

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Tuesday 3 March 2020

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

The Committee met at 9:30.

UNCORRECTED

MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Penny Sharpe

Mr David Shoebridge

PRESENT

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, *Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning*

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**

The CHAIR: It being 9.30 a.m. I welcome everyone to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2019-20 further hearings. Before I commence, it is the custom of this Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I do so with all due respect as well as acknowledging other important contributors to the history of this site—those who constructed the Parliament House building, very often working in a dangerous industry as part of the Stonemasons Guild and the parliamentary staff over many decades who have supported members of Parliament and made our work and representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all.

I also welcome Minister Sarah Mitchell and her officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Childhood Learning. At the outset I want to thank the Minister for acknowledging that this is a year of education reform and the policy direction she set in her article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in December and again comments in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday concerning Local Schools, Local Decisions, which has been the subject of committee deliberations and recommendations. We thank the Minister very much for those directional statements.

With regard to today's hearing, it is open to the public and it 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 should also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the Committee's proceedings. We have no tolerance of fake news. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the Legislative Council in 2018.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or certain documents were to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any message from advisers or members of staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers from your department 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 as soon as possible. Finally, would everyone please turn off their mobile phones or to silent for the duration of the hearing. The hearing today will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. with the Minister, then with departmental and agency witnesses only from 11.40 a.m. to 12.40 p.m. There will then be a one-hour lunch break. The next session will be from 1.40 p.m. to 4.20 p.m. with a 10-minute break at 2.40 p.m. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Childhood Learning open for examination.

All the witnesses need to be sworn in. Minister Mitchell already has been sworn as a member of Parliament. We understand that from earlier budget estimates, the following witnesses have already been sworn in and there is no need to repeat that today: Mr Mark Scott, Mr Dizdar, Ms Harrison, Mr Riordan, Mr Martin and Mr Murphy. Anyone who was not sworn in at the earlier 2019 estimates should state your full name, position title and agency and either swear an oath or make an affirmation.

SALLY EGAN, Relieving Executive Director, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Department of Education, sworn and examined

LIANA DOWNEY, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Delivery, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARTIN GRAHAM, Acting Executive Director, Early Childhood Education, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARNIE O'BRIEN, Executive Director, Health and Safety, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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

TERRY STEVENS, Executive Director, Asset Management, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARK SCOTT, Secretary, Department of Education, on former oath

MURAT DIDZAR, Deputy Secretary, School Operations and Performance, Department of Education, on former oath

GEORGINA HARRISSON, Deputy Secretary, Education Services, Department of Education, on former oath

PETER RIORDAN, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education, on former oath

DAVID MURPHY, Executive Director, Corporate Governance and School Standards, NSW Education Standards Authority, on former oath

PAUL MARTIN, Chief Executive Officer at NSW Education Standards Authority, on former oath

The CHAIR: Thank you very much and thank you for squeezing in around the table. For those who made the private representations about breaking this into sessions to make it more convenient for the staff, an attempt was made along those lines but, as is the way in politics, a consensus could not be reached, so we have the standard arrangement. Further, as there is no provision for any witness to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you everyone. Minister, on the weekend you made an announcement about Local Schools, Local Decisions that you intend to wind back the policy. It is an admission of failure of this policy, is it not?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, it is not. I did not make an announcement about it. I foreshadowed that we are going to make some changes in relation to the policy this year. I made it clear that I think there are ways that it can be improved and that it can be tweaked. It has been in place for a few years now. I think it is a well-intentioned policy that has had a few unintended consequences. I have made it clear that this year I would like to look at ways that we can get a better balance between accountability, intervention and support where it is needed, not in a punitive way but in finding ways that we can better support schools that need assistance with that policy, and also find better ways that we can help principals with the increased administrative burden that this policy has brought to them. It is something that they have raised with me many times and it is something that I foreshadowed I want to have a look at.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you telling the Committee that the policy is not going to be wound back?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I said what I would like to do is make some improvements to the policy in terms of ways that I have seen and feedback that I have received certainly from some principals organisations but also members of the community and indeed your Committee. We are not going to go into details about that Committee report today but I do think that there have been some unintended consequences that we can make some changes to. I will be making some more announcements and further detailed intentions made clear in the near future but for now it was foreshadowing that this is an area of policy reform that I want to focus on this year.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* you said that the changes were necessary to lift results. Are you saying that the Local Schools policy is directly related to the poor results that we have seen in New South Wales in NAPLAN and the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA], for example?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think what is clear—and as I have said many times in Parliament and in public—is that this will be a year where we will see reform in education. There is work that we want to do to lift our outcomes. It is not or should not be a surprise to anyone in the Committee that that is something that we want to focus on. I have made comments about that, as has the Premier. What I want to do is make sure that we are doing everything we can to ensure that the record funding that we are seeing going into our schools is being spent and being spent well and that we are making sure that we are supporting principals in terms of focusing on teaching and learning. That is what they are focused on. That is what every principal I have met wants. They want the best outcomes for their students, and I see that every day when I visit schools. This is about making improvements to an existing policy so that we can make that happen. As I said, there will be more detail to come very soon in relation to how we would like to make some changes. There will be consultation with the sector, including principals organisations in terms of any final changes. But that is what good policy is. You find ways to improve what is existing so that you can get best outcomes and I make no apologies for that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you have a plan of action in terms of the changes that you are proposing? Is that plan being developed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, this is something that has been a focus for me for a little while. There will be more to say very soon in terms of details about that policy.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, there are a number of inquiries in relation to this policy underway, as I understand it. The Auditor-General is looking at this policy. We have had the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] interim review but that review has not been finalised.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Middle of the year.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The final report is coming in the middle of the year. Why did you not just wait for those reports to inform your decision?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I made it clear on the weekend that I was flagging my intention that there will be change in terms of that policy this year. As I said in relation to your earlier question, we will consult with principals organisations and with the education community about some of those refinements that I want to make. That will include information that will come through the CESE final evaluation. There is an interim evaluation in relation to Local Schools, Local Decisions but I am also acting on feedback from principals. As I said, I have had many meetings with organisations where they do talk about ways that we could improve in terms of the administrative burdens that come as part of this policy. Significant work has already been underway in terms of that from the department as well. But I want to turn the volume up this year. I want to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support our principals. The changes are intended to be supportive, not punitive, so that we can lift outcomes. As I said, I make no apologies for that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you wait for those reviews to be handed down?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we will flag our intention for change this year. We will consult our school groups and communities about what those final changes look like. We are already into this school year. We are already in a position now where budgets have been set—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Minister, it was a very simple question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —and policy levers are in place.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The Minister is trying to answer a question. The Hon. Courtney Houssos knows that she should allow witnesses and the Minister to provide their answers before she interrupts or interjects on those answers.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have been listening.

The CHAIR: It is the practice of this Committee to try to allow the witnesses to finish their answers. Obviously there is a point where if there is filibustering, then the Chair will take care of that. I think at the moment the Minister has the capacity and the right to finish her answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we will take into consideration what comes from that report in the middle of the year. I have also looked at the interim report. It again reflects some of the information that I have already given to you this morning, particularly around principal administration and the burdens that this policy has in some ways placed on them. All of that will inform where we end up in terms of change, but I wanted it to be clear to signal that we want to find ways to improve this policy.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about staffing decisions? Is it the intention to roll back that limited discretion that principals already have around staffing?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said in response to one of your earlier questions, we will talk in more detail very soon about what some of the changes that we want to suggest are. We will be doing that in consultation with the school communities and our principals organisations. For now the intention is to make some changes. There will be more information in terms of details very soon.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about the management of the equity loadings under the Resource Allocation Model [RAM] funding? Is that an area of consideration for you?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I am not going into detail today. This is about flagging on the weekend the intention to make changes. There will be more to come very soon.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You will accept that you have made a fairly unsettling announcement on the weekend and people are—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I do not accept that but that is your view.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There has been some feedback by principals that they are concerned about the imputation that has been brought forward by the announcement. There were certainly comments around principals' performance in some of the articles.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In response to that, Mr D'Adam, I say that there was no intended imputation on my behalf. Principals work very hard and I know that they have interests of their students at the front and centre of their mind every day. This is about making sure that the system and the policy levers support them to do the job that they are there to do and that as a government and as a department we are providing that support in terms of outcomes. I think it is pretty clear.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Surely you would concede that there is a lack of certainty. You are not committing to a clear time frame. You are saying that there will be more to say soon, yet we are waiting for reviews at the start of the year. You are saying that this is foreshadowing something "we are doing but that we are not going to give a clear indication of what we are doing". There is uncertainty in the sector. When are you going to give them certainty?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I have had some initial conversations already and reached out to principals organisations and the Teachers Federation late last week. I will be sitting down with one of the principals organisations I think on Wednesday to talk through in a bit more detail. Again, there will be more to come very soon.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will that detail actually cover what the announcement is going to be or is that just to hear more feedback?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, this is about us flagging our intention to change the policy, which we want to find ways to improve. We were clear about that. In terms of details and what that will look like, yes, policy work has been done in relation to that. I will have more to say about that very soon. I have reassured the principals organisations that I have been in touch with that there will also be opportunities for them to have input into the final changes and that there will be consultation.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, will you share the policy work details when you meet with principals next week?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Principals will be very well aware of what the Government's intentions are about this policy when the time comes. But as I said, it was about flagging our intention on the weekend to make some improvements. Many of the improvements are things that they had asked for.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So why will you not share those details here today?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is because I am not in the habit of introducing or announcing government policy in a budget estimates hearing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is yet another thought bubble from you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not at all.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —instead of flagging actual policy solutions.

The CHAIR: What is the question? That is a statement. Members will ask questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What is the policy solution?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With all due respect, we and the department have been working on this area for a period of time in terms of helping the support provided to schools and to principals under Local Schools, Local Decisions. I have made it clear that towards the end of last year and from the beginning of this year that this will be a year of reform in education. We have to work to improve results. We have to better support our principals and our school communities to ensure that our student outcomes are the strongest they can be. I have been very up-front about that. We will work on a range of policy areas this year. This is one of them. I do not feel any pressure to announce details sitting in a budget estimates hearing. This is about good policy and getting it right. On the weekend I was asked to make comments in terms of my views about Local Schools, Local Decisions and that is what I did. We foreshadowed that we are going to work on this area.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The suggestion was that principals have become too powerful. Do you believe principals are too powerful and that they have too much say?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, this is about trying to get that right balance between autonomy and support and ensuring that we appreciate and understand that principals know their school communities and they know what is needed in terms of their student outcomes. But we also have to recognise that we must provide extra support in some schools. These are the sorts of issues that we will be canvassing as part of the improvements, as I see them, to this policy. That will happen very soon in terms of more detail and further consultation with our school principals and communities.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it a question of the capacity of principals to spend the RAM funding? Is that something that has clearly concerned you about the current arrangements?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There certainly has been some feedback, like I said, particularly from principals about the administrative burden. We need to look at what we are doing in terms of ensuring that the way that the funding flows is that the dollars are spent on students in that school year. The department has already been working with schools to help them do that but, like I said, this is something that we need to do, I think, on a larger scale. I think we need to make sure that the support is there and also so we can scale our best practices. If we know that there are school communities that are similar and we see great results in one school and not in the other, finding ways to share that evidence and share that data and have that broader scale reform, which I have spoken about and the Premier has spoken about, to make sure we are implementing best practice programs. Indeed, it is something that your Committee canvassed quite extensively in your report as well.

The CHAIR: We did, but much more than sharing. It is nice to be a good sharer but we recommended something more substantial.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are there areas where you have evidence that the principals have been mismanaging the money?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I did not say "mismanaging". I think that is an unfair word to use. This is not about mismanaging.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Not spending the money appropriately.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There are underspends in some school bank accounts, yes. Some of those are there for reasons for certain projects. Some are there because I do think there is an opportunity to provide some more direction and support to principals. We have been working quite consistently with a lot of our school communities. The secretary might want to add more in relation to that in terms of, as I said, making sure of the way that the funding flows. Those dollars are going in each year for the students that are in that cohort and we want to make sure that that is happening. I do not know if you want to add anything to that, Mr Secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Thanks, Minister. I think if we look globally at education reform, you know there are three key elements that seem to be hallmarks of a high performing system. One is local expenditure and to put spending decisions locally, then to have strong support for schools around how they spend that money and also have accountability for the outcomes that you see. I think over the last couple of years there have been a series of reforms that the department has been implementing at the Government's direction that goes to ensuring that we have strong leadership locally to spend that money wisely, strong support to guide that decision-making and also increasing the accountability mechanisms we have for the outcomes that we are seeing.

One of the strong elements around that has been the tailored support model, which you see good systems around the world: that we have the right kind of professional development, the right kind of professional support

that is available locally so schools can assess where they are in their growth trajectory and then draw on the right levels of support. Ms Harrison can speak to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I am going to stop you there because we have several hours with you this afternoon and we have plenty of questions but we do have limited time with the Minister this morning. Minister, I want to move to a different issue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You would be aware of media reports this last week that New South Wales school cleaners have been approached to clean the *Diamond Princess*.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how many New South Wales school cleaners have now flown to Japan?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to ask the department to answer that.

Mr SCOTT: I think we would have to take that on notice. I do not think we have been briefed that any cleaners have taken up that contract. We just know that the contracts that we have are being fulfilled as to the requirements of the contract.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, sorry, but it has been publicly reported that up to 12 New South Wales school cleaners have taken up this offer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right. We said we would take those numbers on notice, so—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am asking you as the Minister: What have you done to put in place for those cleaners once they return to New South Wales?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously we have mechanisms in place in terms of managing coronavirus and issues or concerns that we have around people that have travelled. Again, without the numbers of who may have gone and when they are returning, it is a bit difficult to answer that question now. I am happy to take that on notice in terms of the advice of what will be provided but we would follow the health guidelines. We would expect people to do what is sensible in terms of our school communities. This is an ongoing issue. There are developments every day. We work very closely with Health in terms of protecting the safety of both our students and our staff at these schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, this was well reported, widely reported, last week. What actions did you take after reading that article?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I sought advice from the department in terms of what the scenario was. I think that there was advice issued in terms of making sure that appropriate protocols were followed but I will ask the secretary or—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So, Minister, I—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am answering. I have just answered your question. I sought advice from the department in relation to the matter.

Mr SCOTT: There are two elements I can add, Minister, and then Mr Manning might provide further detail. Our first key undertaking was to ensure that all cleaning contracts for New South Wales schools would be fulfilled and our understanding is that there has been no difficulty in doing that, and in all other matters related—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So sorry, Mr Scott, I am just going to stop you there and ask you this question. You are confident that they are all being filled. Does that mean the positions are being backfilled?

Mr SCOTT: No, no, no. This is contract labour into our schools. We have contracts for these providers. Their contracts are being fulfilled. The other matter—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I am questioning you on what that terminology means. Does that mean there will be replacement cleaners in New South Wales schools? The information that we are being provided with is that they will not be.

Mr SCOTT: They will not be? Well, Mr Manning can take this.

Mr MANNING: Yes. My understanding is this is Broadspectrum, who are one of our cleaning contractors. The obligations on Broadspectrum are no different. Schools need to continue to be cleaned and they need to source the cleaners in order to do that for us.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So that is a guarantee from you that those positions will be backfilled?

Mr MANNING: Those schools will continue to be cleaned.

Mr SCOTT: Because they have got to meet their contractual requirements. In a sense it is no different than if those people who are meeting those contractual requirements are on vacation or they have the flu or some other matter. The contract we have is that the cleaning services are provided.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, that is directly contradicting the information that I have been provided with, which is that those positions are not being backfilled. Minister, I want to ask you: Have you spoken to the health Minister? Have you said, "What's the best practice thing we can be doing to ensure that this does not come back into New South Wales schools?"

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I can say to you is anyone who would leave Australia to go and work on anything in relation to coronavirus that would bring them into contact, like the cleaning example that you are giving, would have to meet the Federal Government's requirements in terms of quarantine. But, yes, Brad Hazzard and I speak regularly in terms of managing coronavirus and how we can make sure that the safety of students and our staff is number one. In fact, we were the ones before any other State that came out and said we wanted to put that self-isolation in place for 14 days for anybody returning from China. We did that at the beginning of the school year, a few days before the other States and the Federal Government made the same conclusion, because we take this very seriously. It is an ongoing situation, as you would appreciate, that we will continue to monitor and, yes, it is something that I discuss regularly with the health Minister.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will there be independent health checks on these school cleaners before they come back into New South Wales?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They need to meet the Federal Government's quarantine requirements on their return.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are not going to impose independent health checking on these cleaners. The advice is changing. It was 14 days. Now we are hearing it could be 28 days. We have had the first human-to-human transmission just in the last couple of days in New South Wales. Do we not want the best possible practice in our New South Wales schools before someone potentially carrying the coronavirus comes back into New South Wales?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of course we do, which is why we work closely with Health and with the Federal Government in terms of managing this.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So have you asked the health Minister about this?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of course I have.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You can run interference all you like, Wes. These are genuine questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: This is not a chance for you to editorialise. If you want to editorialise, go and write to *The Guardian*. Go and write to *The Guardian* if you want to do this.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, if you want to ask the questions, you just take your time.

