groups.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In a similar way, is there any parental consent required for non-religious meetings—for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex [LGBTI] support groups?

Mr SCOTT: I am aware of the policy, as I have outlined, for religious groups. I am not sure if Mr Dizdar has anything further to add to that?

Mr DIZDAR: Reverend, any guest speaker or any activity that a student may engage in that is outside the classroom will require parental notification and permission.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: So that is the policy?

Mr DIZDAR: For any activity.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Good. Thank you. Under the controversial issues policy of the department, what is the definition of the word "proselytising" that is actually used in that document? It is a word that the department is using. What does it mean?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have a clear view but I think it is appropriate that I refer to the secretary. It may be a requirement that we seek some specific advice and get some technical advice for it.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. We will resort to the dictionary and come back to you on notice with that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It is mainly what you—the department—think it is, not the Oxford dictionary?

Mr SCOTT: No, no, we will come back on notice for you, Reverend Nile.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Finally, if a student wanted to invite a friend to a lunchtime ISCF group, would that be seen by the department as proselytising under that policy?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am prepared to offer a view there: No.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Thank you for coming, Minister, and departmental officers. I am just going to take you to a bit of an unexpected horizon. As you know, Mahatma Gandhi said that the measure of the civilisation of a society is how it treats its animals. I am ask: Considering that two-thirds of most children's meals have an animal product in it and with the growing concern for animal welfare and animal wellbeing—particularly farm animals—that we have seen in our society over time, have you, the secretary or your department turned your mind to a more robust or more ethical education of children about the source of animal products right from the rearing and housing through to transport, lairage and slaughter but a more honest and open understanding and education of that process for children because the industry, whether we agree or not, certainly goes to a lot of effort to keep it hidden—for example, a cow running along the beach and dancing as a dairy advertisement.

That is what is being communicated as opposed to bobby calves that are born and killed within 24 to 48 hours of birth. That whole reality—the story behind what children are consuming in the main—has your department turned its mind in terms of ethics or critical thinking to educating our children as to the truth of the story behind the carton of milk in the supermarket, et cetera?

Mr ROB STOKES: Firstly, I thank you for your question and for your reference to Mahatma Gandhi. I also note that when he was asked about what he thought of Western civilisation he said he thought it was a good idea. In relation to specific policy, the way I best answer that is that in the Australian curriculum it talks of sustainability as a cross-curricula area, and obviously intrinsic to the concept of sustainability are issues of resource use, where food comes, food waste and also wider ethical issues about treatment of living beings. Those ideas are consistent with the curriculum and, in terms of wise resource use, we also have a canteen policy in relation to healthy eating. There are several programs running in schools that I can get specifics on, either on notice or right now.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Do any of them deal particularly with the child understanding and learning what is the experience for the animal that is born to die for us to consume its products?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are all born to die. I did not say that frivolously.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: It is a fact.

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: It is a fact. I will either refer to the secretary or we might be able to provide some further details on notice. I think what you are asking is a reasonable thing for students to look at and it is certainly an interesting area of understanding the nature of the natural processes we rely on and rights of living beings more generally.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: I think the New York Department of Education in its curricula certainly looked at this issue and it actually is part of the critical-thinking aspect of the curricula. I suppose why I am raising it is that some of the outcomes and the understanding are that when children understand and appreciate the experience for another sentient being, because they are connected to it as well as because they are eating their products, it actually brings about an insight to what has been argued to lead to a more compassionate child, which certainly then goes to what Mahatma Gandhi is talking about: a more civilised society, where we are very aware of what our choices or my parents' choices are doing and how it is influencing my life and my connectedness to the living world.

Mr ROB STOKES: I think perhaps the best way I can also answer your question is to say that we have commissioned Professor Doctor Geoff Masters to do a curriculum review here in New South Wales—the first in 30 years. I would encourage you to write a submission to the review because I think the issues you raise are certainly consistent with the directions of the sorts of skills we are trying to inculcate in young people in terms of critical thinking, analysis, creativity and all those sorts of things, and a rights and freedoms focus in our curriculum.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Thank you for that.

The CHAIR: I call Mr Justin Field.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, thank you for being here today. Are you concerned about socio-economic skewing—I think it would be fair to describe it as—that is happening within the State's selective schools at the moment?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I think that is a fair concern to raise. There is data to indicate that there is such a skewing and that is why the department is currently undertaking a review to determine the best way to ensure that there are equal opportunities to access the State's selective or partially selective high schools. I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Field. Yes, it was one of the triggers for the review, frankly. As has been widely reported and is self-evident, there has emerged almost an industry around selective school entrance tests—a lot of coaching and publications and the like. That is not new. I suppose we were concerned that there were messages that were coming from that that parents needed to invest a lot of money in order for their children to be prepared to set the test. We do not want the test to reflect that and we do not want that to be the case.

Hence we are looking at the test and are looking at the test results. One of the reasons selective schools were established was to ensure that any student, no matter where they have come from or their socioeconomic background, had the opportunity to access that kind of education if they were qualified to do so. This review is underway. It is a review that looks at how the testing operates and what choices are made around the selection process and the offers to selective schools. They are quite discrete and that work is continuing now.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: One of the impacts that has been described in some of the public commentary is not only the socioeconomic skewing within the schools themselves but also the impact on surrounding non-selective schools. Their results are falling as students who may pass those tests are able to access selective schools. That would seem difficult to address with any sort of selective system. Is that something the review will look at: the impact the selective system is having on the rest of the public sector?

Mr SCOTT: There are a number of different things in play. We are looking at the selective school test and the entrance criteria. We are also reviewing our gifted and talented strategy because, going to your point, we need to recognise and understand that there are gifted and talented children in every school. Our teachers need to be appropriately trained and skilled in identifying those children and providing them with the absolute best opportunity for them to advance and progress. One of the things I would say about what the Minister mentioned—Geoff Masters' review of curriculum—is that if you also reference the latest Gonski report, that talks all about taking a child through a pathway of improvement no matter where they are. That often applies to our most gifted and talented children. Are we stretching them and demanding more from them and putting high expectations on them no matter what school they go to?

UNCORRECTED

I am aware of the criticism that some might make of students going to a selective school rather than their local school and the impact of that. There is no doubt that we have more selective schools in New South Wales than other States, but they also generate an inordinate amount of attention. I was told that the *Sydney Morning Herald* has already written 37 or 38 stories on selective schools this year alone. They generate a lot of attention. But they are only part of our offering for gifted and talented children. There are just as many gifted and talented children in regular schools and I would say that we have great examples of students in regular comprehensive local schools performing exceptionally well and comprehensive schools performing well. You do not need to go to a selective school in order to achieve outstanding result.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I do not doubt that. When will the review be completed?

Mr SCOTT: It will be completed this year.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you. There is one issue that I would like the Minister's view on. Application fees are being charged and other voluntary fees are being charged at selective schools. Clearly that is a barrier to certain families—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Field. Your time has expired. We will move to the Hon. John Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I am going to return to the subject of new schools and I am going to ask for your help. We covered this ground last year at estimates and it got slightly out of control. It was unedifying for everyone so I would like to ask for your help in dealing with this.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am now a little bit concerned.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You knew how many new schools had been opened last year but you were determined not to say it on the record. You had started down that path again this estimates, talking about "new and upgraded schools". That is not the question. I want to focus on new schools that have been opened this year and that you have attended as a Minister. I am about to ask you that. I will just say this: opening a new school is a big deal and turning up as the education Minister to open a new school is a big deal and is not the sort of thing you forget. Since we saw you a year ago, how many new schools have you attended and opened as the Minister for Education?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am going to do two things—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That was exactly my concern.