The CHAIR: Order! There is a point of order taken by the Hon. Wes Fang, which will be heard by the Committee.

The Hon. WES FANG: My point of order is that the Minister is directly answering the question that was asked by the Hon. Courtney Houssos. The Hon. Courtney Houssos should have the good sense and—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks but I won't take my advice from you, Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: —be polite enough to allow the Minister to answer the question.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you finished your answer?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Only to add, Chair, that, as I said, I speak regularly with the health Minister. The Department of Education speaks regularly with NSW Health. All State and Territory and the Federal education Minister also speak regularly in relation to managing this to ensure the safety of our children and our staff. We take it very seriously and any suggestion that we do not I think is, frankly, a bit offensive.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you spoken to the finance Minister about the contracts. They are whole-of-government contracts, as Mr Manning outlined. Have you spoken to the finance Minister about the provisions within the contract?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, or as Mr Manning said, we have been able to fill those positions if there have been any vacancies. That is the advice that he is given.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are guaranteeing—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can ask questions of the finance Minister when he is here on Thursday. He has questions about the Government's broader contract.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, Minister, I am asking you as the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, who opened the newspaper and saw that there were school cleaners flying off to Japan to clean the *Diamond Princess*, whether you spoke to the finance Minister, whether you spoke to the health Minister and whether you asked and went above and beyond, as you did several weeks ago requiring children to be self-isolated?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I speak to the health Minister about the ongoing developments with coronavirus on a regular basis. I speak to my Federal counterparts as well. Our departments are speaking. I sought advice in relation to school cleaners and was, as I said, given the advice that anybody who leaves and coming back into the country who may have had contact with coronavirus also would need to meet the Federal Government's quarantine requirements. This is a whole-of-government issue. In fact, it is a whole-of-Australia issue.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will these be independent checks?

The CHAIR: No, you cannot sneak one in because you know your time is expiring. Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Good morning, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And half the department who is here. Nice to see you as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: At your request.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I am not criticising. It was at our request.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not want to do an individual welcome. We will be here for half an hour.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Take your time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you, that is sweet. Minister, will you table the interim review that CESE has done on Local Schools, Local Decisions with this Committee? Do you have enough confidence in your policy that you will table that review with us now?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. We can provide that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thanks, Minister. Minister, Local Schools, Local Decisions has been going for how many years now?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: From 2012.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I had eight years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you have a report that identifies a distinct and clear educational outcome, a positive educational outcome, from Local Schools, Local Decisions? Can you provide us with a report that shows it has worked?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get the secretary to respond to that.

Mr SCOTT: I think there are some encouraging signs but there are challenging signs too. Let's look at three—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: With all due respect, it is not about signs. It is about a report.

Mr SCOTT: Okay.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am not interested in the stars. I am interested in the report.

Mr SCOTT: No, I know. How about evidence? We want to go to evidence.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Evidence is good.

Mr SCOTT: There are three strong areas of, in a sense, external validation that comes into play around our school performance system as far as assessments are concerned. There is PISA, which I have no doubt we will get to through the day.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I am not—sorry.

Mr SCOTT: There is NAPLAN.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We have limited time. This is not about a discursive response. This question is about: Is there a report? It is a very distinct question. Is there a report that you can identify that supports the Local Schools, Local Decisions producing positive education outcomes?

The CHAIR: Is that to Mr Scott or the Minister?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was to the Minister. She has referred it to Mr Scott. Now Mr Scott is giving us a discursive chat about it.

Mr SCOTT: Chair, I suppose my argument would be if we are looking for evidence to validate the policy settings—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: A single report?

Mr SCOTT: —we need to look at the markers that we look at. One would be PISA, one would be NAPLAN and one would be the Higher School Certificate. I think what we can see around NAPLAN is a documented lift—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Chair, I am going to say it again.

The CHAIR: Are you taking a point of order?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He is not responding. He is not being responsive.

The CHAIR: With all due respect, Mr Shoebridge, the Minister, having been asked a question—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: About reports.

The CHAIR: —has referred it to the departmental secretary. I think he has got only about 25 seconds into his answer. I think we will take one minute as the filibuster alarm point.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is that the rule?

The CHAIR: Let us hear another 35 seconds from Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: I will up my speed, Mr Chair. We have met the Premier's Priorities for a lift to students in the top two bands of NAPLAN from 2015 to 2019. We have seen a lift there. Similarly, as Mr Martin can testify, we have held our performance in the Higher School Certificate and there is no evidence of deterioration in HSC results and performance over time but the PISA does remain a challenge. We have then made significant investment, which doubtless we will talk about later, to improve investment that we are making in leadership and in support services.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Chair, I am going to take the same point of order related to filibustering.

The CHAIR: You can ask your next question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, apart from the material that Mr Scott has put on the record, can you identify a single report that identifies a positive outcome from Local Schools, Local Decisions?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the interim CESE report, which looked at some of the positives and feedback from the principals and also some of the challenges, is one. I agree in terms of needing to look at ways that we can improve that policy setting, which is what I am assuming you are getting to, which is why we said it is an area that we want to look at and improve.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much was spent on Local Schools, Local Decisions in the last financial year?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get the secretary to answer that.

Mr SCOTT: I think it is a bit hard to document. What we have done is we have put more money into schools.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, it is a simple question. You must have this answer somewhere. How much was spent on Local Schools, Local Decisions last year. If you have not come prepared for this answer, you are obviously unprepared.

Mr SCOTT: Let us look at elements of it. Ms Harrison can speak to it. Mr Dizdar can—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I want the global amount.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge has asked a very direct question: How much have you spent on Local Schools, Local Decisions? The answer should not be along the lines of "There are elements of it." If there is not an answer available now, take it on notice and provide the information.

Mr SCOTT: We can take that on notice. There are many elements to it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the RAM loadings and the different breakdowns, David, we will take that on notice and provide that to you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, you must have known Local Schools, Local Decisions will be front and centre of at least a fair chunk of this budget estimates hearing. It is a budget estimates hearing and I am asking you how much you spent in the last financial year on Local Schools, Local Decisions, and you do not have an answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have said we will take the breakdown of that on notice, David.

The CHAIR: They are taking it on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you give an indication of the quantum? Was it \$1 billion? Was it \$2 billion? Can you tell us the size?

The CHAIR: No, they are taking it on notice but if you have a follow-up question about the spending it should be asked now.

Mr SCOTT: At a system level in the 2020 budget \$9.6 billion is being allocated to the 2,000 public schools in New South Wales through the Resource Allocation Model. That is part of Local Schools, Local Decisions: Give schools cash but also we have spent money on the supporting infrastructure to back that in—the tailored support scheme that Ms Harrison can talk about, the school leadership initiatives that Mr Dizdar can speak to.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was a question about quantum, not about various programs, so we will move on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it is related, David, with respect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand. We will get the further details on notice. Minister, you will be aware that the school handbook about school finance recommends very strongly that every school set up a budget or finance committee to direct the school's finances. Are you aware of that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many schools across New South Wales have actually set up a budget or finance committee and do you keep track of it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Dizdar to respond to that question.

Mr DIZDAR: It is our expectation that every school would have a school finance committee.

The CHAIR: We have heard this before from you, Mr Dizdar. We are not interested in expectations; we are interested in a hard factual answer to the MP's question. How many have set up the committee?

Mr DIZDAR: They are oversighted by the Directors, Educational Leadership [DELs] that oversight school principals. That is our monitoring arm to see that school finance committees are in place. With some 500 small schools, which range from a teaching principal to a fraction of admin support or a fraction of teacher support, it can be difficult in some contexts to have a finance committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There are 2,200 schools. I would like you to tell me now how many of them have a budget or finance committee to guide the principals' decisions on the spending of a school budget? Of the 2,200 schools, how many have one?

Mr DIZDAR: I am happy to come back with the exact number to the committee.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is this something that is tracked?

Mr DIZDAR: It is monitored through the Directors, Educational Leadership.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: At the end of last year, Minister, what were the accumulated unspent funds sitting in school bank accounts? By "sitting in school bank accounts" I mean in that common account allocated to schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary if he has the exact number but I will just—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Again, it is not an essay; I just want a number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to preface it. As I said earlier, there is money in school bank accounts that comes through things like Local Schools, Local Decisions and our funding but often there is also money that is there that the schools may have raised themselves or for different reasons, just so you are aware.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the figure?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The figure is \$1.3 billion.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is actually more than at the end of last calendar year. By "last calendar year" I mean at the end of 2018. So things got worse. How do you explain that?

Mr SCOTT: No, actually there are two elements. I think it is an important question and so we just need to understand what that sum is. As we have discussed previously at this Committee, there has been an issue and I think everyone—principals groups and others—concedes about schools spending this allocation. This was a new thing to give them, this quantum of money.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, it is not. It was in 2012.

The CHAIR: Your time is up, Mr Shoebridge. I am sorry. You are in my time.

Mr SCOTT: No, actually, to be fair, Mr Shoebridge, the amount of money that actually has flowed out to schools has significantly increased over that time with a very small amount early on. The full quantum of the first tranche of Gonski really only came to schools in 2018-19. It is significantly more money. What we saw in 2019 is that—and I am happy to provide you with a detailed list—schools really did a good job in spending the money that was allocated to them in 2019. It was the best expenditure percentage we have seen. However, that amount also includes money that school communities have raised themselves. About half that money is monies that school communities have raised through their own fundraising initiatives that they are designating per initiative that they want to spend at the school. So it is not necessarily a bad thing that that amount has increased because the driver of that—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We are going to have to agree to disagree. I think it is the Chair's questioning.

The CHAIR: Minister, when does the Government expect to respond to the recommendations of this Committee's report on measurement and outcome-based budgeting?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think six months is the general committee process. Being an upper House member, I am very well aware of that. We will be working through those recommendations. There is, as you would appreciate, Mr Chair, an internal government process in terms of the Government response but it will be considered certainly by me as a matter of priority and within the time frame that has been allocated.

The CHAIR: Minister, a common problem in disadvantaged schools is the staff turnover, often through no fault of the school. Perhaps due to the false reputation of the suburb, they do not get a lot of teachers knocking down the door to teach in that school. They get a lot of new and temporary teachers and they are denied staffing stability so they miss out on what John Hattie found as the high effect collective efficacy of schools moving with stability in the one direction. Is it not time to let principals employ 100 per cent of their staff so that they can recruit the people they need and have the stability they need to get the job done, particularly in disadvantaged schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, with respect, Mr Chair, I note that that is one of the recommendations that has come through the Committee in terms of looking at the staffing allocations and how that works.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Through the majority of the report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Clearly you would appreciate I cannot pre-empt a response in relation to each of the individual recommendations here today. I know that you would understand that. The broader issue in terms of making sure that we fix some of those issues is teacher supply and particularly understanding, as I do—and I know you would as well—that the quality of the teacher standing in front of a child in the classroom is the biggest single indicator in terms of the outcome and the results. Making sure that we are investing in our teachers and making sure that we do have our high-quality teachers at our disadvantaged schools is something that is a priority. I do not know if the secretary wants to add any more.

Mr SCOTT: Mr Chair, the challenge is this. We will be carefully looking at the details of the report. If we look at how our current staffing system operates, it takes, I think, about twice as long for a local selection of a staff member to get to a school than a central allocation of staff members. I think if you spoke to some of the principals whom I have spoken to out in the regional and remote areas, they would be quite concerned that if you set up simply a free market that just said, "You recruit your local staff", they would have even more of a difficulty in getting staff. They are quite dependent on the centralised staff allocation model.

As you would understand, too, one of the challenges that we have is that we have an incentive scheme, which is providing incentives to people to do a stint in perhaps a rural school or remote school. One of the ways you get them to those schools is a sense of confidence they have that when the time is right for them and their family they can move to another school. That happens through the centralised staffing model. If, in fact, you break down some elements of centralised staffing and just have it all being on local recruitment, then I think the question would be—I think the test that would need to be solved is will that make it easier to get the staff you need in hard-to-staff schools? I think there is considerable debate as to whether, in fact, that works.

The CHAIR: But isn't this a major problem, Minister, with the department? The department has identified problems and has excuses but where is the solution to produce the staffing stability that disadvantaged schools need for school outcomes. Do you see? Is it not time for the system to focus laser-like on school outcomes? There are big problems for these disadvantaged schools. Where is the thinking to get the solution?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think, as the secretary did say, trying to make sure that we do not disadvantage some, particularly rural and regional schools, with that centralised staffing model. If we were to move to that 100 per cent allocation, as you are suggesting, would be a challenge. So I would not want to be in a position where you sort of rob Peter to pay Paul, in a sense. We have got to make sure that whatever mechanisms we look at in terms of staffing distribution is that we do not inadvertently end up disadvantaging another community to benefit the other. That is the challenge and I admit that that is a challenge but it is about trying to do the best that we can to ensure, as I said, that we have those quality teachers where we need them most.

Ms HARRISSON: Just on the temporary teacher issue that you have raised, I think it is important that we understand the reasons that schools will employ temporary teachers. Often that is due to other permanent teachers being on approved leave, including maternity leave, sick leave and leave without pay and principals can also create some additional temporary positions using their RAM loadings. So we actually have the capacity locally for more temporary teachers to be brought into schools. Where positions are ongoing, schools will seek to fill those on a permanent basis. That is our expectation and is work that we would be doing regularly through a Director, Educational Leadership to ensure that permanent positions are, wherever feasible, filled with permanent teachers and we will continue to seek to fill those vacancies with permanent teachers until that is achieved.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, are you disappointed the department has not developed a framework and guidelines for the most effective expenditure of the Gonski money that is flooding into disadvantaged schools in particular, that these schools can be community health centres, these schools can be pastoral care centres, they

can be social work centres, they can have a focus on wellbeing as an end in itself? Where is the thinking and the recommendations from the department to help schools allocate the money for getting the best outcome?

For instance, why have we not looked at the Canadian system of putting money into after-school tutors for struggling students instead of paying jersey-clad footballers to play handball with kids to get them to school in the morning? Why have we not allowed schools to have a capitation payment to buy in vocational education and training [VET] services to engage students at high school level who are disengaging from the academic curriculum instead of one-way mirrors for behavioural experts from universities to come in and teach parents how to be parents? It is just a wide, wide set of parameters here instead of, again, a focus on what actually gets the school outcomes academic growth?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously there are quite a few issues raised in that question, Chair. I think that we have school excellence frameworks. We have guidelines that we try to provide to the schools in terms of where money should be spent and in terms of what best practice looks like. But as I said and foreshadowed in the comments that I made on the weekend, making sure that we are having that focus on teaching and learning educational outcomes, these are the sort of issues that we want to raise. I will be frank. I have been at schools where I have seen how their RAM allocation has been spent and it has been on things that have included—actually, I was at a school with the Hon. Wes Fang: Mount Austin not far out of Wagga Wagga. I think it was last year. They have a high refugee population. There is quite a bit of disadvantage in terms of their school population so they use some of their RAM funding to bring in an occupational therapist and a speech therapist. But they are sitting in the classroom at the table with the children working through. In my view, that sort of support—and, yes, it is a health support—is about breaking down silos between where you are accessing support and it is an outcome that—

The CHAIR: But it is all optional. Are guidelines being developed from research?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I understand. But my point is that there are opportunities where we are doing that and it is working very well within the schools but also I am looking at making sure that the focus, as I said, is on teaching and learning. I do think that some of those extra programs that you have mentioned—obviously there are different examples at different schools—but if that extra program is contributing to the student attending, the student having a better learning outcome, then I think that is important. But I think that in terms of better clarity around the areas that we would like particular schools to focus on if the outcomes are not what we are expecting, they are the sort of issues that we want to canvass as part of the reform for Local Schools, Local Decisions.

The CHAIR: The Hon. Mark Banasiak will ask his questions.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you, Chair. Minister, the department has been rebranded three times in the last 10 or so years. The first was the Department of Education and Training, then we became the Department of Education and Communities [DEC] and now we are back to the Department of Education, which is what our original iteration was, and in between that internally we have got NSW Public Schools as a brand. How much has that cost the taxpayers and the department in terms of that rebranding process? Considering that as a former deputy principal I had to budget \$6 million and link it all to student outcomes, how is that rebranding being linked to improving student outcomes?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond in terms of costs.

Mr SCOTT: We can get any details for you. The one thing I would say is that in my time in the department since the end of 2016, even though there have been machinery of government changes, I think there has been a deliberate decision not to go and look at the branding issue again. So it has really been the Department of Education now for four-plus years and even though skills came into the portfolio, training, TAFE, we have not gone down a rebranding line. The brand is not the important thing for us. We can look at what those rebranding issues have cost but you are now going back four-plus years since that last happened.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, back on Local Schools, Local Decisions, when last year did you start having conversations with the department about the need to tinker or modify the policy?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have been speaking about this for quite some time. As I said, we have had discussions around ways that we can improve and better support principals.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Before your October 2019 statement where you said it was a good decision?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, it is a policy that is well intentioned. I think there have been some unintended consequences. That is the work that we have been doing over the last few months in terms of policy reform. I will have some more details to go into about that in due course.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: One of the other decisions or one of the other policies that came around at the same time was the Learning Management and Business Reform [LMBR]. Would you admit that that has been an abysmal failure?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would say that obviously the time that that was rolled out predated my time as Minister in this portfolio. I think where we have ended up has been a better outcome but, yes, I would say there were certainly some challenges with the rollout of that program. But, as I said, it predated my time as Minister.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add to that?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am sorry, "a better outcome". Currently it has cost over a billion dollars. It was advertised as an all-encompassing system. We now know that it is just a series of apps jerry-rigged together that do not actually work. It got to round two of implementation and someone finally realised it did not have a timetabling program, it did not have a reporting program and it did not have a calendar—three backbone functions of day-to-day school operations. It was supposed to do away with third party systems and you now find that schools are relying on both their third party and the LMBR applications because they do not trust the LMBR. I do not see how that is a good outcome.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The secretary will respond.

Mr SCOTT: This is an issue long canvassed here, as you know. I think what we have seen, and certainly in my time with the department, I mean LMBR—a lot of that expenditure took place really quite a long time ago now. What we have continued to do is work closely with principals and with teachers about the continued rollout in work and modification of that work. Yes, we have done some modifications. I would say to you in consultation with our principals and our administrative staff we did a rework of the budgeting tool and now the feedback we have had on the budgeting tool that we have rolled out, which we have done in training with consultation with schools on their real numbers, has had the best response.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: For clarification, is that version one or version two of the enterprise financial planning tool [eFPT]?

Mr SCOTT: The second version.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just for clarification.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, absolutely right. So, in a way, I am unapologetic that, yes, a decision was made to invest in the infrastructure of school administration systems. In practice, as we have talked with schools we have modified some of that, as is the case I can say with every piece of technology and software that is rolled out. You know, you learn from the user experience on the ground and then you modify it, as we have done with that budget tool, and that second version has been very, very well received and had very, very strong feedback on training. We have learnt from the experience. Ms Downey has worked with us with that delivery unit team to look at how we develop our software programs now, learning from the LMBR experience, to have more consultation with staff earlier in the process and to have a more agile approach. And, yes, we have worked with schools, if in fact there are external providers and software providers that they think are providing particular benefit for them, we have looked hard to integrate them in the LMBR system.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, can you now tell us if satellite phones are provided to New South Wales schools in areas of high bushfire risk?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for the question. Obviously this was something that was raised during the bushfire period that we had over summer. I did have one school raise it with me out at Bobin. I understand that they have a satellite phone as part of their changes. It is something that we have looked at. We are looking at opportunities around providing that better communication to school communities. I think initially we are looking at making sure that they all have AM/FM battery radios so that they can get that incoming advice from ABC, which provides those bushfire updates. But I have actively asked the department to look at options in terms of communications for those schools, given what we saw and what I heard out on the ground during the bushfire period.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can anyone on the panel tell me how many schools in bushfire-affected areas now have satellite phones? Is it just Bobin?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can take that on notice and get the number for you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is there no-one here who can tell me?

Mr SCOTT: We will take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have any counsellors who were initially placed in schools in bushfire-affected areas been removed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Ms Harrison to go into detail in relation to any who have and what the placement of them is. What I can say to the Committee is that we made the commitment that we would work with school communities to put that extra mental health support in. That is what we did from the beginning of the term. It was for a four-week period but we have also made the commitment that basically we will stay until the school indicates that they are no longer required. We will take guidance from the principals and the school communities as to how long they are there for. I do not know whether Ms Harrison has any more details about that.

Ms HARRISSON: We can provide further details on notice. I think it is important to understand that the need of every community is different and that we are working very closely on the ground to respond to the needs of those communities as they are identified by them.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me specifically on Batlow Technology School if the counsellor has been removed from that school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will take that one on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide then on notice, if you are going to take it all on notice, at least all of the bushfire-impacted schools, how many counsellors were available, if any of them have been reduced since that four-week period, and how long you are planning to keep them on site?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I can tell you that we are planning to keep them on site as long as the school communities have asked for them to be there. We have made that quite clear. I have visited schools in those communities, as has the secretary. We will provide whatever support they need. We know this is not business as usual. I will say that some have had the school counsellors come in. I know that that has been welcomed. Others have asked for different support in terms of what they need. We will be receptive based on what they tell us they need going forward. We recognise that this is not going to be a short-term solution and that we will need to provide support to those schools communities for, I would say, an extensive period of time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: As part of those considerations, are you going to roll out your \$88 million election commitment to any of those schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is rolling out this year. There are placements. We have the scholarship program underway for more counsellors and psychologists to come in but I can provide some information as to where the first tranche has gone and if it does correlate with any of those schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide on notice where they are going?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but this is not an either/or. I just want to make the point that the support that we have provided in terms of counselling for those bushfire-affected schools is separate and in addition to the election commitment. This is going over the election commitment to provide that extra support to those schools, given that we know that they have been through some incredibly horrific and challenging circumstances. We need to support them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, in 2017 the Government passed the Education Amendment (School Safety) Bill. You were the Minister with carriage in the Legislative Council, as I understand it. In your second reading speech you identified a number of reasons that the bill is necessary: One was terrorism; I think another was cyberstalking. Are the reasons that you identified still present? Is that the advice from the department that those risks are still present?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask the secretary. Just to clarify, I was a Minister who led on it in the upper House but I was not the education Minister at the time. I will ask probably the secretary or Mr Dizdar to comment about how we manage those issues.

Mr SCOTT: We continue to have briefings from police. We have police who work closely with us. We get regular updates on that. I think those provisions that were put into the legislation were done for sound reasons at the time as it was outlined by the then Minister. We see no reason to change those provisions.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you explain then why the bill is not operating? Why has it not been proclaimed?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You do not know why?

Mr SCOTT: Well, I will take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In other estimates hearings, other departments have been more proactive and have been willing to provide responses to questions that are taken in the morning session in the afternoon.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Other Opposition members have been willing to accept when the answer is, "We will take the question on notice", to take that on face value and not question the witnesses. I remind both the Opposition members that there are procedural fairness obligations on them both.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I was going to say that we are happy to come back with some more information on that this afternoon.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just think it makes for a better session if we have a bit more of an interactive approach.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will endeavour to come back this afternoon, if we can.

The CHAIR: The Committee is not in complete control of the quality of the session but I think you need to take it that if a witness says that they are taking the question on notice they do not have the answer available right now. It is up to them to decide and hopefully cooperate with the Committee to bring that information as quickly as possible.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, last year in budget estimates we were advised that 43 schools did not meet their Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines [EFSG] of 10 square metres of play space per student. Can you confirm that this ratio does not take into account demountables that are placed on school play space?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to respond to that question in terms of those guidelines.

Mr MANNING: The EFSG, or the Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines, are designed as a guide to help us plan schools. The 10 square metres is really focussed on play space and is designed around how we put together new schools. It would not include demountables in that space.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you tell us then how many schools do not currently meet the 10 square metres per student outlined in the guidelines when you factor in demountables?

Mr MANNING: As I said, it is a guide to be used when we are putting new schools together. Existing schools' compliance with the guide is not something that we are constantly reviewing. It is relevant to new schools rather than—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What is the purpose of the ratio?

Mr MANNING: It is really a guide around when we procure land in order to put a school in, how much land do we think we need in order to deliver that school. That is part of that process. That is where the 10 square metres sits.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that based on an assessment that that is the necessary amount of play space that is reasonable for a school per student?

Mr MANNING: It is developed around what we think is a commonsense approach to space. I do not believe there is necessarily any scientific basis around 10 square metres. It is just a guide. It gives us a sense of the volume of land that we need to procure for a school. That is why it is a guide within that process that we use.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But obviously it goes to the broader issue, which is that if you are encroaching on play space after a school is constructed, if you have not anticipated the full growth and you are

then placing demountables, the play space is being eroded. Does the department not feel the need to keep track of that? How low can it go?

Mr MANNING: No, it is not an analysis we do on a regular basis. In terms of deciding placement of demountables, the Asset Management Unit is involved in that. We look to place demountables in areas that do not impact on play spaces as much as we possibly can.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is the department capable of providing any information or that analysis that I have asked for in relation to the ratio that would apply if you take the demountables into account?

Mr MANNING: It is something that we will have to take on notice. There is an enormous amount of work that would need to be done to look at the building spaces that we have got and the volume of the school sites. There is a huge amount of work. It is not a statistic that we keep across 2,200 schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am happy for you to take it on notice and come back with some analysis around that.

Mr MANNING: We will take on notice whether that is something that we can provide.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, when were you first told that the Alexandria Park Community School construction would be split into two stages?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have had conversations about that school. I visited that school not long after I was appointed the Minister, from recollection. Since I have been Minister I have been aware that that has been the case since I visited that school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you were aware from your first visit that it was planning to be in two stages, not just as one holistic construction. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is my recollection. I have also had a meeting with the local member, Ron Hoening, in relation to that school project as well. We discussed it at that meeting. I just cannot remember the date off the top of my head when I met with him.

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

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, I can tell when I met with Ron.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide on notice when you were first told that it would be split into two stages?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, my recollection would be the day that I visited that school. I get advice in relation to school infrastructure and projects that are happening but I can check the date as to when I visited the school. That is fine.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Because you would be aware that there was no prior mention to parents, staff or even the school's architects that there would be a two-stage construction. The initial planning and all of the communication with the local school and the community has been that there would be one stage of construction. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to provide some information in relation to the communication that has gone out to the school community, or the secretary. I am not sure.

Mr MANNING: I do not have the information on hand for that school in particular, but with almost all of the schools that we plan we look at further potential stages. It is quite common for us to plan an immediate stage and know that there may well be further stages beyond that point and put some planning to exactly how that would work. We quite often will do a master plan for a school even though we might not be intending to deliver or even need to deliver a further stage at some time, depending on the demographics. So it would not be uncommon for us to plan a school project knowing that there might be subsequent stages and allow that within the strategy of how we might build it. I cannot talk to that particular example but that would be a very common practice for us across the schools that we build.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, I am not speaking to a master planning strategy and a secondary. Initially the school was told it would be a redevelopment. It would occur, that the school was being moved offsite into a pop-up school, they would be building that. And suddenly in 2019 even the people who were designing the project, not to mention the principal and the school's director of the local area, all of a sudden were told that it would be in two stages. This was news to them. I would like to find out when the department made the decision and on what basis.

Mr MANNING: I would need to take that on notice. I do not have that information to hand but that is not my understanding. But we will take that question on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well—

Mr SCOTT: My understanding was that it was planned as our—that what we are rolling out was what was planned and that there were conversations about further scope but they were never part of that original plan but we have thought through in terms of making sure that that would fit and work into our future stages.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, your testimony to this Committee is that it was a two-stage planning process.

Mr MANNING: My testimony is that, along with a lot of other schools, we think through further stages and we plan those as part of what we do whereas we might only actually be delivering the first stage full.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, I am going to stop you there. We might ask you some more questions about that this afternoon.

Mr DIZDAR: Ms Houssos, I have visited the school a number of times. It was always a complex build. It is being built for 2,200 students in the mean state—a primary school of 1,000, a secondary school of 1,200—and our demographics and data and the principal and leadership team know this, that we would not be 1,200 from day one, the complete build. You would also know that just across the road we moved the inner Sydney Intensive English High School from Cleveland Street, so that was an added complexity to the plans and staging of the build. So I think it is fair to say the school community has always known—and they are in a pop-up school at the moment, the high school. I have visited the pop-up school and its great facilities. They are happy with the facilities. They always knew that it would be a complex staged build. That is my operational advice when I visited the school and I have heard nothing to the contrary.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am going to stop you there, Mr Dizdar, because we have limited time. We might come back to this this afternoon but I suggest in the meantime you take some alternative advice because that directly contradicts what the local member has been telling me. Minister, when will the 2020 asbestos registers be made publicly available?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning or Mr Stevens to answer that.

Mr STEVENS: The asbestos registers we try to update annually, so it is around September-October.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Around September-October we should expect those?

Mr STEVENS: That is correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And they will be released this year?

Mr STEVENS: They have been released every year. We missed one year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Stevens. I am going to stop you there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. Let him answer the question. He is about to respond to it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am trying to get him to not mislead the Committee.

Mr STEVENS: I am not misleading.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, he is not. He has just said—

Mr SCOTT: Yes. Let him finish the sentence.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let him finish the answer, that would be helpful.

Mr STEVENS: As I was saying, we release them every year. We missed one year in 2018 because of an issue with printing, but they have been put out. Since their inception they have been put out. We missed one year. I think it was a 14-month break.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We might come back to that in later questioning. Minister, how many of the 29 New South Wales public schools that require remediation for vermiculite ceilings containing asbestos have been completed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Stevens might take this.

Mr STEVENS: All the schools have been remediated. At the moment we are going through a quality assurance [QA] process to make sure that we have collected all the information and remediated all sites.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you can confirm that all 29 have been remediated.

Mr STEVENS: That is correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, given that the vermiculite ceiling of the music room at the Callaghan College, Waratah Technology Campus, was identified as containing asbestos, why was it not listed on the 2017 and 29 schools asbestos register?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to ask Mr Stevens to answer, if he has got information for that particular school.

Mr STEVENS: Yes. We take a risk-averse approach. That particular ceiling, my understanding is it was at a great height so it was not tested at the time. It has since been tested and was cleared. But just to make sure that people do not do work on the ceiling without the proper precautions until it is tested, we take the approach to say, "Assume it is asbestos unless it is proven not to be." In that particular case we had not tested that ceiling. We assumed it was asbestos. We have since tested and it is not and now it will be updated in the next review.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I like to hear that you are taking a risk-averse approach because at the Newcastle East Public School, Minister, it was not listed on the 2017 or the 29 schools asbestos register, yet asbestos was discovered there in the Christmas school holidays.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In relation to Newcastle East, there was some asbestos that was listed particularly in relation to the roof. We were going in to do some replacement of that and, again, I will get school infrastructure to talk in more detail in terms of that specific project. But, effectively, we were going in, as I understand it, to replace that roof. That had been scheduled for work over the Christmas period. There was a piece of bonded asbestos which was unexpectedly found at that school site. It should not have been there. Again, I am not a construction expert but they have told me that it was not normal building practice or common building practice in a roof of that nature for that extra piece of bonded asbestos to be there.

I understand that the roof cavity—and I apologise to anyone who is more technically advanced than I am in terms of construction—but that the roof cavity was very small and there was no way of knowing that that extra piece was there until we went in to remove the bonded tiles to replace them. As soon as it was found we took all necessary precautions and all thorough testing to make sure that it was removed and remediated, as is what we do with the asbestos management plan, where it is known and where it is suspected. That was a very unusual circumstance, I am told, that that piece was there when in common building practice it should not be.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, are you reviewing the contracts of the arrangements for the removal of asbestos from New South Wales schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not quite understand your question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There are two parts. There is identifying the asbestos, which clearly there are some issues around. But are you considering reviewing the contract of the way that asbestos is removed from New South Wales schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have processes in place to remove it when we find it, as we have made clear. When we know it is there, if there are any concerns about safety, we go in immediately and remove it. We also have a program in terms of vermiculite ceilings and like what we saw at Newcastle East, which was planned removal of bonded asbestos tiles. That is my understanding. I do not know if Mr Manning wants to answer or add anything further to that.

Mr MANNING: With Newcastle East, the roof, we knew, was bonded asbestos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, I will need to come back this afternoon because I have only two minutes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, no, with respect—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: You have asked the question, Courtney.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Don't try to take up my time again.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am not.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to answer the questions. That is fine.

The CHAIR: All members will come to order. There will be no yelling. It is not a very good example. Let us keep things calm and reasoned questioning. If the Hon. Courtney Houssos asks questions, I would expect that she will allow the witnesses to provide some kind of answer. Minister, the answer?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. I am happy to go to the next question. That is fine.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you. Minister, will the Inner Sydney High School be open this year for years 8 to 12?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Dizdar to answer that in terms of the operational status of that school.

Mr DIZDAR: We started with year 7 and we build from there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Does that mean that there will be no years 8 to 12 students entering the school this year?

Mr DIZDAR: Yes. We only start with year 7.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And then the next year it will be years 7 and 8.

Mr DIZDAR: Next year we have years 7 and 8 and we continue to build from there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And what about the Lindfield Learning Village? Why have the expansion of enrolments not happened this year as planned?

Mr DIZDAR: In Lindfield Learning Village we are right across, K-12. In terms of the second stage of that build, Mr Manning may want to comment on that.

Mr MANNING: Yes. We are in planning at the moment for the second stage of Lindfield, so through the State significant development. As soon as we are through that, we can begin to progress the second stage of Lindfield.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My understanding was that there was a higher number of enrolments that was expected to start this year, not the second stage. It was a higher number, which has not occurred. Can you provide us with any more information on that?