Mr ROB STOKES: I take it that this is what you do and I will do what I do. You are trying to pull context away from a particular issue to ask a specific question. I want to put the context back around my answer.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will give you a brief chance to give some context, provided you answer the question.

Mr ROB STOKES: With respect, I will answer the question the way I see fit. I will have to get the precise answer on notice; I do know that there have been 13 new schools and major upgrades during my tenure as Minister so far. The reason I focus on that is that what I am focused on is providing new classrooms across New South Wales. Kids attend school in classrooms. Classrooms are a consistent number. We have reduced classroom sizes under this Government—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand that background.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let him finish.

Mr ROB STOKES: We have 23 students on average per classroom. The most accurate figure I can provide you is not necessarily the number of schools because, as you would appreciate, schools are all different sizes. If I gave you a particular number of schools it would not really tell you anything. What you need to know is the number of classrooms and whether we are meeting the increasing enrolments. I can say that we are at a trajectory that is in advance of what is required over the next 15 years.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have put a lot of that on the public record and I would be happy for you to provide as much more of that on notice as you would like. But I would like to ask a simple question that I think the public has a right to know the answer to. How many new schools have you attended as Minister for Education and opened since we last saw you last year?

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: As I have answered—and I will stick by my answer—I will provide that answer on notice. Off the top of my head, there are 13 either brand new schools or significant upgrades.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is not the question. I have asked you to separate those two out.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will do that on notice. I cannot recall off the top of my head.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you recall attending any school openings since we saw you a year ago?

Mr ROB STOKES: Of course.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: New school openings?

Mr ROB STOKES: Of course.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Take us to those. Which do you remember?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I have answered your question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Which do you remember?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide further details on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Luckily the school infrastructure website is a lot more detailed than you are prepared to be on the record.

Mr ROB STOKES: On that, when your lot was last in government you did not have a school infrastructure website at all. You did not have a website where you published these details. We are very transparent. We have a massive building content across the State.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I invite you to be transparent on this subject.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have been Minister now for 18 months. On average it would take two to three and even more years to build a school.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that context, Minister.

Mr ROB STOKES: Of the schools that I have announced, obviously they have not been fully built yet.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand that. On the school infrastructure website it lists 14 sites that have been completed—14 new schools that have been opened. That is the department's own information on the web for the public to see.

Mr ROB STOKES: The majority of those would by nature—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They would have been completed in the past.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have already described that schools take two to three or even more years to complete. I have been the Minister for 18 months so none of those schools would have been able to have been announced by me.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you attended a single school opening during the past 12 months?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I have, and I will provide details on those.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you attended two of those? Did you attend the Wentworth Point Public School opening?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I did.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So you remember that one?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, and, as I have said, I will provide the details on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Did you attend the O'Connell Street Public School opening?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You recall attending that?

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Did you attend the Fernhill School opening?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You recall attending those three?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you recall attending any other school opening?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I do. Again, I have said I would take this on notice, but there was the Ultimo one I attended and there will be others. I will provide the list on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is a relocation; it is not really a new school. They are the only three schools that your department's website says have opened during your time that you could have attended as Minister.

Mr ROB STOKES: Mr Graham, I will return to my answer because you are trying to, quite deliberately I think, strip context out. I have already said that this is a pipeline over 15 years in accordance with our school assets strategic plan. That is funded. It is \$6 billion over four years. We have 172—off the top of my head—projects, maybe more, currently underway either in planning, in commencement or in delivery. There is a whole pipeline of schools.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I invite you to provide as much of that context as possible, but I am not putting the blunt measures here.

Mr ROB STOKES: You are trying to strip context out. I am telling you it takes a while to build a school.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I will tell you why I am doing it. Because of, not my announcement, your announcement that you were going to build at least one dozen public schools a year into the future.

Mr ROB STOKES: Into the future. Precisely. And if you look at—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You were the one who set the goal here. That is what you claim, and we are now discovering that only three of those schools have opened.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, we are doing precisely what I said we would do, which was to meet increasing enrolments. You work backwards, Mr Graham. We know that on current enrolment trajectory, between 2016 and 2031 we are going to have an additional 291,000 students across New South Wales and 164,000 of those will be in New South Wales Public schools. Working backwards, that means that each year we are going to need the equivalent of an average of 12 schools a year.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And we are just not getting there at the moment on your building rate, are we?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are clearly getting there at the moment. We are, clearly. In the last budget we have funding now for 2,000 new permanent classrooms across the State. Those projects are starting right now. Some of them are well advanced right now. We are perfectly on track to meet that trajectory and that commitment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Including reopening schools that you closed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, in the budget papers many of the new schools you say are on the way have recorded against them—and I am referring here to page 5-6 of Budget Paper No. 2—under the allocation for 2018-19, "N.A." Why do so many of the schools in the budget papers which used to have allocations next to them now just have no indication of what the Government is spending on them?

Mr ROB STOKES: There is a very simple reason for that: because many of those—the specific schools you are referring to, others are schools that we have announced that planning begins for this year—we have allocated money to undertake that planning process. As part of the planning process—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It just does not look credible, though, Minister. You tell us all these schools are on the way; there is just no money allocated in the budget.

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: No, no, no. Let me be very clear: We have got 110 projects continuing. More than 110, I think. We have got 40 commencing this year alone. We have a further 22 that now have money allocated toward the planning process. Of course we do not have an estimate of total cost yet because we have just provided the planning for them. We do that in consultation with the community.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have talked about the record spend of the Government.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have not finished my answer, but you can continue.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Understood. You talk about the record spend of the Government. I invite you to put your view to the Committee on the record that this year's capital spend is the highest capital spend that the Department of Education has had in the budget papers. Is that your view?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think this year—I will take that on notice but I can tell you over the current four-year period—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is very wise, Minister.

Mr ROB STOKES: —the forward estimates period, we are spending \$6 billion. That is a huge amount of money. As I have already articulated, that is going towards more than 170 projects across the State. Not every school will be completed in the same calendar year. That stands to reason. We have a pipeline—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Since we saw you last year—

Mr ROB STOKES: —and the new schools that you are referring to refer to the new schools for which planning—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, you have taken that on notice.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, I have not taken this on notice. I am providing you with an answer—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have taken my question on notice.

Mr ROB STOKES: —and that relates to schools for which planning is commencing in this year because we have a pipeline of projects.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, how many properties have you sold since we last saw you one year ago? What is the number of Education properties?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think I will take it on notice. It is something in the vicinity of eight, I think.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Eight, yes. So much lower than last year.