Mr DIZDAR: Having spoken with the school principal and having visited, we have tremendous demand in applications for that school. We have a lengthy waiting list of parents and families that want to take up their education at that school, so we have strong demand for that school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and my understanding is that there were not as many spaces that were provided this year.

Mr SCOTT: There has been no decrease in spaces. We are growing that school over time. It is a K-12 school. I think its capacity will be 2,000 or thereabouts by the time it is through.

Mr DIZDAR: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: It is an innovative school and a different type of school site and we are growing it steadily. We have strong confidence in the leadership team there. We will grow that school steadily over time. It is not a bad process actually. I was at the Inner Sydney High School the other day. The principal there was very pleased at the ability for them to grow that cohort and grow that school steadily, year 7 through to year 12.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, in our recent Committee inquiry there was a fair bit of focus on the contents of school plans. As part of my Committee work, I have looked at over 50. They set out three different strategic directions, so there are over 150 different strategic directions. Only once have I found mention of "achieving academic growth" or words to that effect. Does it worry you that such a small proportion from that sample—maybe a bigger sample would show a similar result—of our schools are actually focused on achieving academic growth as opposed to all the other objectives that have crept into the system, which indicate they are not really schools anymore?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask Mr Dizdar in a moment to make some comments about school plans and the requirement. Like you, I have looked through quite a few of them since becoming Minister. What I will say is that we have made it clear and I have made it clear that improving educational outcomes is the number one priority. We have been working with our schools, particularly in relation to the rollout of Bump It

Up, and to try to set those targets and make it clear that we want lift across the system. There are a range of programs that we have got underway to help address that issue and improve that outcome. Like I said, Bump It Up is one that particularly I think will have real benefit. We have seen that it worked well when we did it for a smaller number of schools. We are rolling it out and I think by the end of this term we will have targets in place for all 2,200 public schools. We have never had it at that scale before. I think that makes it clear from a Government perspective that lifting educational outcomes is something that we are very serious about and an area that we want to improve.

The CHAIR: What do you mean by "educational outcomes"? All schools will say they are interested in educational outcomes but they do not necessarily mean achieving academic growth. They will say they are after happy kids or pastoral care or wellbeing. What do you mean by "educational outcomes"? Do you mean results of an academic kind?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. I think we need to make sure that we are getting those results of an academic kind. I think that particularly with Bump It Up we are looking at literacy and numeracy through NAPLAN or its equivalent. We have said that because obviously I have made it clear I think NAPLAN can be improved. We are also looking at attendance because, of course, if children are not attending school then that has impacts on their education. We want to have a better understanding in real time in terms of data that can inform us about school attendance. We are looking at an equity slice.

We are looking at children from more disadvantaged communities, Aboriginal families and children from rural and remote communities in terms of how they are measuring against their city counterparts. As part of that, we are also looking at wellbeing, recognising, as I said, that if a student is having a positive school experience, if they have got those extra supports around them in terms of the mention that I gave before of allied health support in the classroom, I do think we need to take that into consideration. But there are clear targets in terms of educational outcomes and hitting those NAPLAN targets as part of Bump It Up and the rollout.

The CHAIR: Are you worried about the number of schools that seem to take wellbeing as an end in itself?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think, as you said, it is important that we look at the whole picture in terms of the school and a student and their outcomes because I know—and I think that many in the Committee would share this view—if there are additional issues going on in a child's life, it is impacting on their education. We cannot turn a blind eye to it in terms of our school system, but we have to make sure that the focus is on improving their educational outcomes. It could be through things like the mental health support, the additional allied health support, as I have referred to earlier, that in and of itself is about helping them improve their education. I think to me that is the link that we need to make sure is strong and that there are wellbeing programs that benefit the child's educational outcomes.

The CHAIR: As Minister, would you expect that every government school in New South Wales would have as their number one strategic direction achieving academic growth?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. I think that in the schools that I have visited that is clearly the case. I have been to a lot of schools where principals are very focused on improving the educational outcomes for their kids and that is what they should be focusing on.

The CHAIR: You said you have looked at a lot of school plans. Have you seen that as the number one strategic direction?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, in terms of the school plans, I think the approach, as you would have noticed, is different in terms of how schools put that information forward as the process that comes through the school assessment and the external validations that happen. I think it is every five years in terms of those plans and what figures and targets there are in place. But, like I have said, I have made it clear that the focus has to be on lifting outcomes. That is what we want to see and I think principals and school communities understand that.

The CHAIR: Would you undertake for the department or CESE to do an analysis of the 2,200 schools on what they say about their strategic directions to tell us more about what our schools have actually become and what they are trying to achieve?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have the secretary make a comment.

Mr SCOTT: I can add, Mr Chair, that we are revising the school planning process now. It will go hand in hand with Bump It Up targets that have been identified and that we are currently working through with every

school. I must say there have been no schools that have been made aware of that have not been willing to engage with the school target-setting process, which starts—

The CHAIR: No, that is not my question, Mr Scott. We will have to come back to that later because you have moved on to a different question.

Mr SCOTT: But I am saying it will be in the school plan. These targets will be in the school plan and so if you are asking whether, in fact, there is a commitment to improving lifting academic outcomes, that will be a hallmark of the next generation of school plans, just like it is a hallmark of our strategic—

The CHAIR: Why has it not been the hallmark of past plans? Isn't this just so obvious what a school should be?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar can talk in detail about the school—

The CHAIR: No, I am asking you as the head of the department, why has it not been the hallmark of school plans to date?

Mr SCOTT: I would say, Mr Chair, that we have developed the School Excellence Framework to establish schools in the school planning processes to identify their current levels of performance and outcomes, the areas they are focused on and where they want to see improvement. I think the School Excellence Framework as developed by the department before my time was a very significant step forward about schools identifying areas of need for growth and improvement. And now we are evolving.

The CHAIR: With all due respect, you are not answering my question and the schools ignore your School Excellence Framework. Apparently they have been allowed to ignore it for many years now.

Mr SCOTT: No, I do not think—

The CHAIR: We will come back to that this afternoon.

Mr SCOTT: We can talk about that this afternoon.

The CHAIR: I have other data and we will come to that. I have some specific examples about what is really going on in this system.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, good. I look forward to that. That will be good.

The CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned Bump It Up. What is the overriding lesson out of that? You mention it often as a success story and some of the results are reasonably impressive. What do you think is the broader lesson for scaling up success in schools out of Bump It Up rather than just doing more of Bump It Up?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think what we found with the first iteration of Bump It Up was that when we gave schools something to aim for, it gave them something to aspire to in terms of their educational outcomes and results. I think if you aim for nothing you hit nothing. You have to be able to give them a target. The way that we have worked with developing it across all 2,200 schools is that we will look at effectively a range in terms of where we want them to be. We have modelled it based on, I think, 40 statistically similar schools in terms of their background and the socio-economic conditions of their community as well. So we want to find a way to, I guess, compare like with like, in a sense, when we are setting targets. I think that what it showed when we had that in place was that we saw many of the schools in that program hit their targets, many of them had a lift. I think expanding it is a good way forward in terms of making it clear that we want to see that lift in outcomes. That is why we have put it across all of the public schools in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: What lessons do you attribute to the importance of just the pressure of schools knowing that they are being monitored and watched for performance? The thing is that Bump It Up, with no extra expenditure and with no transformation of classroom practices, will achieve these results simply by saying to a school, "We are watching what you do with this middle cohort of NAPLAN-type students. Can you move them into the higher bands?" Should that lesson of pressure and accountability not be available and implemented right across the school system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I probably would not use the term "pressure". I think "accountability" is probably a better one. I have certainly visited schools that have been part of the first iteration of Bump It Up. They have been really positive about what it meant for them in terms of setting that direction for the school. I know that there was support from the department in terms of their targets and helping them to hit it. What we can now do with the expansion of it right across all of our schools, as I said, is look at how schools are going to work towards those targets, what evidence-based practice we can put in place across those school communities to

get the outcomes that we want, how we can share positive experiences for schools that we know perform well, look at similar schools that maybe are not at the same level of performance and transfer that knowledge and expertise across. I think that this is a good opportunity for reform. It is a good opportunity to set those targets for every school. As Mr Scott and Mr Dizdar said, it has been welcomed by our school communities. It has been a good process with them to put them in place. They will all be in place by the end of this term. I think it is important in terms of ensuring that we are all responsible and we all have accountability for those outcomes for our kids because that is what we are here for.

The CHAIR: What about the students in the lower bands? Bump It Up is about trying to move middle bands into higher ones. If you are a non-Indigenous student languishing in the lower bands of NAPLAN, there is nothing for you in the Premier's Priorities? What is being done for the students who need the most assistance in achieving academic growth?

Mr DIZDAR: Chair, that was one of the strong lessons we learnt with 137 Bump It Up schools: That when you focus the data and show them the middle proportion of students and where they may move, our most successful sites zoomed in on all their students because this is about adding value for all students. So that is a lesson that we take from the rollout of Bump It Up going forward. While it is a Premier's priority around the top two NAPLAN bands, we have been showing our principals and schools communities their entire student trajectory, where they sit, across all the bands. You rightfully go to those who have got challenging backgrounds or contexts or disadvantage who we need to move through the bands. So these 137 schools, the most successful, were able to demonstrate lift right across the bands. In fact, Chair, some that did not hit their target you may have looked at and thought, "Well, that's disappointing". But when we actually looked at their movement from bottom to the middle they significantly shifted a number of students, weren't as successful in moving them up. That is another lesson that we take forward—that with the targets, whilst it is the top two bands, that focusing and having line of sight across all students, having faces on the data for all students, is really important.

The CHAIR: I will follow up on that later. The Hon. Mark Banasiak?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chair?

The CHAIR: I have to say as Chair of the Committee I am not a fan of the walk in, walk out parliamentary model.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, I haven't.

The CHAIR: You missed the call because you were not here.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have two committee responsibilities, Chair.

The CHAIR: That is well and good but the walk in, walk out model does not work in Portfolio Committee No. 3. You missed the call so I have allocated the 20 minutes as 10 minutes to myself and 10 minutes to the Hon. Mark Banasiak.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Chair, you do not have the right to do that.

The CHAIR: Yes, I do, as Chair.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, because we agreed as a Committee beforehand. You do not have the right to unilaterally stop a member of the Committee from asking questions on this Committee.

The CHAIR: We are not doing walk in, walk out.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am going to call you out on it. You do not have that right. You are not the czar.

The CHAIR: You should have respect for this Committee, as other members do—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do have respect. I have multiple budget estimates committees.

The CHAIR: Out of respect to the witnesses and the Committee, you should be here for the duration.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You do not have the right to do that.

The CHAIR: I am doing it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will move dissent.

The CHAIR: You can move dissent.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am moving dissent on your ruling. You do not have the right to remove a substantive Committee's questioning on that arbitrary basis.

The CHAIR: You were not here. You could not get the call because you are not the invisible man. I saw *The Invisible Man* movie.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am moving dissent on your ruling.

The CHAIR: You were not here.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am moving dissent on your ruling.

The CHAIR: It is open to the Hon. Mark Banasiak to share five minutes of his time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No. I am moving dissent on your ruling.

The CHAIR: Speak away.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We have to close the room for the Committee to do this.

The CHAIR: The Committee will deliberate on this issue. The hearing will resume when we have concluded deliberations.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge has six minutes of questions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you ready, Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Fire away.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I first of all indicate my appreciation and the appreciation of school communities across the State about the way the department and teachers dealt with the bushfire crisis. I particularly note I visited the Wyaliba Public School. I note the extraordinary achievement of the department in rebuilding that school over the Christmas break and the support it gave to that community. Please pass on my regards and those of the Committee to the staff, the teachers and the community who did that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And the local contractors who worked very hard.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Indeed, I met the local contractors. They rebuilt the school after a fire and then it flooded. And then they did it again. It is an extraordinary achievement.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But in light of what we have seen with the bushfires, how many schools were shut because of air quality concerns during the bushfire period?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask Mr Dizdar but obviously through some of the heightened period during the summer schools were shut anyway because of the school holidays. But I can ask him to provide advice in terms of that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Rather than go back and forth, I have my five questions here. I might address them to you and get a response from you. The absence of air-conditioned classrooms meant that, as per my understanding, more schools had to shut because they could not shut the windows and purify the air. The absence of air purifiers and the air conditioning meant more schools were shut over the bushfire crisis than would have otherwise happened if we had had fully air-conditioned schools with air purification in place. That is a concern that has been raised with me. I ask you to address it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I will get Mr Dizdar to go into some details but, for example, when we had to shut up to 600 schools in November that was because of the possible threat of the bushfires. We worked with the RFS very closely, as you would appreciate, and I think you are probably aware that I canvassed those matters in the House as well because we need to make sure that we are, I guess, pre-empting any concerns and safety has to always come first, so we do not take the risk.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept the fire risk was the principal reason that schools were being shut.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. Then, as I said, we were in a position at the beginning of the school year for all of the schools to be back up and operational from day one, term one as well. But I will ask Mr Dizdar in terms of the air quality issue if he wants to add any additional comments about that.

Mr DIZDAR: Since October, Mr Shoebridge, we have had about 250 government schools that have been impacted by the bushfires. Ever since October we have had schools that have been non-operational, whether because of the fires directly or whether that is related to the imminent risk. In working with the Rural Fire Service, we have had—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Dizdar, I am not talking about the fire risk; we understand that. It is about the air quality.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. In a way, as we all know, because we lived through it—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They are closely related.

Mr SCOTT: —the two are closely related. We provided advice to schools on poor air quality days. Advisory was provided to schools and schools, off their own bat, took decisions to keep kids indoors and the like. But we were not specifically closing schools around air quality issues; we closed schools on advice from the Rural Fire Service and others on fire risk.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I suppose it is about that. A number of schools kept kids inside when the smoke was just terrible. I assume that was on advice. Would it have been safer to have been keeping kids inside in air-conditioned, closed school rooms as opposed to un-air-conditioned school rooms?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously it depends on the individual schools and the air-conditioning systems that they have. This is an issue that, as you say, arose because of the issues around air quality and smoke. To be fair, I have had advice from rural schools in terms of the drought and dust storms that they have also kept their children inside in the classroom or the hall or the library or air-conditioned spaces in relation to that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think they are fair concerns. I suppose we come back to this point, Minister, which is, are you now going to review the prioritisation about the air conditioning of schools, especially regional schools but not just regional schools because we saw this air quality in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. But especially are regional schools going to have faster adoption of 100 per cent air conditioning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously we have got our rollout in terms of Cooler Classrooms. That commitment over five years is, I think, \$500 million. We are looking at prioritising, as I said, areas where the mean maximum temperature is over 30 degrees. That is my understanding.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I am asking you: Are you going to revisit that and re-prioritise it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will also say in relation to the rollout that, yes, it is about air conditioning but it is also about air quality. Part of the way that that the system works is that it is improving air quality for the school as well. We have got that commitment. We are rolling out that program. Over 900 schools are eligible under that program.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If I understand your answer, even though we have had the terrible experience of kids not being able to go to school because of a quality issues, there is no proposal to speed up the adoption of the Cooler Classrooms program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But we are rolling that program out, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There has been no change this summer.

The CHAIR: Can we hear the Minister's answer, please? I have not heard a word of this answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, there are communities and schools on that list of the over 900 schools that we are working through to roll that out. I am sure there would be a correlation with some of those communities being those that have been affected by a bushfire as well, given that a lot of them are in rural and regional communities.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I just want to be clear because I take from your answer that there has been no change to prioritisation and no change to resource allocation for air conditioning or air quality of the school classrooms as a result of the bushfire crisis. That is how I understand your answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But, as I said, David, we are rolling out that program. Mr Manning can provide some more figures in terms of where that is up to in terms of the rollout of schools. But there would be an overlap between some of the school communities that have been affected by bushfire that are also getting—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But that is by accident, not by design.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is a program that is already underway. It is in place to provide air conditioning to more than 900 schools across New South Wales.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, moving on to another issue, the Arthur Phillip school in Parramatta was reopened and it did not have a library.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It actually has six libraries; there is one on every level.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It does not have a library. Why does it not have a library?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to answer, Mr Chair. There is a teacher-librarian position at that school. I was there a few weeks ago, last week—or recently, I will say is probably safer—with the Premier. At each year base level there is a hub, there is an area where there are books available for students for their academic year. There are also not just the non-fiction books but fictional books that are appropriate to that year level as well. Students can access materials from other parts of the library easily as well. There is actually a hub of the library on every single home base level of that school.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will come back to this.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I will just rattle off some figures from CESE for you. They did a workforce profile in 2016. They found that only 17 per cent of students undertaking a teaching degree did so based on their Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank [ATAR] and the rest circumvented it. The University of Western Sydney also had the highest number of undergraduates, despite being in the newspaper numerous times for accepting people into teaching with ATARs below 40. We also know that universities circumvent the measures that were put in place a few years ago where you had to have a certain level of standard in English in the HSC. We know that universities are circumventing that. My question to you is: Will you make a commitment to talk to the Federal Minister of Education to sort out the mess that is happening in the universities that are acting under the premise that you can take our least successful students in year 12 and somehow magically turn them into our best teachers in three and a half or four years?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for the question. It is a good one and it is something that education Ministers have discussed when we have met, certainly informally as well. Can I say just a couple of things? We have brought in, as you mentioned in your question, the minimum requirement for three band 5s, at least one in English. We have also announced last year that if somebody is going to do a primary teaching degree that we want them to have a minimum in terms of mathematics, because that was not the case previously. I think it would be a fair assumption that most parents would expect that if someone is teaching in a primary school level that they studied maths past year 10.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But the universities are circumventing this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, if I can just finish answering your question. We have put those mechanisms in place for the entry requirements. It is something that I have spoken to the deans of education about from the universities and also the vice-chancellors. We have made it clear that that is our expectation but we have also put in place the teachers' success profile. That has started for students who are studying initial teacher education [ITE] courses.

If they are to get a job in a government school when they graduate they need to get a credit average. They need to pass an interview, recognising that teaching is relational. We want to make sure that they have the right qualities in terms of teaching and imparting knowledge as part of that. They are also having their practicums assessed. What we are doing is trying to put those entry requirements that are in place at the beginning but we are also bringing them in for the end of their degree as well. So if you are going to enter a government school and be a teacher there are extra requirements that you will have to meet. As I said, we make no apologies for that.

I think some universities, to their credit, have adopted very well the practices that we have put in place. I think others have a bit of a way to go and I have been quite clear about that. Now obviously there are some mechanisms in place in terms of if somebody just misses out, if they want to go through New South Wales Education Standards Authority [NESAS] and get that extra accreditation if they have done a year of a similar study. There are a few pathways that they can reach what those minimum requirements are in terms of entry to the degree. But I also think that what we have done at the back end in terms of the quality that we expect to come into government schools will make it clear, particularly to these universities, that if they are not admitting students who have the academic capabilities to be teachers they will not be getting jobs in government schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how many new services at term one 2020 opened as a result of your before and after school funds?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Ms Harrison to go through those figures for you.

Ms HARRISSON: Since 1 July 2019 we have grown the sector by more than 68 new services. We have increased the number of places by 7,696.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When you are calculating those positions, do you calculate a before school position and an after school position as two separate positions?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, as places, that is correct. I can come back to you and confirm that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So there are 68 new services. That was from 1 July.

Ms HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many of those were new services as at term one 2020?

Ms HARRISSON: I will need to come back to you with the specifics on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you tell me how many new services will be in place for term two 2020?

Ms HARRISSON: We do not have specific numbers for each term this year as the tendering processes are underway. We have a number of tenders out and I can provide the specific numbers on notice for that. We do expect that by the start of next year we will have 120 new services.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is 120 new services providing how many places?

Ms HARRISSON: It is 19,000.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The election commitment, Minister, was to provide 45,000 by next year. That is not really on track, is it?

Ms HARRISSON: I think you are referring to the previous election commitment, which was met, and this is then the additional election commitment from last year, which was around ensuring that we are meeting the demand for before and after school care and that we have provision on school sites everywhere where there is demand for a service.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, no. That is actually a considerable walk back, Ms Harrison. I will refer back to the Minister because you guaranteed that there would be before and after school care positions for everyone who needed them at metropolitan schools and there were a few places in regional areas. You were going to say that they were not going to be provided but there were 45,000 new places that were going to be provided.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As Ms Harrison said, that was the figure that was used in a previous election commitment. What we said this time was that we wanted to significantly increase the number of before and after school care services, you are right, at our metropolitan communities and major regional centres. For smaller regional and remote towns, we would look at bespoke solutions in terms of making it available to parents. I am very comfortable with the progress we are making in relation to that election commitment. There has been a lot of work underway and it is ongoing to make sure that parents have that commitment met.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So the 19,000, how many positions are going to be provided?

Ms HARRISSON: That is for the start of next year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have an ongoing program beyond that?

Ms HARRISSON: As I think we came to at the last hearing of this Committee, we are aiming to meet that election commitment from the start of next year. So that is when we expect to have all the services open that we need to have in order to meet the demand in the community.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are saying that there is demand for only 19,000 additional places across the 2,200 schools?

Ms HARRISSON: We have done a lot of research since we were last before you. We have done a census of providers to understand their waiting list. We have been out and run a Have Your Say survey with the community and had nearly 7,000 responses gathering insight. I will just check that number on notice of the number of responses, but we have had community response.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is the Service NSW survey?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are saying roughly 7,000 responses?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will confirm the number.

Ms HARRISSON: If I could confirm that on notice, that would be helpful to make sure we are giving you the accurate information. But we have gone and found out where in our system there is demand and we have a school-by-school plan in place to meet that demand.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I put it to you that this is a significant walk back from the election commitment. The election commitment was you would provide additional out-of-school hours care at every school across New South Wales. You walked it back at the last estimates to say it would just be at certain metropolitan schools and you are now walking it back to say we need only 19,000 new places across the entire State. There are 2,200 schools and there are only 19,000 places that are required?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I say that I do not agree with the premise of your question? I think our election commitment has been clear. I am confident with the work that we are doing to deliver that commitment that we have made. Ms Harrison wants to add something further.

Ms HARRISSON: Those 19,000 places are in the new services. We are also seeking to expand the existing services where they are already in place and we continue to work with service providers and with schools to do that. So those 19,000 places are new services.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: New services, yes.

Ms HARRISSON: And then there will be further expansion of existing services that are currently operational, both on current school sites and in local communities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We are seeing that now.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What are you doing to expand those additional services?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have funding programs underway in terms of schools able to apply for additional funding to increase the number of places that they can offer. We have had that in terms of—I think it is \$10,000 or \$15,000 per application that we have had.

Ms HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So we have got that grant progress underway and I have seen a few of those come through already, and that is on an ongoing basis to improve and, as Ms Harrison said, expand on the places that are available at existing services as well. So that is the other body of work that is happening in addition to the new services that she has mentioned.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many new places will be available under those existing services expansion?

Ms HARRISSON: That will be based on the needs of those communities. I can come back to you with our estimates of that on notice. We have approved 26 grant applications already this year, since 1 July 2019.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Out of how many applications?

Ms HARRISSON: I will have to come back to you on how many we have received, but we have allocated over \$850,000 to improve facilities to existing services to allow them to expand.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Over a thousand additional places is part of that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So in total there are roughly 20,000 new places? That is it?

Ms HARRISSON: No. That is not. I think that is an incorrect characterisation of what I have said. I have said that we are going to have 19,000 new places in new services and I will come back to you with detail of how many additional places there will be from expanded services by the start of next year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I put to you that one of the number one concerns of working parents in New South Wales—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is why we made the election commitment to increase it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —is how to access a before and after school care place. Your Government has continually walked back this election commitment—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not agree with your question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and now you say that you have done a census and you have done a survey where we have seen 7,000 participants. That is an average of four at each of the State schools participating. You are, therefore, going to be providing 20,000—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To be fair, Ms Houssos, you talk about 2,200 schools. Some of those are high schools as well that obviously did not have before and after school care. When you are trying to work out figures, you probably should just consider primary schools because that is—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many primary schools do we have in New South Wales, Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: About 1,600, just for clarity.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you have five at every primary school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But Ms Houssos—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am putting to you that this is a key concern for working parents and you are continuing to walk back this election commitment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not at all. In terms of the feedback—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: People went to—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: There is no need for a point of order. The Minister shall be allowed to give her answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have put the survey out through Service NSW so that we can get feedback from parents in terms of demand. This is coming from different parts of the school community. These are parents who need support to access it. We have said to them, "You tell us where you are and what you need." We have had over 7,000. I am quite happy with that. I think that has been a good response from parents. It is an opportunity for them to tell us what they need and where they need it. We know it is important; we know it is a big issue for families. That is why we have made two election commitments in relation to the expansion of before and after school care. We had significant numbers increase during our last term of government. We will see significant increases during this term of government because we know it is important to deliver these services. That is why we made it clear that this is a priority for our Government.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, in Early Childhood Education and Care service's last reporting year, I am advised that there were 383 cases of children locked in/out, taken away or unaccounted for in New South Wales education and care services. I am also advised that the number of serious incidents in these services has increased by 333 on the previous reporting year. That is an increase in absolute numbers but also in relative terms. What steps are you taking to reduce this number?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take your word in terms of the figures that you are using from the Report on Government Services [ROGS].

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is cited from the Report on Government Services.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not have that particular report in front of me in terms of those details but, as I said, I will assume that the figures you are using are correct. What I will say is that the safety of children in early childhood services has been and will continue to be the number one priority for us in terms of early childhood education and care. There are many requirements in place for these services in terms of the safety environments for the children and reporting. Incidents have to be reported. Often they can be reported by the parent; they can be reported by the service as well. When you are looking at the figures, sometimes you need to distinguish if potentially one incident could be listed a few times in terms of where it is reported. Whenever there is an incident that is raised, no matter how minor but particularly when it goes to child safety, there are investigations that are in place.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What do they involve?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Mr Graham to comment further or elaborate further in relation to that. But every time there is notification, particularly when it involves the safety of a child, there is follow-up and a process that is underway. In addition, in terms of the regulatory requirements that we put in place, we have spot checks, we have staff in and out of our services every day ensuring that they are putting the safety

and welfare of children first. That is a very strong effort from our department. There are people out in the community doing that on a daily basis. In terms of the investigations process, I will get Mr Graham to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you also explain the increase? Why is it trending up?

Mr GRAHAM: There is a change year to year. One thing we do is encourage services to report any incidents. That is actually a requirement of the national law. We occasionally go out and make sure services are reporting those incidents. Every incident that is reported goes through a triage process. We have an officer who assesses whether it is a significant concern, something that warrants investigation, or is it something where we are satisfied with the service's response and perhaps we contact a parent to make sure they are satisfied and that no further action is required. In terms of incidents, then there are confirmed breaches. If we do have a confirmed breach of policy or the national law then we do further action. In fact, in New South Wales confirmed breaches have been decreasing. We have had a trend of services, as they should, reporting incidents to us but the number of actual confirmed breaches has been decreasing, which is a positive sign.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you clarify "confirmed breaches"? Is that after the investigation? Are the confirmed breaches then not reported in ROGS?

Mr GRAHAM: The confirmed breaches are in ROGS.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is reported.

Mr GRAHAM: Yes, in ROGS. We can provide those figures to you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: My understanding is that in overall terms though it is still trending up.

Mr GRAHAM: I can confirm that confirmed breaches have been decreasing in New South Wales, the latest figures show. It is trending up in Australia but it is actually trending down for New South Wales.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are child care centres becoming more unsafe? Is that the conclusion that we can draw?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the evidence of confirmed breaches going down should give parents the satisfaction that this is something that is taken seriously and that the number of confirmed breaches is less than it has been previously.

Mr GRAHAM: That is right.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What new measures are being taken to improve the safety of the sector?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said in my earlier answer, this is an area that we have focused a lot of the department's time and efforts in to ensure that services are following all the national laws, guidelines and regulations when it comes to appropriate early childhood education and care. We have our assessment and rating processes, spot checks and visits. As I said, they know every incident is followed up, so I think it is proof of a good regulatory system in place to try to make sure that we manage these issues appropriately.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I move on to the new quality rating system? Minister, can you explain the rationale for the rating system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. What we wanted to do is make sure that parents understand what the rating system is, how it works and what quality looks like. We had conducted some research internally and, from memory, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] had also done some work in relation to what the rating system is, what assessment and rating shows, what the different requirements are and what the different measurements show. I think it was pretty clear that about 50 per cent of parents really did not understand what to look for to go in to see a service and what it was rated, whether it was "meeting" or "working towards" or "exceeding". There was not really that understanding of what it meant. We thought it was important to ensure quality so that parents know what to look for when they visit a certain centre, what questions to ask and also to reaffirm the fact that it is not a pass-fail system.

Services are operating because they have met the requirements under the national law. In some respects, it is quite a tough marking system. You can be going exceptionally well—in six of the seven indicators, you might be at the "excellent" rating—but if one of your areas is "working towards" then that affects your overall quality rating. This is just a simple method. It is the star rating. When you go, it is on the front of the door. It will be on the enrolment forms for families as well with a bit of a breakdown that shows what the different seven categories

are that we assess, how that service is tracking. I think it will also give parents that understanding if their service particularly is focused, say, on improving the quality of their learning program, that might be because it is an area in their assessment rating that they need to improve. It is about correlating what is happening in the services and making parents more informed so that they can make those choices when it comes to the services for their children.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it fair to say that there has been some resistance in the sector to this?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have spoken to quite a few services in relation to it. I think there were some questions initially in terms of how it would work in practice. It will come into place in the middle of the year. We are about to do the next round of road shows. We are at more than a dozen.

Mr GRAHAM: We are at 17.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have had 17 sessions with the sector, which we will do right across New South Wales, where it will be gone into in some detail. I have had some questions about it but I have also had a lot of support. We spoke with the Early Childhood Reference Group in relation to it. We had quite a few of the major providers supporting us at the announcement because this is about providing information to parents. It is about providing transparency in terms of the quality rating system. We have also put in, as part of this, opportunities for those services who may be at a lower rating, who might still be at "working towards". We have had a program in place to offer targeted support to them to help them lift their rating.

As part of this announcement, there is more money that will go into that because what we found when we have done that is that we have seen increases in terms of the lift. The percentage of those that previously have been at "working towards" and then moving up to "meeting" or "exceeding" has been quite significant. There are basically elements to the reform. Yes, it is about making sure that parents are aware of what service quality is and what it looks like but also better supports those services that we want to see are lifting quality as part of that. That is where the majority of funding is going through for this project.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You said earlier that they are required to put the sticker on the front door but that is not exactly correct, is it? There has been some modification of that requirement and now stickers are not actually required on the front door but they can be further inside the service. Is that correct?

Mr GRAHAM: The requirements under the national law are that they must be in a prominent position.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Clearly displayed, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What does "prominent" mean?

Mr GRAHAM: We can get you the wording from the national law. It is clear that it has to be publicly available.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it on the front door, as the Minister said, or not?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I use that as an example to say "on the front door". It could be on the inside. It has to be somewhere that the parents can see it when they walk in. It is going to be an A3 size. At the moment it is only an A4 requirement so it will be bigger. It will be permanently stuck on the door, on the wall on the inside near where parents sign in. Obviously different services have different physical characteristics as to where there are set up. But it will also be a requirement that it will be on the enrolment as well so parents will be able to see it there.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you clarify for me the involvement of The Wiggles in this process?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are they involved in endorsing the ratings system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that is correct. We have an arrangement with them to help promote not just the ratings system but also quality more broadly. That will be over a two-year period; that is my recollection. I am happy to be corrected if Mr Martin wants to add—but effectively helping to promote not just this rating system but what quality looks like. I think as with other parents in this room, we are a fairly captive audience at Wiggles concerts, so they have a broad reach.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: Who is your favourite Wiggle?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have daughters, so I will say Emma. But the point of it is the reach that they have to parents, into the market, that we are trying to promote this initiative to, is very strong, which is why we have entered into an arrangement with them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just clarify? You say your system will be in place by 1 July this year. You are confident that you will meet that deadline?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. There are early adopters that we have said that are able to start to take that up now. I do not know whether Mr Graham has any figures as to who has done that yet, but we might find that out during the roadshow. But, yes, we are putting it in in the middle of the year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Could you provide us on notice with how many confirmed appointments The Wiggles have, what future appointments or engagements they have?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. It is two financial years but we can give you some details, I believe, as long as there are no contractual issues with that, but yes.

Mr GRAHAM: Yes, what their arrangements are.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I wanted to ask you about the universal access of three-year-olds to attend preschool. I refer to a New South Wales Government media release that says, "New South Wales is the first State to subsidise preschool for all three-year-olds." In promoting this initiative, you said that all children will be able to attend to use a preschool. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: All children whose parents put them into a preschool program will be eligible for funding, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Put them into a preschool program?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The figures are in, Minister, and it is 4,596 children from the most recent figures that I have seen. Do you have more up-to-date figures than that about how many children are participating?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can take that on notice but I will say in relation to those changes that previously, as you would be aware, we had three-year-olds who were funded as equity children if they met those requirements, particularly those who were from Aboriginal families. We brought disability into equity as well, so for a period of time in New South Wales there has been funding for three- and four-year-olds. What the commitment was was to expand that three-year-old funding to all three-year-old children who apply to attend a preschool. That has been partnered with our extensive capital works program. I think it is about \$60 million that we have put in place to create more places in areas where we know that there is demand. So that is about ensuring that we provide the places in the community-run preschools for three-year-olds who wish to attend and the funding to go along with it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But it is only in community preschools. Is that right?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that is right, because—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There are only 4.6 per cent. So if you do not have more up-to-date—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But, Ms Houssos, it is only—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The Minister is trying to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I only have a minute left.