Mr ROB STOKES: You got the number wrong last year. That was quite embarrassing.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is not my recollection, but—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They do not know how it works because they have never built anything; still figuring it out.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —you are confirming that you have sold more Department of Education properties—

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Chair, could you call her to order?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —than you have opened new schools? Is that right? You are confirming you have sold more Department of Education properties than opened new schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, that is a ridiculous comparison. Actually, if you want to make a comparison in terms of land acquisitions and sales, we have acquired land with a value 10 times that of land that has been sold over the same period.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you are pretty much the only Liberal Minister in this Government who has not attended Wagga over the recent month. Is there a reason why you have not? Are you steering clear of the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Point of order: How is this relevant to this portfolio? It is outside the terms of reference, unless the question—

UNCORRECTED

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about the Minister's travel. Is there a reason why you have not been to Wagga?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am finishing. My point of order is this: The Hon. John Graham has not made clear in his question how it relates to the portfolio area of Education, which this Committee is examining. I ask that you direct him to do so.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And I just—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: To the point of order: It is entirely appropriate for the Opposition to ask questions about the travel, and I would also ask you to remind Government members not to interrupt Opposition questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They are separate from the point of order; they are separate issues.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is a good example of not interrupting while we are asking questions. If the Government wants to ask questions, they should extend the time for the Committee hearing and undertake their own questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Further to the point of order: The Hon. Lynda Voltz is not unaccustomed herself to making interjections, so I suggest that she come to the court with clean hands. But, nonetheless, I ask that the original point of order be ruled on—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Seriously, Chair.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —that some context be given to the question by the Hon. John Graham so that the Minister can answer the question in relation to the portfolio.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be happy to do that, Chair.

The CHAIR: I would hope that the Hon. John Graham's line of questioning is in relation to education.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am certainly happy to provide some context. Minister, I want to ask about your ministerial travel. Is there a reason you are the only the Liberal Minister who has not gone to Wagga? Is it because you are worried it is going to be a disaster on the weekend?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I do not believe it.

Mr ROB STOKES: I do not accept the premise of the question. I have visited Wagga and the broader Riverina several times during the course of my appointment as education Minister. I visit schools on the basis of educational events, educational need—and that is as it should be. My diary commitments are made well in advance and I certainly am not going to shift longstanding educational appointments in relation to school visits in response to anything in particular. I will continue to visit Wagga as and when the need arises for educational reasons.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, how much is allocated on average per student by the Department of Education to schools for information and communications technology [ICT] equipment? The view has been put that it is an average of \$23 per student. Do you think that sounds about right?

Mr ROB STOKES: I do not, but I am happy to take—you can appreciate I would not have that off the top of my head—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, understood.

Mr ROB STOKES: But what I will say—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you can take that on notice, that would be good.

Mr ROB STOKES: There are some difficulties with providing the answer on notice because a lot of the funding that we provide to schools through the resource allocation methodology provides the flexibility for schools to apply that funding where it is required. So, for example—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: And when they apply—

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I please finish?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes.

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: So, for example, rather than applying particular hardware that might not be required—like rolling out, for example, a particular product that might be obsolete in a couple of years—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to get to a particular question, so I would be happy for you to provide the context on notice.

Mr ROB STOKES: I know you might want to get to a particular question, but I am going to provide a particular answer because I have not completed my answer yet. You have asked—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but Minister, I am asking the questions.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, but I am providing the answers.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: This has been happening throughout this morning, where the member asks the Minister question and continues to interrupt. I ask that you remind the member to not interject when the Minister is answering the question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: To the point of order: This is exactly what the Minister did last time. It is the right of members in estimates to ask questions at a tempo they choose. The Minister can answer in the way he chooses. He has to be generally relevant. It is the right of the member to move on at the point at which they choose. This is not question time; this is budget estimates. I am happy for the Minister to provide any context on notice. I have a right to ask the questions in my own tempo.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Further to the point of order: The member certainly has the right to ask questions, but not to interrupt a Minister whilst they are attempting to answer the question and have only had a couple of seconds to respond.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: They have got to answer the question, have they not?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do not interject, Lynda.

The CHAIR: Order! The Minister will continue to answer his question.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will continue being relevant.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Still looking for relevance, Natalie, are you?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ask an Education question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Looking for relevance, are you, mate?

Mr ROB STOKES: The reason I am answering this question is because you have asked me to accept the premise of a particular dollar amount per student. I am explaining that it will be difficult to provide that answer on notice because we provide a flexible funding where principals and school communities have the autonomy to determine where that spend might best be made. So it is not as if we mandate a particular rollout of equipment in every school—and nor should we necessarily—because different schools will have different needs.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When was the rate of that funding that is provided last reviewed? The view was put to me that 2004 was the last time that was reviewed or increased. Surely that cannot be right. Surely that is wrong.

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I will provide what details I can on notice. Again, the model of provision to schools—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Would it concern you if it had not been reviewed?

Mr ROB STOKES: The model of provision to schools is to increase flexibility, for schools to have the money to apply as they need.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are making a separate point though.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, they are clearly related points.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They have got the flexibility. I am asking: Have they got the funding? Has it been reviewed or increased since 2004? Surely that cannot be right.

UNCORRECTED

Mr ROB STOKES: Under the Gonski funding arrangements we have significantly increased funding to schools and we have also significantly increased the authority of principals to determine where that funding is spent.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: When the Audit Office looked at how this is playing out in schools, particularly with the bring your own device [BYOD] approach being taken, what they observed was that most students in lower socio-economic schools did not bring a personal device to class and teachers relied on the schools providing laptops or computer labs. I want to underline that finding: Most students did not bring. Are we not at risk in New South Wales of really opening up the digital divide, if that is true?

Mr ROB STOKES: I know the secretary is keen to add some details. But what I will also say here is that is precisely what flexible funding is aimed at and precisely what the resource allocation methodology determines in terms of needs-based funding, to provide that flexibility to ensure that those students who might not otherwise have access to that equipment have the funding for that equipment to be purchased. I know the secretary has more to add.

Mr SCOTT: A few things to add, Minister, if I may. We will come back to, as the Minister said, the Technology for Learning program. The only thing I would say—and I am sure you understand this, Mr Graham—the buying power of dollars in technology now is dramatically different. If you look at what dollars a decade ago could buy compared to the power and the equality of the dollars a decade now can buy the collapsing unit cost for a lot of the provision of these things. You have to be careful when you are looking at expenditure over time.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are talking more than a decade here, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: And we are coming back to that. On the BYOD, as the Minister said, we are aware of the report. We continue to monitor the rollout of BYOD in schools. Schools have been strongly supportive of BYOD, but of course the whole premise of Gonski funding—the extra funding that is provided to schools with a high proportion of low socio-economic students—is exactly to give schools the flexibility and the capacity to provide support for learning of most students. I think that is a more sophisticated way of rolling out a technology program than a one-size-fits-all model. You have provision going in to every school. You have extra funding going in to disadvantaged schools—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Again, Mr Scott, you are talking about the model not the funding.

Mr SCOTT: No. Surely we are talking about the provision of quality teaching and learning environments and how best we do that. The third thing that I think is very important around this is the supporting and underlying infrastructure that exists to make this technology work well. That is why the Government has launched the Connecting Country Schools program, which is looking at fast wi-fi and internet connectivity in 900 school sites that are classified as regional or remote. It is one thing to have the technology there but if you do not have the wi-fi with the speed and the consistency to support the teaching and learning, then clearly that will be problematic. That has been a key area of department investment as well. I think when you are asking questions about where the investment has come, we can see it comes in three different ways: One is the provision of funding for schools every year to buy new technology; the Gonski funding, which is more than \$1 billion—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: I was in mid flight.

The CHAIR: The time has expired.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Minister, would you agree that the number of children who are feeling freer to be able to face their sexuality or sexual identity in schools has increased because there has been instruction available to teachers and counsellors about this very issue? That has assisted these children to become more open about it and begin to deal with these issues rather than having to grapple with them alone and isolated—and we all know what some of the consequences of that can be. That is the reason, as opposed to the instruction forcing or causing children to develop a problem with sexual identity or sexual preference?

Mr ROB STOKES: The first comment I make is probably the most sensible I can provide, which is I do not feel qualified to offer an expert opinion on those matters. I really do not. The second thing I would say is, primarily, those issues are matters for families and not matters directly for schools. Our focus is on equipping young people with the clear skills they are going to need throughout life. I recognise, as I recognised earlier, that yes, that relates obviously to intellectual development and also to physical development but there are also spiritual

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and emotional sides of people that we recognise in our school systems and of course we will provide support to students. Beyond that, I do not feel qualified to offer an expert opinion.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: It would be a measure that this is certainly an avenue that we need to maintain support, and in fact nourish support, for these children, who might not be getting that instruction or feel comfortable talking about it at home but the school and the contact with teachers and mature people at school might be the only opportunity for them to be able to grapple with this issue. Therefore, we need to nourish and support that instruction to teachers, to allow the children to become themselves naturally and without conflict.

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, my comment on that is that would not relate to any particular issue that young people might be facing but in fact their development more broadly.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: I understand what you are saying.

Mr ROB STOKES: I would seek to broaden my comment to say of course we need to provide counselling and support services to every student.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Earlier it was stated that there are special programs for gifted and talented students and how they perform is a measure of the efficacy of the education system. Is that really the measure—rather than those students who are struggling and are at the bottom of the class or the back of the class and having all sorts of difficulties with learning, for them to be educated in a way to be lifted up to moderate understanding, moderate education, or even better; rather than the duxes or the ones who are best, who will probably go very well even if they did not go to school and learnt from home? Is not the measure how we lift up the children who are struggling rather than making it easier for the ones who are very talented?

Mr ROB STOKES: I seek to even challenge the concept, as probably I should, of gifted and talented in and of itself as an assumption.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: I agree.

Mr ROB STOKES: The reality is that every human being is gifted and talented in a particular way. The job of the education system is to help kids to identify where their particular gifts and talents lie, and also to support and nourish that learning.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: But is it done as effectively with those who are struggling and really finding it difficult to understand those gifts and talents, as opposed to the students who are already flourishing and striving forward?

Mr ROB STOKES: The simple answer is yes, and there are a number of programs I can point you to directly. It is also more a cultural shift as well, which is associated with this whole idea of recognising learning as a progression and that we need to recognise growth in every student—and every teacher for that matter—every year in our public education system. What we are aiming for is growth and it does not really matter what base that is off. I get frustrated when I see schools advertising in the independent Catholic sector, "We will help kids reach their potential". That means there is some assumption about what a child's potential actually is. I know my experience in life is constantly trying to increase or test your potential and keep developing throughout life, and that is consistent with an approach of lifelong learning.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: You are saying the same amount of resources are put into that group of children as are the talented and gifted that we know about, as opposed to the others we do not?

Mr ROB STOKES: If anything, there would be more resources provided to support those children.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: And that could be demonstrated?

Mr ROB STOKES: We can clearly illustrate that.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Could you provide documentation and analysis to demonstrate that on notice?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: To go back to where I was before, talking about application fees or some voluntary fees, I think there has been some reporting of \$1.4 million or more in annual voluntary fees at selective schools. Is there a policy, are there any guidelines, are there any restrictions on fees that can be charged at selective schools?

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Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer that question to the secretary for specifics. Obviously, one of the fundamental tenets of our public education system is that it is free. However, of course, parents are free to make contributions towards particular activities at schools.

Mr SCOTT: There are voluntary fees and fees set taking into account the context of the local school community in mind and also with a view to providing opportunities to ensure that any student who is disadvantaged is not held back from participating. Mr Dizdar might like to add to that.

Mr DIZDAR: I emphasise the fact the voluntary fees are exactly that—voluntary.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Application fees, not so much. I am happy for you to take on notice any guidelines about fees at selective schools.

Mr SCOTT: We will do that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What is the status of the review of the Confucius Institute programs in New South Wales schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer that question to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: It is underway at the moment. We are not looking specifically or only at the Confucius Institute but also at the governance processes in other similar programs in consultation with other governments or organisations that seek to provide support and resources to teaching and learning in this State. As I said, that review is underway and we expect it to be completed in the balance of this year.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How much money has been received from the Chinese Government through the institute by New South Wales public schools?

Mr SCOTT: I will take that question on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I was glad to attend the announcement you made recently of the purchase of the Shoalhaven Anglican School at Milton.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is another school for Mr Graham.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You did not build it and you did not open it, although I do appreciate that you bought it. When was the decision made to engage with the previous owner to buy the school?

Mr ROB STOKES: We have been engaged with the previous owner for some time; negotiations have been continuing for some time. We were constrained by the fact that an existing option had been entered into by the previous owner and a potential buyer. Given that, we were not able to conclude any transactions until that option period had expired. However, we had expressed our interest in the site for some considerable time.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: When did settlement occur?

Mr ROB STOKES: Just a week or so ago. I think we were able to truncate the settlement period by agreement with the vendor.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Was there an allocation in this year's budget for that purchase, or has this come about since the budget?

Mr ROB STOKES: We had clear advice that the purchase constituted good value for money. We were aware in terms of our provisioning that this purchase was in prospect, so we made sure there was provision to allow for flexibility if we were able to secure the property, which we were.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What timeline do you envisage for determining how the site will be used and how it will work in with Ulladulla High School?

Mr ROB STOKES: That work has commenced. As I indicated on site, the important thing was securing the facility. There was no haste in terms of a particular current need. However, when you get an opportunity to buy a purpose-built school on a well-located site you look for opportunities to do that because it constitutes great value for money for the taxpayer and for future generations. There is no particular haste required in determining uses. I understand that we are already looking at its potential use as a Higher School Certificate examination venue for Ulladulla High School. That may be of real benefit to the school in the interim. We are looking at a range of uses. It is a large site—I think it covers nine hectares—and it could be used for a range of educational activities.

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It is pretty exciting and I encourage you as a member of the local community and others to engage with the planning for the site.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Graham was talking about the "not applicable", "NA" or "not available", whatever that means, in your capital works program. You suggested in your answer to his question that of course there is no information about estimated total costs because some of these projects are only in the planning stages. There is no coherence in that answer because an overwhelming number of cases are marked "NA". There are NAs for schools that are due to be completed this year and about which there have been public announcements, including estimated total costs. It has been publicly announced that the super school at Ballina will cost \$40 million and that it is due to be completed next year. The total cost is marked as "NA" despite the fact that specific numbers have been provided for last year and this year. There is also no total estimated cost and no specified allocation in the budget for some schools that are due to be completed next year. Can you explain what is going on with these figures?