The Hon. WES FANG: That is irrelevant because the Minister is answering the question.

The CHAIR: Order! We will take a question and then an answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, the latest figures show that only 4.6 per cent of all three-year-olds are utilising this. We have the lowest participation rates in preschool in the country. We have declining NAPLAN standards and PISA results, which there is increasing evidence to show that early education can influence.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you now revisit this and roll it out so that more three-year-olds and more four-year-olds across other service providers will have access to this funding?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In response to the question, Chair, I can say that it is in community preschools because that is the sector that we fund in New South Wales. They do not get any Federal Government support as opposed to, as you would well know, the long day care and the family day care sectors that get Federal funding in relation to all of their children. We do provide some money for the educational requirements for children in the year before school at long day care. That is part of our national partnership arrangement but in terms of the community preschools they rely solely on State government support. They are the part of the sector that we fund, which is why we have made the commitment in relation to increasing the places for community preschools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My time has expired.

The CHAIR: We would normally go to Mr David Shoebridge but he is over at Portfolio Committee No. 1. He is kind of like Mrs Doubtfire in the restaurant scene, jumping from place to place, only he has had to put on his Education costume and return here. In the interim, we will go to the Hon. Mark Banasiak.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will just compose myself after that one.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. Follow that one.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, there was an election promise of about 300 counsellors. What work was done around coming to that figure, given that the average age of a counsellor probably sits at close to the retirement age and there are 2,200 schools. It seems like we are trying to put a bandaid on an arterial bleed. The maths do not really add up. Three hundred counsellors will not, I guess, furnish a counsellor at a school every single day because at the moment we have school counsellors being shared between multiple primary schools and a high school and at best you get a counsellor maybe one day a week. The numbers do not add up.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I will get Ms Harrison to talk in some detail about how the program is being rolled out but the commitment is to make sure that at every high school we have one counsellor or psychologist and one additional support worker in terms of mental health for the students, recognising, as you say, that some schools already might have one position available. There could be some that are shared across schools.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is that one counsellor every day of the week, or is it one counsellor?

Ms HARRISSON: Every high school will have a counsellor on staff. I can come back to you with the specific allocation on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That would be good.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But also just recognising the workforce issue that you raised in terms of the ageing workforce for counsellors. As part of that, what we have got is a scholarship program running in conjunction so that we can help people who are currently partially qualified, or potentially a teacher who might want to then take on a psychology degree, to be able to become a counsellor. We have got supports in place and we actually have some of those scholarship recipients starting in the schools throughout this year as well. So we are looking at both strands in terms of workforce.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In 2016 some new positions were created. There were 32 Principals, School Leadership positions created and 227 instructional leaders. What did that cost, including on-costs? Has there been any cost versus benefit analysis done about what they have delivered in terms of improving student outcomes?

Mr SCOTT: We will take the precise costing on notice. I would say on instructional leaders Mr Dizdar can talk to this. They were really the underpinning of our Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, our Early Action for Success approach, which was the attempt to really lift those that the Chair was referring to earlier, those who are the lowest performers in NAPLAN—to lift them up. Mr Dizdar might want to talk to that program.

Mr DIZDAR: Your referenced there, Mr Banasiak, the Principals, School Leadership?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, the 32.

Mr DIZDAR: That is part of our school leadership strategy. These are peer principals that come out for two years and play a strong role in mentoring and growing newly appointed principals as well as coaching and

mentoring those principals who may want to further their development. They play a strong role in the school excellence processes around external validation.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I know all that because I was part of the process.

Mr DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But what data do we have to say that that has been effective?

Mr DIZDAR: We constantly take feedback and data on the types of work they are undertaking and the requests that are coming their way. I am happy to provide that to the Committee. We have material there according to the key accountabilities of a principal in terms of where they work, and that is a \$10 million resource under the School Leadership Strategy. It involves full-time principals as well as some part-time workforce as well around the coaching-mentoring.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Could you provide that on notice?

Mr DIZDAR: In terms of their impact and work?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

Mr DIZDAR: Yes, happy to do that. And as the secretary was saying in terms of instructional leaders, there are some 500 schools now where we have had Early Action for Success. That was targeting our most disadvantaged contexts which have the highest proportion of students in the bottom two NAPLAN quartile bands so that we could have expert in-house expertise that could grow literacy and numeracy capacity of staff, shoulder to shoulder in classrooms across stages. That has been a very valuable and welcome resource in schools. I know that the Chair recently visited Claymore, and you may have visited Claymore, which is a site under Early Action for Success that has had that instructional leadership intervention where, with the support of the principal, it has been able to utilise that expertise to great effect to ensure there is consistency of literacy and numeracy practice across classrooms. The Chair was referencing the disadvantage context where you have a lot of beginning and new teachers. That resource is a welcome professional fillip for development for staff.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, last year I asked you in the House whether the New South Wales Department of Education and the Teachers Federation had signed any agreements that would limit union involvement in representing teachers. You said there were no such agreements. Perhaps you could take this on notice. Are you aware that a teacher efficiency agreement was signed in 2000 and there was a paper done by a senior Employee Performance and Conduct [EPAC] officer that basically stated it saw a reduction in the federation supporting teachers when they were complaining about unfair treatment?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was in 2000, you say?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In 2000, yes. Perhaps you might want to take it on notice, given the time.

The CHAIR: I will do 7½ minutes and then Mr Shoebridge will do 7½ minutes and we will finish with the ministerial session. I will come back to an earlier point, Minister. Are you able to undertake some CESE or departmental assessment of the school plan strategic directions to see how much emphasis is given to the vital achieving academic growth?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think, as the secretary said, it is something that we are looking at as part of the revision of the school plans with Bump It Up and those targets. In terms of any involvement from CESE, I am happy to take that on notice and see whether there is anything we can do in that space.

The CHAIR: Can some statistics be produced for the benefit of the Committee?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I will take that on notice and see what we can come back to you with.

The CHAIR: Minister, in your very good op-ed piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 7 December, you said:

Perhaps more than any other portfolio area, education is prone to sudden infatuations with flavour-of-the-month fads.

Why do you think that is?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think it is part of the issues that I want to address with some of the tweaking that we want to do with Local Schools, Local Decisions, making sure that it is evidence-based practice. I think potentially that there have been times—and we have certainly spoken about it before—when there might

be a particular conference or a particular issue that gets raised that certain school communities try. I think we need to find ways to be more evidence-based in terms of practice in the classrooms. That is something that we have been working on but that I want to continue to refine as part of some reforms to Local Schools, Local Decisions.

The CHAIR: Why do you think that has not been in place for the life of this Government? I think a lot of parents would be surprised that it is possible for a principal or a teacher to go to a conference and just because they heard something at a conference, to bring teaching practice back to a school, change the way in which the school does things, without a clear evidence base of what actually works. How is this laissez-faire arrangement been in place for so long?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I know that this is something that your Committee raised in terms of the work that you have done. I will say that there are some excellent evidence-based programs happening in our schools as well. I would not want parents to not have confidence in our public education system in New South Wales because there are some great examples of where it works exceptionally well. I have certainly seen it. I think the department would agree and I think you would agree, Mr Chair, with some of the school communities that I know you visited where it has worked and it has worked well.

But it is about making sure, as I said earlier, that we get that balance right between autonomy and intervention and support, making sure that particularly in school communities where maybe we are not getting the education outcomes that everybody would want, including the principal and parents, we can look at what sorts of practices are in place and what sorts of programs resources are being used and implemented in the classrooms, and offer a bit more guidance in terms of best practice. That is something that I would like to do as part of Local Schools, Local Decisions.

The CHAIR: In your op-ed piece you also said:

Universities have forgotten their societal duty to put only the most qualified graduates in front of our kids.

That is a heavy but, I think, well-justified criticism. What do we do to solve this problem? Should we not be trying to find organisations that do take their obligation seriously to have qualified graduates teaching in our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, thank you for reading my op-ed. I thought only my dad read my op-ed. It makes me feel better, Mr Chair, that you read it too.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I read it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, David.

The CHAIR: I have read it three times—more than your dad even, I think.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Probably. Sorry, I should not be flippant. I think that goes back to some of the issues that the Hon. Mark Banasiak raised in his question around what we are doing to make sure that our universities are producing the best possible graduates. We have brought in the requirements certainly in terms of the intake but we are now bringing in the Teacher Success Profile to make sure that we have high quality coming in. There is a responsibility on the universities, as I said. It is something that I raised when I met with deans of education from various universities and when I met with vice-chancellors. Many of them have been very supportive of this push for quality because they understand that it is important. I think there are some who probably need to come to the table a little bit more quickly. We need to make sure that we are in universal agreement that the outcomes of a child are very strongly based on the quality of the teacher standing in front of them in the classroom. We should be unashamed in our focus to improve teacher quality through our university systems.

The CHAIR: Do you get the same feedback that I have had at schools when principals will say that the new graduates have been taught a lot of pedagogy but very thinly—no deep knowledge about the things that actually work in the classroom and the new teachers coming in not actually knowing the evidence of what is going to achieve academic growth for the students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, this is coming back to that issue of the academic ability of the students in the courses and also the content of the courses themselves. I do not know if the secretary wants to provide more comment.

Mr SCOTT: I think, Mr Chair, our ability to control those university faculties is limited but what we can do is exercise our power in recruitment, which is exactly what the government strategy is all about: making really quite clear as the biggest recruiter of teachers in the country that these are the standards and this is what we are looking for. Part of the conversation we are having back with them is precisely on the matter that you have raised now and I think some of the good writing that came out on the back of PISA. We need to spend more detailed time preparing teachers in the "how to teach" as much as the "what to teach" and the detailed pedagogy

about what the evidence will suggest is the best way of improving learning outcomes. They are the conversations that we are having. That is what the recruitment strategy is all about. We expect that is the way that universities will change their practice.

The CHAIR: If we do not have much control over universities, why are we not going to organisations proven in other States that have Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks [ATARs] of over 90 for their teaching recruits, like Teach For Australia? Is this not an abdication of government responsibility to have allowed the Teachers Federation to put a veto on Teach For Australia when clearly they have a higher level of ATAR students coming into their system and have proven results in other States at a time when we are struggling to get academic growth?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In relation to Teach For Australia, I know that they were in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory and I think the ACT actually pulled back from that approach. For whatever reason it did not seem to fit—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think they are in the Chair's office as well. That is my guess.

The CHAIR: It was another Teachers Federation veto in the ACT. The Minister there said, "We do what the federation says." You may as well make the federation boss the Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Contextualising what has happened in other States, my understanding is that I met with them—sorry, I am trying to get some clarity. I have met with them because I remember having this discussion I think with you potentially, Mr Chair, and talking to them in a bit more detail about what they do and how it has worked in other contexts. I know that the secretary has met with them as well in terms of the work that they do.

Mr SCOTT: A number of times.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I guess it is about trying to make sure that we ensure quality, that we know the importance of the initial teacher education degrees and that process. But we need to look at what other States are doing. At this point in time, it was an information-gathering exercise for me to learn more about what they do.

The CHAIR: Minister, have you met with the Teaching School Alliance Sydney, a group of independent schools that are trying to set up a better system of teacher education to service their schools and potentially benefit New South Wales Government schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not believe I have met with that organisation, no.

Mr SCOTT: There are these schemes out there and we can debate the evidence around Teach For Australia. On high ATARs, I will say that we recruit a number of students with ATARs in their 90s. There are a number of universities that are enrolling many students with ATARs in their 90s but we need to recruit thousands. There are niche programs but the only way we are going to crack this problem is to fundamentally rework our association with the universities around it. One of the areas that I am talking with the universities about is the strategies we have for mid-career recruitment to bring people into the teaching profession. But given the size of the department, given we have 60,000 teachers out there, given the turnover that inevitably happens with retirement, we need thousands. Our only way of really guaranteeing that supply is to work with the 38 universities in the country.

The CHAIR: Good luck with that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will just clarify. I know that my office has met with Teach For Australia and I will double-check my diary as to whether I was in on that meeting as well.

The CHAIR: Can you meet with the teaching alliance? They have approached you on wanting a meeting as well. There is a lot of good work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, we can have a look at that as well.

The CHAIR: Minister, going back to the Arthur Phillip school in Parramatta, you are not suggesting to me that the six spaces on each level—the hubs, as you describe them—are libraries? You are not trying to tell me they are libraries.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They are spaces for the children to access resources, including books and there is access to a teacher librarian as well. I will say that different schools have different ways that they have their library services. Arthur Phillip is quite unique in terms of being a high-rise school and the way that it

is set up. My understanding—and Mr Dizdar might want to make more comment about that—is that that was the way that the school community wanted to set up the library services: to have one on each level as part of their student hubs.

Mr DIZDAR: As the Minister has indicated, Mr Shoebridge, the school community, via the principal and a teaching staff member, were part of our project reference group that had considerable input. What we have designed and delivered there is in line with the operating rhythm that the principal and leadership team wanted to undertake there. We should not forget that this is going to be a school of 2,000, where each year group is going to be of considerable size. So operating as a hub on a floor, they were of the view that having a library facility on each floor was a much better way to go. We have been respectful of those wishes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many librarians are there?

Mr DIZDAR: There is one teacher librarian allocation to that school. As the school continues to grow in line with its staffing formula then the allocation may also grow.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have six spaces and one librarian teacher but that does not work, does it? You are not going to have the kids having that crucial access to a librarian if the library teacher has to spread themselves over six separate spaces?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When I was there, as I said, recently I think we were about six weeks into the school term. We were talking to some of the students who were at the hub. They were saying that they are happy with how the process is working. They have got access to the resources that they need.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, but you have to look to the academics though. The academic studies say that libraries with librarians in them is what provides value. For example, the Lance and Kachel 2016 study was unambiguous that the presence of a school librarian in a teaching—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is a school librarian at Arthur Phillip.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The presence of a school librarian in a library leads to improved academic outcomes. If you have got six spaces and only one librarian the kids are not going to have access to a librarian.

The CHAIR: That is statement. Do you have a question?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How can a librarian be in six different spaces?

Mr SCOTT: The librarian, I think we can assume, will have a level of mobility to move with different classes as they are working in different spaces. But the idea of actually making these resources more accessible for students when they are working—I am really happy to take you through Arthur Phillip. You should come and take a look at it because the students there are doing their classes and working together, all organised on these, effectively, two-storey hubs. And to have resources that those students are using readily accessible where the students are rather than tucked away—we are not taking any resources away from Arthur Phillip. There is still the same librarian resource; it is just organised in a way that the experts on the ground thought was worthwhile for a high-rise school. Come and take a look.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am going to take you up on that opportunity because I went to Anzac Park. It is a good school.

Mr SCOTT: It is a great school.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think it is a good idea. Is there a set ratio for librarians to students?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Mr Dizdar to answer that. It is based on the staffing allocation.

Mr DIZDAR: I will come back with the specifics. There is a staffing formula for all our schools and it does go on school size.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Who made the decision not to have a library in Arthur Phillip? You say you consulted with the community but, of course, the community is surely only one party to consultation. You would look at the academic studies and the like. Who made the final decision not to have a library?

Mr DIZDAR: I will reiterate. The school does have a library. It chose and wished to have that library in what is a 17-storey facility on the two floors that the secretary indicated with each hub of a year group. It wanted to have the digital and physical resources that a library would have as a base on each floor.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was: Who made the decision?

Mr DIZDAR: And in particular for our stage four learners when years 7 and 8 come in, library lessons and building their capacity and access is really important.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Dizdar, my question was: Who made the decision?

Mr DIZDAR: The teacher librarian at that school is undertaking—the department made the decision respecting the school community's wishes through the project reference group.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, will you take on notice what primary schools and high schools in New South Wales do not have a library?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you do the same for librarians as well?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Teacher librarians?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Teacher librarians.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, the Bureau of Meteorology gave its assessment recently and said that on the current policy settings Australia is on track for four degrees of warming as a result of climate change. What plans are in place for New South Wales public schools to deal with the impacts of climate change?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond in terms of forward planning.

Mr SCOTT: I think we can take this a number of ways. As I think we have already heard, in the planning of our school buildings a commitment to rolling out of cooler classrooms is something that is factored into the work that we are already doing.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Have you any costings or budget considerations for addressing the kind of climate change we are on track to deal with under current policy settings? Do you know what it is going to cost?

Mr SCOTT: I would say that the Government has made a clear commitment to a major capital program. I think it is the largest capital program ever undertaken by a State Government since Federation—\$6.7 billion new school buildings being developed now. Those buildings are being developed to have a longevity and to also recognise the reality of the climate in which students will be learning. So I would say it is factored in. I do not think there is a separate budget allocation on this.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are they being built to be ready for a climate that is two, three or four degrees warmer than currently?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can certainly speak from experience in some of the schools that I have visited. I think what we are doing in terms of school infrastructure is quite astonishing. They are very different to the classrooms that I used to sit in.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept that. I remember my life in aluminium demountables.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is right. My point is though when we visit the schools we look at things like air flow and how we can improve the natural environment. Recently I was at the school at Old Bar that has recently been refurbished with a new part of that building there. It is close to the water, as you would assume being in Old Bar. The breeze coming through in that room was extraordinary because it has been built in a way to maximise the environmental conditions of that community to get the benefit. It was a very hot day and it was very cool inside of that room.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I suggest there is a lot more to good design than air conditioning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is what I am saying to you. I have seen it in practice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think we probably agree on that. What, if any, part of those design criteria that you set when you are building new classrooms and new school infrastructure is designed to take into account we are going to get hotter and longer summers? Is that part of your build design criteria—longer and hotter summers going forward?