Mr ROB STOKES: First, we are happy for further details to be provided. This is a Treasury document and it was prepared in accordance with Treasury advice and guidelines. Ultimately, the publication of data in the budget is a matter for Treasury. There were details that we were certainly comfortable releasing.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Will you provide on notice to the Committee the estimated total costs for all the schools listed in the budget papers that are due to be completed this year and next year? I assume those estimated total costs are available to you.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that question on notice and provide what details we can. Obviously, I am subject to the Treasury guidelines about the publication of this sort of data. In relation to the new schools that have just been announced, obviously they are only in the planning stage. I take your point about the schools that are nearing completion.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The NSW Education Standards Authority's [NESA] accreditation portal—eTAMS—has been with us for some time. It deals with teacher accreditation and is designed to facilitate easy access by staff and schools.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer to the chief executive officer of NESA to provide the specifics.

Mr de CARVALHO: You are probably referring to the maintenance function, which has been in development because of a change to the accreditation maintenance policy agreed at the end of last year. We are now very confident there is light at the end of the tunnel. I received notice today that we are moving to open that part of the portal to a further 1,000 teachers who must complete their maintenance of accreditation by the end of this year. We are taking a staged approach to ensure that everything is working properly. At this stage, we are confident that the fixes that have been applied in the past few months are working. Of course, we acknowledge the frustration that many teachers and principals have experienced while that has gone on. However, we are very confident that it is working for those we are prioritising, and that is a good sign for the future.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Changes were made last year and we are getting close to 12 months. Teachers pay \$100 a year to NESA. With 120,000-odd teachers in the State and a \$12 million budget, one would expect that if there are legal professional accreditation requirements they would be able to enter the details and that they would be monitored and maintained in a working system. Can you provide a date on which all teachers who require it will have access to eTAMS?

Mr de CARVALHO: No, I cannot. However, I am confident in today's news from my staff that the maintenance of accreditation function appears to be working fully for those to whom it has been opened. As we get verification from those teachers who have been given access that it is working, we will continue to roll it out. My view is that it is probably better to under-promise and over-deliver rather than the other way around.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Fair enough. Minister, I have been advised that Special Religious Education [SRE] material has been put into children's school bags despite the fact that they have specifically opted out of SRE at their school. Have you heard reports of this happening?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, and I would be concerned if that were the case—if material of any kind had been forced on a student against their will—in light of the fact that it is obviously a parent's choice in relation to opt out.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Is any advice given to those who are teaching special religious education [SRE] in schools about how to engage with students who are not participating in SRE?

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Mr ROB STOKES: My understanding is that is the case. For some of those questions I can seek further details from the providers.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I appreciate that, Minister. We did hear answers from you earlier in the hearing about some of the programs that are or are not being run. As I understand it, respectful relationship programs are being delivered in some New South Wales schools by community and health workers on an ad hoc basis. Correct me if I am wrong about that.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will seek some advice.

Ms HARRISSON: The Respectful Relationships program is a Victorian program run in Victorian schools. It is not a program that is run in New South Wales schools.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Not in a coordinated way. Is there no ad hoc delivery of that program?

Ms HARRISSON: Principals make the final decision about the delivery of programs in their schools in relation to their resource allocation funding and the things that they may seek to do, but it is not departmental policy, it is not our program and it is not something we endorse for our New South Wales public schools.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are there any programs in New South Wales schools that deliver that sort of information to students?

Mr ROB STOKES: On that, can you be specific in relation to the sort of information you are referring to?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The aspect I am particularly focused on is the discussion that is being had publicly around Australia and the world at the moment about the relationship between men and women primarily, around domestic violence and around bullying as it relates to gender-based bullying. The Respectful Relationships program does provide information to students and teachers about how to cultivate in our student community more respectful relationships around those sorts of questions primarily—about dealing with sexism in society, about respect between genders.

It would seem that if we want to avoid another generation that features gender-based violence, harassment and sexism, schools are where we should be targeting some of that information. What will be done to try to ensure that our students have that information that will be useful for them to develop and act in society and within their communities in a way that deals with this challenge that we have in society now? It has been around for a long time but we do not want to see another generation where sexism and gender-based discrimination is a feature. I am trying to work out how we will do that work in our school system.

Mr ROB STOKES: The simple answer in terms of curriculum resources within the syllabus, the personal development, health and physical education [PDHPE] syllabus is the area within the classroom that these sorts of issues are traversed. I would actually say more broadly that this is something that is imbibed in the whole culture of public education and is something that is broader than any one particular program. It relates to the leadership and culture developed across public education. It is something that when I go into schools I see evidence of everywhere in terms of work within classes, extracurricular activities. I am impressed with the volume of work going on to make sure that students are raised in our schools with respect for one another.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Do you not think that a specific program like the Respectful Relationships program would be beneficial to try to ensure that outcome?

Mr ROB STOKES: There are a lot of programs that can be beneficial in schools.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand.

Mr ROB STOKES: The challenge is also in terms of—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. Time has expired.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I just want to thank you firstly, Minister, for your answer on that budget question. Just to underline the concerns of my colleague, there are schools here well in process that just have significant expenditures last year that just disappear in the budget. The department is publishing this information elsewhere. So whether it is Treasury or the Department of Education, you are the first education Minister I can recall who has ever had to turn up with this lack of detail in the budget papers. So I appreciate the answer you have given to say you are happy to go back and investigate that issue further.

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Mr ROB STOKES: Again, obviously the budget papers are published by Treasury. We provide data. As to what data is published is obviously in accordance with their internal guidelines. But I am happy to provide whatever details we can reasonably provide.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you. I think that would be very helpful. One of those consultancies I asked about was this one by Deloitte. It cost about \$150,000. It was the NAPLAN Online Readiness Review. There has been significant discussion—you have taken part in it—about the difference between the online and written test results for NAPLAN this time around. Many people have been critical—you have been critical yourself—of where this has ended up. I guess my question, looking at it, is: Why did you sign off on some students in New South Wales doing this test online and some in writing?

Mr ROB STOKES: For the simple reason that there has been a decision back in 2015 by the Education Council that we would move toward an online test environment across the country. The jurisdictions have agreed—and these are decisions that go before my time but I am obviously completely comfortable and consistent with them—that we will move to an online test.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But not every State did that, did they? It has been reported that Tasmania did not go down that path. They held back and said, "We are not doing this online test this time around. We are not certain." Why did you not do that?

Mr ROB STOKES: It depends, and that is why it is important to assess readiness in terms of the technical capacity of systems to be able to make that migration. As you would appreciate, we are a bigger State with more resources. We are obviously, I guess, more equipped to move quicker than a smaller State like Tasmania. Across New South Wales I think 17 per cent of students sat the online test. Nationally it was 20 per cent, so other jurisdictions have moved more quickly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Noting your concerns that you have expressed publicly, do you regret not going down the path that Tasmania did and saying, "This time around we will keep it simple; we will not move into this online testing regime."

Mr ROB STOKES: No, I do not think kicking it down the road would be the sensible approach. I actually think a staged approach to prove up the capacity in a conservative and sensible progression is precisely the way to do it. That is the way that other jurisdictions have chosen. I think that is sensible. It helps us to identify whether there are any problems in terms of technology and capacity. I am pleased to report in terms of online readiness the reports from systems across the State were that the experience was a good one. Certainly students have reported that they actually prefer sitting the online test. Nevertheless there was always going to be a point of transition. During that period of course there are some challenges with comparison that are well known.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for that. I will just ask you to confirm that in New South Wales it is your decision as to how many of those children sat the online test as Minister for Education; is that correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: Well, it is not that simple because we obviously work with our partners in Catholic and independent schools to determine which schools consider they are ready. In terms of New South Wales public schools, there were a number of schools that wanted to participate. Generally those schools that wanted to participate and that the department also felt were ready to participate participated and the results in terms of the experience of those teachers and schools have been reported as very positive.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, the Treasurer in the budget increased the efficiency dividend which will apply across government. What is the size of the efficiency dividend that will apply to the Department of Education going forward in dollar amounts? What does the decision of the Government and the Treasurer mean for the Department of Education?

Mr ROB STOKES: The vast majority of the Department of Education is quarantined because it delivers frontline services. I can provide the exact dollar figure but I can say as a proportion of the budget it is minimal.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, under the Connected Communities program, how many executive principals have remained in their schools for three or more years?

Mr ROB STOKES: The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation is currently undertaking a review in relation to the Connected Communities program. I will provide the details in relation to the executive

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principals, many of whom I know. They work in sometimes challenging situations. I understand where you are going. There is a reasonably high turnover in those principal positions, and that is something that we are reviewing.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Who coordinates the Connected Communities and where are they based?

Mr ROB STOKES: It is within the department.

Mr SCOTT: It is in the Educational Services Division. We have a Director of Connected Communities. We have an Executive Director of Aboriginal Education, and they both report through to Ms Harrison.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Where are they based?

Ms HARRISSON: They are currently based in Oxford Street. The executive director works often out of a school. As part of an [inaudible] arrangement, they work regularly out of Rosemeadow Public School.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Are there only the two staff members or are there more?

Ms HARRISSON: There is a team that supports them both. I can give you the specific data on those.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you could give me the FTEs, thank you. At somewhere like Wilcannia Central School, what post-school options are being provided to the students who are part of the program?

Ms HARRISSON: I do not have the specific details of information provided to individual students about their personal options. What I am able to inform the Committee is that in those Connected Community schools we work very closely with industry and community to ensure that the students are provided with a full range of opportunities.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And you will provide some more detail on notice, will you?

Ms HARRISSON: I am happy to do so if that would be of use to the Committee.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many employees from the Department of Education identify as Indigenous?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide that on notice. I think it is already provided in the annual report.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Could you identify how many of those are in senior leadership positions.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And also what constitutes a senior leadership position, whether it is a head teacher or district officials. How much funding was provided for Clontarf? Was it Department of Education funding for the Clontarf Academy?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. There are a range of programs like Clontarf—the Girls Academy and Smith Family provides services as well. The specifics in relation to Clontarf I can provide on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And also the Girls Academy?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, we can provide that on notice too.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: When you made the decision on Clontarf, did you read the evaluation by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] before that allocation was made?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, I am aware of the great work of CESE in relation to the evaluation of Clontarf which found that it was strongly supported and produced some great benefits, as some of these other programs are doing as well.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are saying that that is what the evaluation said?

Mr ROB STOKES: I can get up some further information on that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: They said that there was not impact on attendance in years 10, 11 and 12, no impact in NAPLAN, no significant difference and that the social profit was 0.01 cents for every dollar invested. Is that the evaluation?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am just getting up some further information. I will get some more information for you on notice, but I am certainly aware that I have had the opportunity to visit many Clontarf academies and,

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indeed, the work of the Girls Academy across New South Wales schools. I can see firsthand the benefits that that is providing to communities.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many schools is the Girls Academy in?

Mr ROB STOKES: I do not know off the top of my head. I think it is about a dozen.

Ms HARRISSON: I can provide the specific details on notice. The benefits we find for these programs across the system are in the whole child and the whole student, not just in some of the educational outcomes. We certainly see in programs like Clontarf less tangible benefits, such as increased confidence, increased engagement and social connections and relationships and connection to community, which we do see as a valuable outcome for those students.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And you are taking that from the evaluation by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, are you?

Ms HARRISSON: No, I am taking that from the experience of talking to students who are engaged in that program in two Clontarf sites in—

Mr ROB STOKES: I have found that information I was looking for. Parents, teachers, students and community members have reported the program had been beneficial for many of the students taking part. This included reports of improved wellbeing and conduct, statistically significant benefit for attendance in boys in years 7, 8 and 9. Within two years of leaving school Clontarf graduates were more likely to be working or studying.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but they also make the point, don't they, that they believe that that is because the people that are in the Clontarf Academy are more motivated anyway? Given that the data is being provided by Clontarf assessment, it is very difficult to make an assumption based on that.

Mr ROB STOKES: As I said, there are a range of programs working. They are under constant evaluation. They are showing some positive impacts and the overriding view of stakeholders is that the program has been well implemented and has a positive impact by providing good role models, improving self-esteem and confidence and providing a welcoming, encouraging environment at school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sure, but I was asking you what your department's evaluation said.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is what my department's evaluation said.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Okay. We will let them make their own assumption on that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, how many full-time permanent positions have you cut from the Department of Education for this Government since 2011? How many have been lost?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to take details on staff numbers on notice. I can say that we have employed an additional 5,129 teachers, I think.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about full-time permanent Department of Education staff.

Mr ROB STOKES: Not frontline?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

Mr ROB STOKES: You mean back office people.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Correct.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to get that answer on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Great. Thank you.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many vacancies are there for teaching positions in rural and remote areas?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I will find the precise number on notice. We have a number of programs directed toward encouraging experienced teachers and new graduates into rural and remote schools.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is the rural scholarship?

Mr ROB STOKES: And the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint.

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The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many people have applied for the rural scholarship?

Mr ROB STOKES: They have just been recently overhauled, so obviously those numbers will be low at this stage because it is new, but I will provide details on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So you have a current review underway on that, have you?

Mr ROB STOKES: We just renewed the scholarships program.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Could I just ask you: how many reviews does the Department of Education have currently going at the moment?

Mr ROB STOKES: I did not say that it was under review. I said that we had recently renewed the scholarship program.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, I got that. I am actually asking—

Mr ROB STOKES: A different question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes. How many reviews is the Department of Education undertaking at the moment?

Mr ROB STOKES: Across individual schools and across the department as a whole, I think it would be very difficult—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The department as a whole would be a good place to start.

Mr ROB STOKES: You do not want to know individual school—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you could give me individual schools I would like the names, but I prefer the department across the board.

Mr ROB STOKES: In terms of department-initiated reviews as opposed to reviews that might be happening school by school—which obviously would be hard to find data on—I can get that detail on notice.

Mr SCOTT: The only thing I would add, Minister, is that we have built into our programs a review process. When we allocate funding into a new area, part of what is built into that is an evaluation process because we want to make sure that every dollar we spend is getting the return that we want, to improve teaching and learning outcomes. So, yes, if there are big policy initiatives—and we have heard about some of them today, like selective schools and like gifted talented; we are looking closely at disability at the moment—yes, we put teams of people to closely evaluate the evidence to ensure our dollars are being appropriately spent.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Are consultations such as you are doing for the enrolment forms for special religious education constitute a review, or would that be classified simply as a consultation?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, the challenge of providing a specific answer is as the secretary has indicated. All of our programs remain under constant review. It is an organisation that seeks to constantly improve. But in terms of announced reviews, I am sure we can provide that detail on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Just going back to the schools themselves, who is responsible for staffing sick bays at schools and administering student medication?