Mr MANNING: From our perspective, we comply with all the current building codes for new schools where we do upgrades of existing schools like where we replace the roof, we will put in insulation where there might not have been insulation before. So we do have a program of upgrading and protecting buildings. We are

working with the current building code, which we believe does give us room for increased temperatures—so better thermal value. All our new schools come fully air conditioned. We work within the statutory planning rules and, as you know, we cannot build a school in a flood zone. We work our way through trying to minimise the impact on those schools. All new schools and upgrades do have an element of thermal improvement in them so we can begin to make sure that we are futureproof for future increases in temperatures.

The CHAIR: That is the end of the session. We thank you for answering the questions in a direct and full way. We wish you all the best in the all-important task of school policy reform.

(The Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning withdrew.)

The CHAIR: The Committee is due to break for lunch at 12.40 p.m. so we will continue with the officials, given the time that was lost earlier on. I will now turn to the Labor Opposition for 20 minutes, and then a breakdown of 20 minutes for the crossbench.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I want to come back to the question of asbestos. I think Mr Stevens was answering the questions earlier. There are a number of examples of where teachers or other staff have raised concerns of residual asbestos after asbestos has been removed from school sites. We have raised all those in the House and other examples have been in the media. Are you seeking recourse from the people who provided those clearance certificates for the subsequent destruction of school property that was required?

Mr STEVENS: I am not sure. I am not aware of any particular instances to which you are referring. I would be happy to take any individual—

Mr SCOTT: Are you talking about the Newcastle East situation?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am talking about Newcastle East, Endeavour Sports High and a number of instances where musical equipment, for example, has required to be destroyed, guitars have been found to have asbestos fibres on them. The Department of Education covered the cost at the time. Are you pursuing the practitioners for that cost?

Mr STEVENS: I can speak to the musical instruments. The musical instruments were tested. They were put in a negative pressure environment and were cleared by a registered hygienist, so they were safe to use. There was no issue with them.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are talking about Newcastle East?

Mr STEVENS: No, I am not talking about musical instruments that you brought up.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: At Endeavour Sports High?

Mr STEVENS: I believe that is the site.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Stevens, the musical equipment was destroyed.

Mr STEVENS: It was destroyed. I was answering your question. The musical instruments were tested. They were cleared. They had a hygienist give them the clearance. However, the students—not so much the students but the teachers—were still concerned even though they had been cleared. Because they had that concern we decided to replace those instruments.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So the advice from the hygienist was that they were clean?

Mr STEVENS: Correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And then staff raised concerns and you subsequently destroyed the musical instruments?

Mr STEVENS: We subsequently replaced those musical instruments, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So your dispute is not with the hygienist? You are not taking any—

Mr STEVENS: No, because the equipment was cleaned. It was certified as clean. However, we had some people who were not confident. We took that on board and replaced those instruments.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Stevens, I have seen the photographs of the guitars in question and they clearly still had fibres on them. You do not think, therefore, that we should be revisiting the standards that the hygienist is required to clean them to?

Mr STEVENS: The cleaning from the hygienist is that they are clear of asbestos. I cannot comment on other materials.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are not seeking—

Mr SCOTT: Can I seek clarification? Was that photograph taken before or after the guitars were cleaned? Are you saying—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: After they were cleaned and placed back in the classroom. The teacher then raised concerns about it.

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice. We would appreciate the detail on that. We can investigate that further. On these matters, can I say, we work closely with SafeWork and certified hygienists to help guide us through what is a very complex area of public policy not just in education but also across the public sector and also in residential properties. If there is a query on any of that we are happy to take that on notice and investigate further.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, given the supplementary questions lodged by the member for Newcastle, Tim Crakanthorp, after the last round of budget estimates and the subsequent advice—which I assume was provided by your department to the Minister—that was lodged as answers to questions on notice that outlined that there was not any friable asbestos at those schools, are you reconsidering the methods that are taken to survey schools?

Mr SCOTT: Thanks for your question. As outlined by the Minister earlier, the asbestos that was found when the roof was taken off at Newcastle East was not visible or held in any records. It was understandable that it was not found. When it was found, mitigation processes were put in place. The asbestos register asked us to identify known or suspected asbestos. We follow processes that are spelt out to us by SafeWork NSW, the regulatory framework that we operate in and the work health and safety laws. From time to time—we have 30,000 buildings and the asbestos register identifies that asbestos is in 1,600 schools—we review that and update the asbestos register. We also look at it whenever any work is being done and we change that with information that comes to light.

But we are following the advice and the guidelines that are set out by SafeWork in managing and dealing with this very complex issue. Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our students and the staff who work in our schools. That is the legitimate community expectation and that is how we approach this work. We approach this complicated work by following the advice of the experts who are dealing with the proliferation of asbestos in buildings all around the State, probably including this one.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, can I characterise your answer as you saying that you are continuing with the existing procedures and that there will be no change in the way that asbestos is managed?

Mr SCOTT: Why do we not cast it this way: We are continuing to follow the advice in managing asbestos from the absolute best experts and authorities that exist within the community that are guiding not just us but also NSW Health, private residential homes and everyone else in how to manage asbestos. We identify it as best we can and we put it on the register. Of course, a lot of the advice is that when asbestos is found, keep it in place and do not touch it unless you need to. But if, in fact, you do need to because you are worried about the deterioration of its condition, you should follow the guidelines and the regulations as spelt out to deal with that asbestos appropriately. My answer to you is: We are continuing to follow the advice of the experts in dealing with and managing the presence of asbestos, which we have already spelt out is in 1,600 schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, can you tell me how many of the schools, as identified in the 2019 asbestos register, that have friable asbestos in place—which we discussed at length at the last hearing—have had that friable asbestos removed since the last round of hearings?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, let me take that and Mr Stevens might be able to add to it. What we have identified—as I said earlier, I think we have around 3,000 buildings and 2,200 schools—is that 1,600 schools have asbestos and 332 schools have friable asbestos. There are 1,230 friable items in those 332 schools. The friable asbestos is overwhelmingly contained. It might be an asbestos sheeting or a low-density fibre, or it might be in vinyl tiles, for example, or in installation material. But it is not loose and it is not airborne. But we have—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, are you saying that none of those 332 schools have friable asbestos that is loose?

Mr SCOTT: No, no, I am saying that we monitor for where friable asbestos is loose and then we put a strategy in place. Mr Manning might be able to take this further.

Mr STEVENS: The safety of students is obviously the most important thing to us. We follow the regulations, and the regulations are put in place with the expectation that we will find unexpected asbestos. When we look at friable asbestos it is classified as that if you can crush it between your fingers, even though it may be contained or bonded so it is not aspirable. Does that answer your question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My question is: Of the 332 sites; and I think that number is— anyway, I will leave my commentary—

The Hon. WES FANG: Please leave your commentary.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Wes, if you want to ask questions—

The CHAIR: Order! Let's move on. We have limited time. Let's move on with the questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of the 332 sites with friable asbestos, is the asbestos contained in every single one of those sites?

Mr STEVENS: It is contained, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add—and I think Newcastle East is a good example of this—that I attended a public meeting at Newcastle East that was addressed by the Minister and also attended by Mr Manning, and the Minister apologised to that community because our communication with that community was not what it needed to be. A lot of this was identified over the holidays and the work was done over the holidays. But I think parents and staff were concerned that there had not been the ongoing communication that is necessary. The Minister apologised for that and we do need to do better on that. But it is a very sensitive matter. I know you are trying to be sensitive in your questioning on it. We know the concern that asbestos can cause and we know the damage that asbestos can do. The reality is, as someone said to me, half the homes in western Sydney have asbestos in them.

Asbestos is a reality that we are all living with. In fact, the hygienist who briefed the meeting at Newcastle East—airborne asbestos was not detected at Newcastle East—said that they did almost 3,000 swipes and found four or five fibres in the 3,000 swipes. The hygienist said that it was at a significantly lower level than any one of us would expect to inhale on any given day going about our lives. Of course, you could see the concern on the faces of the parents. Asbestos does generate concern. We have to be sensible in how we manage it and assiduous in dealing with any issues that are problematic. But we also have to follow the advice that if the asbestos remains bonded or contained the best course of action is often to leave it where it is. We need to do a better job to communicate to parents our strategy in managing what is a very, very complex matter for all of us to manage without causing unnecessary concern for parents.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Dizdar, I want to ask you about a question that I asked in the previous round of estimates around details on the number of assaults that occurred in schools. I asked the question in the hearing and I subsequently asked it in supplementary questions. Then there were further supplementary questions and I asked it again. Effectively, I got an answer that said, "No, we are not prepared to provide that information to the Committee." I was wondering whether you might elaborate on your reasoning around your refusal to provide the information as requested.

Mr DIZDAR: Ms O'Brien might be able to help here as well. My answer at the time, if I recollect correctly, I said that there are reporting procedures in the department for assaults that may occur in schools, for violence that may occur in schools. The Secretary indicated earlier that we have seconded police in that unit who work with us. We make notification and we support the school in working through a matter of that kind. I think I spoke to that in my answer. I think I said at the time, if I have it right—I do not have the transcript in front of me—that we publicly release the nature of, I do not know the categories but we release the incidences in our schools. I am looking at Ms O'Brien, whose unit helps us there, because I still believe that to be the case.

Ms O'BRIEN: Yes, we proactively release a range of data and that gets published on the department's website. We do not release data based on school by school because that has the potential under our privacy responsibilities to be able to allow people to identify particular people who may be involved in certain incidents, which would be a breach. So the data is rolled out to network level or local government area level.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Obviously we are not interested in specific incidents at specific schools. However, I wonder how it is possible that we, as a Committee, can properly scrutinise the department's approach if we are unable to identify whether there are particular schools that have a problem with violence. Do you have an answer for me on that? How can we discharge our duty to be able to make sure that the department is doing its duty in relation to keeping students safe if you refuse to provide the details to the Committee?

Mr DIZDAR: I just want to reiterate—and I know that it will be obvious to the Committee—that schools are some of the safest places that we have in society. It does not mean that incidences will not occur. They occur when you have 60,000 classrooms and 2,200 sites. Our response as an organisation is always strongly supportive, in supporting the principal leadership team unpack that situation. So we work with the Director, Educational Leadership, and experts in educational services, depending on the matter and the incident, to both unpack that incident but then have those young people involved re-engaged back into schooling. So it is a multifaceted approach. What we are covering at the moment, and we covered in the last estimates, was simply the reporting procedure of that, so that if there is any further support needed—inter-agency—then we are well placed through the seconded police, through the school security unit, to have that extra assistance given to a school.

We have had to have a school, at times, placed in lockdown from something impacting in the community, possibly, on the school that is totally not school-related. So these incidences are multifaceted. We, certainly, at a Director, Education Leadership level and principal level know of sites that may require extra support around welfare, wellbeing, engagement, around incidences that may lead to suspensions or exclusions from school. So we provide strong support from the educational services arm and the operational arm for those schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Dizdar, where is the transparency in terms of our role in making sure—we hear what you are saying about providing us with assurances but we do not have the capacity if you do not provide us with the information.

Mr DIZDAR: Mr D'Adam, why don't we provide to the Committee the publicly available information that we make?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That has been provided.

Mr DIZDAR: Have we provided that to you? You have that?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, you provided a list of statistics for 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, broken down by—

Mr DIZDAR: Networks?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —networks.

Mr DIZDAR: Yes. Are you after school by school?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The request is for school by school. The information could be provided to the Committee on a confidential basis.

Mr SCOTT: Let us take that on notice. We are working closely with these schools. There will be some schools that are in challenging settings and have dealt with incidents. I am happy to provide—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I understand that. Obviously, if we were going to probe into those areas where we think there may be an issue, where the department's approach may need to be scrutinised, we do not have the requisite information to enable us to do that.

Mr SCOTT: It might well be—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have a further question. If an incident—say, an assault—occasions hospitalisation, what advice is provided to parents and the parent community in that situation? Do parents have any right to know that that is happening in their schools?

Mr DIZDAR: I will unpack that generally for you. It is difficult unless you have the specifics of an incident. In my experience, if there is an assault in a school—and that can be of varying kinds, whether that is the students in that school or across schools—we would be working, depending—you indicated quite a serious assault there—we would notify the police. We would notify the families involved—whether that is the victim or the perpetrator or perpetrators—we would make contact. We would work with all parties, in terms of families as well as the police, to unpack the matter.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How can parents be assured—

Mr DIZDAR: We are often called to do that, I should add.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —because, obviously, if a violent incident occurs in a school—

Mr DIZDAR: I should add that we are often called to do that with matters that happen outside the school involving our students.

Mr SCOTT: I think you have to be a bit careful here. A principal is running a big, complex high school of 1,200 kids. There might be an incident with a student on a staff member or a student on student assault. I think what the principal wants to do is manage that school environment. What you would often see, I think, is the principal alluding to matters around appropriate levels of behaviour and engagement in staff newsletters and the like, but in no school do you see the principal putting a list in the newsletter of incidents that they have been managing this week.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is not what I am suggesting.

Mr SCOTT: Well, you did ask whether, in fact—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Obviously, the word gets around in the student community and then parents get feedback from their children—

Mr SCOTT: How does a principal sensibly—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —and there is no official communication from the department.

The CHAIR: We will let Mr Scott answer the question. The question is clear.

Mr SCOTT: I think the question is: How does a principal sensibly manage this environment? What I am saying here is that I do not think we should have hard and fast rules on this as far as the exercise of a principal's judgement is concerned. If a principal has an issue with a group of students or perhaps a year group, the principal might well engage that year group and parents of that year group. If there are broader issues at the school, the principal might well send messages to the school community through the school newsletter and the like. But I think, in a way, we have got to trust principals' judgements on this matter.

What is great, I think, about the way the department is structured is that the principal can work with the Director, Education Leadership, they can draw resources in to help work on student management issues, student behaviour issues, student wellbeing issues. There are resources that a principal can bring to bear to help them manage that environment. **What I was going to say earlier is that rather than school by school lists, I am really happy to provide a further detailed briefing, with some case studies perhaps, on different scenarios that we are dealing with and the different levels of support the department can provide.**

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, going back to the air conditioning issue, the schools that did it the toughest over the summer period with the terrible fires and smoke were the schools that did not have any air conditioned space. They did not have a hall, library or classrooms. They had nowhere to go. Are you looking at reprioritising some of the Cooler Classrooms Program funds to ensure that every school has at least one space to go?

Mr SCOTT: I will just check with Mr Manning. I think that is part of the strategy, is it not—a cooled space at every school?

Mr MANNING: So the above 30 degrees is learning spaces and libraries, and we are trying to make sure that in all those spaces that, yes, there is at least a place within the school. And then the other part of the fund looks at those that are below 30.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, and that might well be cooled spaces, a cooled precinct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking whether there has been a reprioritisation, given the terrible summer we have had, to ensure that the first cab off the rank, if you like, are those schools with no air conditioned spaces so at least they have the library or the hall or one space where the kids and staff can go?

Mr MANNING: The first phase of the program was to identify those schools that were in the above 30-degree zone, to try to install air conditioning equipment as quickly as possible into those schools in the first instance. That program has been rolling its way through as part of this process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But that is a five-year horizon.

Mr MANNING: And we are trying to make sure that we deliver those in the first portion of that five years, not—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking: Is there any reconsideration, given the terrible summer we have had, of saying, "Do you know what? In the next 12 months we are going to make sure that every school has a cool space—a cool, protected space—for kids and students before next summer". Surely that should be our priority—that every school has at least one cool, protected space.

Mr SCOTT: So let us take that on notice. Stage one is rolling out. There is a stage two process that is currently under evaluation. Let us take your question on notice as part of that. We will come back to you and provide advice on that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Maybe if you can, the time frame at which that will happen.

Mr SCOTT: We have got stage one; that is rolling. I do not think anyone thinks that we should de-prioritise those schools that are over 30 degrees in January. But there is a stage two. The advice I think we had was that most schools did the very best they could to manage the air quality questions that were faced.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can I just give you from my own family experience the bizarre situation that happened to my kids, who were actually attending a school function at the end of the year at Sydney Town Hall on one of those terrible days with nightmarish air quality conditions. They were required to stand outside the town hall for two hours or so in that terrible air quality because the town hall was concerned about the air quality standards inside the town hall—which were substantially better than outside. They had this bizarre situation of occupiers' liability, if you like, getting in the way of actually making kids safe. Can we be assured that that kind of situation will not happen again?