Mr ROB STOKES: There would be specific policies in relation to that. I refer to the secretary and Mr Dizdar.

Mr DIZDAR: The principal, as site manager, is responsible for leading and managing the entire site—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sorry, say that again.

Mr DIZDAR: Our principals, as site managers, are responsible for leading and managing the entire sites.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but who is responsible for staffing the sick bay?

Mr DIZDAR: Our principal is responsible for staffing the entire school in the sense of its programs and its operation, and it is staffed in terms of its student numbers, in terms of our class size policy by the department.

Mr ROB STOKES: The principal.

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The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The principal is responsible for staffing the sick bay? I am actually asking who within the school is responsible for staffing the sick bay.

Mr DIZDAR: The principal, in consultation with their leadership team, would make decisions about who would actually then logistically operate the sick bay. But the principal would be responsible for that staffing decision.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Is there any training that has to be undertaken for staffing the sick bay and the distribution of medication in schools?

Mr DIZDAR: The distribution of medication in schools can only happen with parental permission and the appropriate medical advice that comes with that for each individual child. If that requires anything beyond normal development in terms of administration of that medicine, then that training would need to be afforded for it to be undertaken.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What about the staffing of the sick bay? Is there any special training in the school system for the fact that schools have to staff sick bays and administer medication?

Mr DIZDAR: A great example is EpiPen, for example. We give all our staff training in the administration of EpiPen. That is compulsory for all staff but we would not give a student who came to school with permission to receive a tablet at certain times during the day that is administered by the staff their training for that.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What about the staffing of the sick bay, is there no specific training for that?

Mr ROB STOKES: Training for the staffing of the sick bay?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You have someone who staffs the sick bay and you have sick kids coming up. Are the people who are looking after them trained in any way?

Mr DIZDAR: Just in line with the normal supervision training that we give for things such as playground duty, for classrooms, it will be in line with the same sort of training that we give.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Are there any schools that actually have a position allocated to them or a full-time equivalent position for staffing of the sick bay?

Mr DIZDAR: We staff all our schools, as the Committee would be aware, based upon our student numbers and our class size policy and then we leave the local decision to the principal, in consultation with their leadership team, about how to best staff their entire programs that they operate.

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I also add, I cannot remember what the form is called but there is a particular allocation for every school in relation to the staffing arrangements. It has been around for many years.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: And the sick bay would be included in that criteria based on the school numbers?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again I am not sure off the top of my head.

Mr DIZDAR: It is part of our entire staffing of a site.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, the Prime Minister has been reported as saying that he sends his children to private schools because he does not want the values of others imposed on his children. I would invite you to respond to that comment?

Mr ROB STOKES: Sorry, could you say that again?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am just asking about the Prime Minister's comment that he does not want the values of others imposed on his children in public schools. I invite you to make any response you would like to put on the record. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Chair, I am happy to cede the first couple of minutes to my colleague.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I invite you to respond?

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Mr ROB STOKES: I am certainly not going to comment on parents' decisions about which schools they choose for their children. That is a fundamental choice available to parents and I am certainly not going to comment on the Prime Minister's children. That would not be appropriate.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Mr Graham and Chair. Minister, as I understand it, students who are under supervision and who have difficulty writing with a pen are not allowed to use computers during Higher School Certificate [HSC] exams, is that correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am sorry?

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Students who have difficulty using a pen are still not allowed to use computers during HSC exams, even if they are supervised; is that correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take the specifics on notice but those matters are a matter for the disability provisions as determined by the Education Standards Authority and it will depend upon the particular requests of the student as to what decision is made.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: NAPLAN is moving online; you were saying before that there is a recognition of that as a possibility. My understanding, though, is that students with disabilities who have been allowed to use laptops and tablets for classroom work have not been allowed to use a computer to answer questions during HSC exams. That would seem unreasonable and unfair.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will offer a general comment here to say that the HSC is an examination that is provided across the State. So obviously the provisions that apply in the HSC may well be different to the provisions that apply in schools because schools will operate according to different provisions. So it is important to standardise those provisions in the interests of fairness. Obviously that needs to be balanced with compassion and balanced against ensuring every child has the opportunity to perform at the best of their ability. They are judgement decisions that need to be made in relation to individual cases. But my clear message in relation to those judgement calls, as you would appreciate—I cannot influence them directly; that would be inappropriate—is that obviously the Education Standards Authority should act in accordance with providing students natural justice based on legitimate expectations that they might have in relation to their treatment.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But are there clear guidelines on this?

Mr ROB STOKES: It legislated in the Education Act in terms of misadventure and disability provisions.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It would seem, though, that it would be very useful for a student to know in advance of the HSC that they were not going to be able use computers and potentially be prepared for that. I get the sense that there is some surprise here and people are feeling disadvantaged.

Mr ROB STOKES: I was aware last year that there were a couple of instances where there were concerns and reviews leading right into the HSC and on the basis of that I have asked the Education Standards Authority to review the way in which disability provisions operate. My message to the Education Standards Authority is to be compassionate and broad in its decision-making, but obviously I cannot intervene in relation to individual decisions. From the policy level, that review is, as I understand, nearing completion and that will outline the way forward. But again you have to balance the needs of individual students against the broader need of providing fairness for all.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What does the department do to provide educational support to students who are on suspension while they are not at school?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer for specifics to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar will take us through that.

Mr DIZDAR: We provide work to a student and their family, often depending on the nature of the suspension because there are different types of suspensions that are available according to the policy and the length and duration. There is follow-up support around that work and often the provision of further work. There is the provision of counselling support that is available to the young person and often the family alongside that. They are the main mechanisms of support that we provide. It is important for the Committee to note that for most of our young people, pleasingly, suspension is a one-off occurrence. For those students who maybe a part of more than one suspension, then the wellbeing and welfare support becomes very, very critical for that young child.

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Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How many children in New South Wales fit into that category?

Mr DIZDAR: For repeat suspensions? I would have to take it on notice. We have got that data. We would be happy to provide it to the Committee.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If you could provide as well the percentage of those students who are Aboriginal students?

Mr DIZDAR: Sure. I was just going to say, our learning support teams, which exist in each of our schools, play a pivotal role, particularly around those repeat suspensions, in making sure that we are covering all bases, working with the family and the young child—and often interagency as well—to work out the mechanisms to best connect that child back into the school context so that they can succeed and thrive.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are learning support teams available in all schools, in small schools and regional schools potentially where that would not be the case?

Mr DIZDAR: They are but in our small schools—and small schools do this exceptionally well—we encourage great connection and collaboration with surrounding partner schools often to share that expertise. We have our educational services learning and wellbeing arm that they are also able to tap into. There is the system resource but also the collaboration between small schools to share that expertise.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, this question is probably for you. Does the Government have a position on a policy to enable in-school suspension classes to occur?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is a matter that I have reflected upon. There are difficulties in relation to that but I think broadly where it is possible it is something we should look at. But, as you anticipate, there are some difficulties with that, depending on the nature of the suspension as well where that might expose, for example, risk to other students. It is an easy one to answer in broad terms but much harder to implement in practice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sorry, are there considerations at the moment about how that could be implemented? Are there plans in place?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer to the secretary for details here.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it has been raised. We are wondering if, on certain sites, it might be beneficial. But as the Minister says, it is complex. But we can understand why, under some circumstances, it could be beneficial to have those students continue under supervision and to try to continue to keep them in a learning environment, although there is often merit in that not taking place in the immediate environs of the school. It is complicated and it is something that people have suggested to us. We are investigating that on its merits and we will see what steps can be taken to resolve that.

Mr ROB STOKES: To add to that, sometimes the school has a particular environment that a particular student just does not respond well to, so actually the spatial separation can actually be beneficial. It really is a horses for courses approach.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand. Last year I asked you about preschools inside and early learning centres inside our primary schools and public school system. You seemed genuinely open to the idea—or at least not resistant to the idea—and, of course, there are about 100, I think, at the moment. Have you reflected on that at all? Is there any preparedness or willingness, or are you looking at the idea of increasing the number of primary schools that have either early learning centres or public preschools attached to them?

Mr ROB STOKES: There are plenty of examples, as you referred to, and we will always look for opportunities. We have a clear focus on joint use wherever we can. In terms of out-of-school-hours care as well, we provide capital grants. We are working with a number of providers. We will always look for those opportunities because they provide an extra use for schools and school properties. As well, it can be really helpful for parents and also for school communities more broadly. In terms of our planning and our infrastructure planning, one of the considerations we look at at a base level is the need for those sorts of facilities in a broader community and the way in which we can provide those on site. I have already mentioned the capital grants we provide as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: To go to that point, there will be a number of primary schools that are somewhere along the stages of planning at the moment—new primary schools. Do any that are on the planning books at the moment, do they have an early learning centre, after-hours care or public preschool attached to them in the planning?

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Mr ROB STOKES: I understand a number that we are looking at are looking at exactly those sorts of joint use arrangements with councils and also potentially with parents and citizens [P&C] groups, too. I am not sure. I can provide more details on notice, to the extent that those conversations have reached a stage at which it is appropriate to share.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Just to be clear, where there is a partner—either a P&C that is willing to run potentially a preschool service or day care service, or there is a council that is prepared to run an early education service—that is where you look at this? You are not necessarily considering public preschools with public education teachers inside those preschools? They are quite different things.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am just trying to understand exactly what you are looking at.

Mr ROB STOKES: I see. Our focus is on providing new schools. We have also provided additional funding in terms of early childhood education. In relation to operating government-funded and staffed preschools on school sites, that is not something that we are specifically looking at.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: But that is what the 100 that currently exist mostly are, correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. As I said, the ones that are under development—I thought you were asking about tendering a relationship with P&Cs.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am. Last year's question was sort of going to this. I will not disguise this, but I like the idea of making our early childhood system more of a universal free public education system and that is where my question goes. We have 100. It seems that you are putting a limit there and do not want any more of them, but are prepared to work with the community, councils and other bodies to support facilities to run what essentially will be non-government early education centres or long day care inside public school grounds. I am trying to separate these two out.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am sorry, I misunderstood the direction of your question. I am not seeking to make any ideological point, but in relation to the specifics I will refer to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: For a long time the department has basically run 100 preschools. Our planning is not on extending that provision because you have a lot of providers in early childhood education. We are a regulator in that section through the department. But we understand the benefits to families of co-location and some educational benefit as well. So where there is space we are happy to talk to providers. We have actually rolled out a very significant program to expand the number of before and after school care programs that are attached to schools or are adjacent to schools. But our focus and our remit fundamentally is providing a schooling system.

Those preschools that we run have been around for a very long period of time. Our priority is not to expand those, but if we can facilitate and enable quality early childhood provisions to be located close to schools we would be happy to do that. Of course, through the Government's policies this year, the opening up of places for three-year-olds and four-year-olds to do a couple of days a week early childhood education has been enabled through additional funding provision and we are happy to support that in as close to a school environment if we can.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, can you guarantee that there are no for-profit operators operating long day care centres or preschools on public primary school grounds?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that question on notice. We have a tendering system that we are in the process of reviewing that has a categorisation that effectively preferences those operated by P&C associations first; they are not-for-profit operators. Then the for-profit operators, in terms of the tendering system, would be at the end of the list. I do not know the answer to your question off the top of my head, but I will take it on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are there any plans for the 100 existing public preschools to be transitioned, moved, changed or offered up on tender to private, community or council operators?

Mr ROB STOKES: No.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: No. You can understand that one of the key issues—and I know you are not the early education spokesperson, Minister—is around the pay differential between public education, public school teachers and early educators generally. Those who are teaching in those 100 public preschools will be on rates much more aligned with the public education pay rate. So you now have teachers in those community council

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potentially not-for-profit or profit-based early learning centres on public school grounds earning significantly less than the teacher teaching in the primary school attached to it. It seems to be exacerbating the problem that is starting to be faced within the early education system.

Mr ROB STOKES: To provide a broad reflection on that, obviously the funding of early childhood works quite differently and the arrangement with the Federal Government works quite differently.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand.

Mr ROB STOKES: I appreciate we need to do everything we can to reduce silos in education. This is one of the areas of institutional governance at a constitutional level that separates the systems. Again, my focus is on, obviously, the school system, and the public school system in particular.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: There will no doubt be pressure, and you will have advice from people in your department, about the value for society as a whole and for students and families who are expanding our public universal education system to younger years. Are we setting ourselves up for failure down the track to differentiate in new schools and have not-for-profit or community-based centres operating? Would it not just be better to start the process of transitioning by putting in place more public preschools or public early learning centres in these schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, the Government's approach is to support, as I said, principally the P&C-run centres, but also recognise that there might be other opportunities out there as well. We will provide capital funding support and wherever we can do so—wherever capacity allows—we will also provide the land resource as well and work in partnership with those organisations. Partnerships in education are quite commonplace. For example, in school-based education itself, we have partners in Catholic Education and in independent education, and we are ultimately all aimed at the same thing: to provide equitable access to an excellent education for every child in New South Wales.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, you would have seen the *War On Waste*, I am sure. Kiama High School was proudly reflected, and I think a lot of lessons were clearly learned down there. It was a journey. The teachers learned a lot. It looked like the kids had a good time of it and possibly saved a lot of resources both for the school and, obviously, costs of landfill and the like. Have you looked at how you can improve sustainability across the New South Wales public education system more generally and expand some of those lessons out?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. What we do in life echoes throughout eternity; so indeed. We have a sustainability summit coming up shortly in relation to looking at opportunities across education in terms of our infrastructure build, but, as I mentioned, sustainability is a cross-curricular imperative in the Australian curriculum. We can look at ways in which we can embed that in every part of the curriculum. There are also some really interesting Indigenous insights in terms of sustainability that we have embedded, for example, in the new stage 6 biology curriculum. We are always looking for ways in which we can encourage a consciousness of wise resource use, and many of the jobs of the future are going to be in those areas of recycling and extended producer responsibility.

The CHAIR: I am sure you would love to keep answering that great question. Unfortunately, our time has expired. I thank you, Minister Stokes, and I thank your officers for attending today's hearing. The Committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice be returned within 21 days. The secretariat will contact you in relation to the questions you have taken on notice.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.