Mr SCOTT: I pay tribute to Ms O'Brien; she did a remarkable job over the summer in providing advice to schools through the fires and the floods and now the coronavirus issues that we are dealing with. We worked very closely with the Department of Health. We were providing a lot of advisories to schools so if in fact air quality was deteriorating it was kind of self-evident to schools, but we would provide particular advice on that. I hear the thrust of your question but many schools do have a cooled space somewhere.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What I am suggesting to you is we should very rapidly get to the point where every school has, and when will that happen?

Mr SCOTT: I understand the thrust of your question but I just want to make it clear that there is a difference in every space being a cooled space, but there are relatively few schools that do not have any cooled space. We will take your question on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Maybe you could give us a list of those schools, if it is a small number, and we can work it out.

Mr SCOTT: We will see what we can find.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alexandria Park Community School, I know there was some discussion about this. The Alexandria Park Community School redevelopment, apparently the delivery of 400 of the total of 1,250 secondary high school places has been delayed indefinitely. Is that true and, if so, why?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning, you talked to Alexandria Park?

Mr MANNING: To some, certainly. The 2018-19 budget papers identified Alexandria Park Community School as stage one in 2018-19, so it has always been intended to be staged. Chasing down some advice as to exactly the scope that was delivered as part of that, so I can make sure I am clear with the Committee exactly what the capacity—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What has been said to me is 400 of the total of 1,250 high school places has been delayed indefinitely. Do you know if that is right, Mr Manning?

Mr MANNING: I cannot tell you whether I know that to be right or not. We will go away and do some work and come back this afternoon.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Some has, and you will come back with details about when and time frames, is that right?

Mr MANNING: It was always envisaged to be a staged project.

Mr SCOTT: That is not unusual for us. When we talked about Lindfield earlier, we have talked about other developments that take place as well. Often it works very well for schools. When I was at Inner Sydney, as I said, they appreciated this is a rollout of that development. That will give them a great chance to grow that school the way they want to grow that school.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But the community is asking when will the 2,000 new school places at the Alexandria Park Community School that have been promised and Inner Sydney High School, when will they actually be available for enrolments?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: With the number of non-local area enrolment applications for the Inner Sydney High School, what proportion of that school population is going to be out of area?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice and look at those.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you are doing that, could you give a breakdown? There has been particular concern about the 2020 and 2021 postcodes.

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I know this may seem narrow, but there is concern raised about the Anzac Park Public School and the inadequacy of actual parking on site for teachers. It is a lottery basis; there is insufficient parking. Teachers and visitors are therefore parking and chancing their arm in two-hour parking outside. We would all agree that is inadequate. Are there plans to increase the amount of parking at Anzac Park Public School or, alternatively, come up with some creative arrangements, like a shuttle bus to North Sydney or the like?

Mr SCOTT: Let me take that on notice. It is an outstanding school. We have had an executive meeting at that school and Unity Taylor-Hill does a great job in leading it. It is an interesting model, as you will appreciate. It is a primary school scheduled to have 1,000 students on less than a hectare.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have been there; it is an interesting school.

Mr SCOTT: What I am trying to say is it is site constrained; it is amazing.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Which is why I am asking about potentially creative alternatives, like a shuttle to and from North Sydney or the like.

Mr SCOTT: It raises an interesting question for us as well—I think you would be interested in it too—what is the department's responsibility to provide car parking for each of our 60,000 employees on site? There are worse-served areas for public transport than the North Sydney area. I take that on board. It is not a matter that has been raised with me from the school personally, but we will get some further advice on that to you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Going forward, we are going to see more of these high-density sites.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you going to have a policy about proximity to public transport, car parking and the like so that we have got a consistent policy in place rather than make it up as we go?

Mr MANNING: We are working our way through strategy and a policy for that. One of the things we encounter is each local council jurisdiction has a different way of thinking through and calculating the number—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have noticed, have you?

Mr MANNING: —of car parking spaces. We actually have quite a good strategy now. We are really looking at where do we think we have opportunities around access to public transport. We have begun to have some really good conversations with the Department of Transport around supplementing those. Can we ask for additional bus services to arrive? We are also beginning to talk to councils about walking and cycling paths to school so we can begin to not rely on car parking spaces and cars as a source of travel. Certainly, in metro Sydney that is the strategy that we have been running. We have quite a comprehensive assessment process now that we use to try and identify as much walking, cycling and public transport availability as possible.

Mr SCOTT: This is for students as much as staff. It is really quite a detailed mapping program.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will come back to walking and buses and maybe get some more detail about Anzac Park.

The CHAIR: I take the department to the reaction to the Minister's comments about Local Schools, Local Decisions, where a number of very senior people in the cohort of principals, including the secondary and the primary principals associations leadership have come out and said two things. The first is that the Government has gutted support for principals. It seems to be a vote of no-confidence in the DELs system. If that is true, does it point to the need for a Scottish-style inspectorate, where you have got additional support in schools giving feedback to teachers with professional development—which will have massive gains—classroom practice, accreditation measurement and compliance. That DELs are not enough.

Mr SCOTT: Thanks for your question, Chair. The questions of an inspectorate go centrally to the report of your Committee. The Government will respond to that, as the Minister said today. A few things on your question. There is a line I quite like which says: In Australia you always get the reaction before you get the reform. The Minister indicated she is going to come out with a statement on how Local Schools, Local Decisions evolve. We had some reaction to, I think particularly the headline of, the news story. I think the best advice would be to hear more detail from the Minister when in fact she is ready with that.

The principals I speak to—and I visit many schools and you do too, Chair, I know—have seen that we have continued to evolve Local Schools, Local Decisions. It is not just simply a policy of putting money inside the school gate. It is an idea for us to develop school leadership capability—big investment on that—to develop tailored support so that schools can draw on an evidence-based research method. It is the creation and the development of the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], which is the envy of the rest of the country. We are continuing to evolve Local Schools, Local Decisions in line with what the global experience would be on high-performing systems.

There are different structures of oversight for schools. We think there is a lot of merit in the DEL structure—senior educational leaders who can work closely side by side with school principals, who can help them with their leadership team. Ms Egan was a DEL who worked for us very successfully in the Forest area. We think there are great benefits to that structure. Those benefits have been far more evident in the last couple of years when the number of schools that DELs were looking after reduced from 35 schools to 20 schools. Far more ability for in-depth engagement and also to train all those DELs in instructional leadership so they spent time with John Hattie at the University of Melbourne, so Hattie can work with them on how they best engage with school principals to lift teaching and learning outcomes.

I do not want to pre-empt the Government's response to your report. I can say we are intensely engaged in how we best structure support for school principals so that they can see exactly what you call for and exactly what our strategic plan calls for, which is improvement of every student, every leader, every school, every year.

The CHAIR: The second thing that the principal leadership said was that they comply with everything. Why change Local Schools, Local Decisions? They are out there with quality control and compliance. It was mentioned earlier, and it has been a frequent theme of this Committee, is the School Excellence Framework. It clearly requires whole school reporting about internal and external assessment data to monitor and report on student and school performance and other requirements about reporting on student growth, effective classroom practice and data use in planning. To test what is happening in the system, logically one would think the person who heads up the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council would be complying with the School Excellence Framework.

Can the department provide an analysis about what is happening in the school plan and reporting of the Denison College, headed up by the head of the Secondary Principals' Council, with the Bathurst and Kelso campuses in place? Because I do not see, in the material produced by Mr Petersen for which he is responsible, any internal academic targets or reporting. At Bathurst, I do not see in the annual report any academic data, other than what is already publicly available through NAPLAN. At Kelso, they mention improved academic outcomes demonstrated through internal progress measurers but they do not say what that looks like and there is no reporting of them in the annual report. Do you think parents have got every right to think it is the Mad Hatter's tea party? The department says that these School Excellence Frameworks are complied with but clearly they are not. The head of the Secondary Principals' Council says they comply. Clearly he, at the top of the system, does not comply. Is anyone complying?

Mr SCOTT: I will ask Mr Dizdar to talk about how the Schools Excellence Framework is working. There was a clear view that actually to set up a structure where schools identify—well we identify areas that high performing schools systems around the world are identifying to work on—for them to map their current area of achievement, for them to articulate how they want to see improvement and to have that independently verified and assessed every few years. That was a good stage, a good step. We are continuing to involve our school planning and school reporting processes in ways the Minister outlined for you this afternoon. So future schools plans will have clarity around targets for improvement and have clarity in articulating where the strategy is.

The CHAIR: What is going to make them do what they have not done to this point in time? What is the change here?

Mr SCOTT: There is a clear change in that planning process that is underway. Mr Dizdar can speak more to that.

Mr DIZDAR: The current school plans that you have been looking at, Chair, come to an end at 2020. We are looking to go out early term two, recognising that schools will be looking to set up their next plan of operation. We are calling them school improvement plans and making specific that the plans should call out—you referenced the three strategic directions—the key improvement areas in the school. The Secretary and Minister referenced that the targets are going to be visible in the school plan, which is visible to the school community and to the system, and give a greater degree of focus and accountability around the academic achievements of the school. I have got full confidence in Mr Petersen as college principal. He does a great job in making sure that both Bathurst and Kelso are well placed to achieve academic excellence.

The CHAIR: How can you have confidence in someone who has ignored your framework? What is this?

Mr DIZDAR: Some of the tools that we have had at their disposal, Chair, we recognise need improvement and that is what we have been working on.

The CHAIR: You said you have confidence in him and now you say he needs improvement. Which one is it?

Mr DIZDAR: I am saying the tools that we use require—

Mr SCOTT: There is a difference. I think, in fairness to Mr Petersen who is not here to defend himself—

The CHAIR: His documents are on the website and they are a disgrace.

Mr SCOTT: I just want to parse it slightly, Chair. In fairness to Mr Petersen who is not here to defend himself, Mr Petersen is a well-respected and experienced school principal. He has recently served a term on the New South Wales Education Standards Authority. He is acting head of the Secondary Principals' Council [SPC] or head of the SPC at this point. I have not studied his paperwork—you have studied his paperwork and expressed concerns. The only difference I would draw is that I would not put a question mark over his entire career and success as a principal because of that paperwork. What you are pointing out, I think, is that you are concerned at some of the documentation of schools planning, as you have seen in the School Excellence Framework. What Mr Dizdar has articulated is that we are changing that.

Some of the things that you are specifically looking for is what the department had been working up to bring about as a change. Minds agreeing on this, we are actually turning that into a school improvement plan. There will be clarity around targets that schools have agreed to on how they are going to see improvement and the plan will be able to articulate the strategy that the school is using to achieve that target. I would also think that parents would want to see how schools are spending their funds to help see improvement, to help reach the targets. So we are bringing about an alignment in the planning process here, which is, I think, along the lines of the kinds of things that you have been talking about, and the department has been long planning and I think are fairly uncontroversial.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Continuing that theme, my comment is that that alignment was supposed to be there. In terms of improving the school plan and the Schools Excellence Framework, is part of that going to be having a consequence for when schools score poorly on the Schools Excellence Framework? At the moment you have this huge bureaucratic exercise—some schools are reportedly paying \$8,000 for professionals to write their report—and it is drawing countless hours away from educational leadership. Then you get to your validation and someone says, "Yes, we think you are right on that one, on that one, but not that one" and then nothing else happens. In the view of schools it is a massive bureaucratic task that essentially achieves nothing.

Mr SCOTT: Let us work back through it. Let me address some of these things and Mr Dizdar as well. That schools may not like doing some of this paperwork—I appreciate that you are out and about too, and you know many people in the system—well, that might just be the requirement.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As long as the paperwork goes somewhere and achieves something.

Mr SCOTT: I would actually think that part of the process is schools sitting down and agreeing. What I say when I speak with school principals is that if they have 20 priorities, they have no priorities. They have got to make some choices here and the choices really are: What steps will they take to improve teaching and learning outcomes? The fact that the School Excellence Framework asks schools to think carefully through about their current level of success and where their engagement needs to be to see improvement. I think that is a worthwhile exercise for schools teams to do and that will continue under the school plans that we were just talking about with the Chair.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: A school can excel in one year in an area, then change its initiatives over a school plan and then be back workings towards development. I think it is a bit misleading for the school community in terms of how their school is performing when they can make that jump because of the way the School Excellence Framework is structured.

Mr SCOTT: That is why we do the external validation. You sounded critical of the external validation process. The feedback I have had from schools is that it is quite good to have someone from outside the school come in to test the thinking and decision-making that the school has been through.

Mr DIZDAR: Part of our work in tightening up the school excellence cycle will be—we need to give greater support around the self-assessment process because schools self-assess across the 14 elements that are in leading, learning and teaching in the School Excellence Framework. Schools make on-balance judgement calls of where they at. We are making available in the new processes support mechanisms that allow them to gather their evidence not at the external validation point but in an ongoing way so that they can make those assessments in a more informed way. We are looking at bringing in the external validation. I have only had positives around external validation. I acknowledge the workload issue that you call out. The stakeholders have spoken to me about that as well—could we help them to take it away from an event to an ongoing process? We need to do some work there. I think that is a rightful call out. But we are working to have a four-year cycle of external validation as opposed to five, and that is more in line with what school improvement traction can look like in a school.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just moving to another area, because I know I only have about a minute and a half left, is there a different process with regard to EPAC or a standard in reporting for principals versus teachers? I note that Mr Dizdar reported that last year only one principal was on the principal improvement program. I have evidence to suggest that there is at least one principal out there with 30 complaints against them and another up on the mid North Coast that has been moved three times because they have left a wake of destruction in every community that they have been in, allegedly.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Some have become directors.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My concern is that there is a different level or standard for when a teacher is referred to EPAC than when a principal is referred. There is also a perception out there in the community that some directors are running a protection racket for their principals because it may reflect badly on them. Is there are different level or standard?

Mr SCOTT: Let me start and then Mr Dizdar will continue. We have high standards for our principals. I think it is a little misleading to suggest that only one has been involved in an EPAC process.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That was the evidence given.

Mr SCOTT: Let me finish. One of the reasons for that is that there are other ways that principals move on from leadership. Often when there is discussion and performance plans a principal will resign or move away from a principal role. That is actually far more common than someone going through a leadership—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, can you provide those details—how many were moved on in other ways?

Mr SCOTT: I am happy to do that.

Mr DIZDAR: Can I just say I think you said that there were "protection rackets" being run by DELs. I would be really interested in that. I am happy to come outside the Committee and sit down with you and if you have any information on that I would like to have that information. That is not my operational experience, but I would like to have that information to follow up on.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But the number has a certain power, I think you would agree. To have one out of 2,200 principals has a certain power.

Mr SCOTT: Ms Harrison has further detail.

Ms HARRISSON: If I could add, we have 44 teachers on improvement programs at the moment, so as a proportion of the workforce the numbers do not suggest that we have a different standard for teachers or principals.

The CHAIR: What, they are both low? They are both at 0.1 per cent. Is that what you are saying?

Mr SCOTT: The way it works is that the EPAC process is a detailed process. We have talked about it in the past. We had Mark Tedeschi review it. We have made some changes to it. But it is a detailed process, partly

because of the industrial framework that we operate under too. But there are many principals who—and this is the number that I will provide to you—when you say, "Well, we are going to have the performance discussion", decide that it might be time for them to wrap up as principal. Some are willing to say, "Actually, I am not that happy as a principal; I would be happy to go back into a school in another kind of leadership role." Those conversations are often triggered by the very first performance discussion. That is far more common than someone saying, "I am ready to run the gamut of the reviews and the people sitting in and watching." That is often the way it goes; that is often the way it goes in senior leadership positions everywhere. I am happy to provide those numbers.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Scott and the other witnesses. We have an hour lunch break and the Committee will reconvene at 1.40 p.m.

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: It is close to 2.40 p.m. I declare the Committee open for the afternoon session. I thank the witnesses for their attendance. The first volley of questions will come from Opposition members.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms O'Brien, the assault statistics provided to the Committee show that 632 student-on-teacher assaults were reported for 2019. Is that your understanding of the figure?

Ms O'BRIEN: I am not sure where that—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is from the answers provided to supplementary questions.

Ms O'BRIEN: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is a very high figure, is it not?

Mr MANNING: Any incident of violence against a teacher is too high, of course, but given the size of the population and the number of students and staff that we have got, it is something that we will be constantly working towards improving but it is not an overwhelming number, given the other types of issues and incidents that schools manage very successfully on a day-to-day basis.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add that any incident is an incident too many and is taken seriously. We have 2,200 schools. They are operating for 200 days a year. We are running 440,000 school days in the system.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you saying that it is an occupational risk? Are you saying that teachers should simply accept that—

Mr SCOTT: No, I am just—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —some of them are going to be assaulted by students and that is just part of the job?

Mr SCOTT: No, no, please, let us take it—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It seems like you are pretty complacent about it.

Mr SCOTT: Let us not—

The Hon. WES FANG: Let us not put words in the witness' mouth.

The CHAIR: Order! Committee members will let the witness finish his answer.

Mr SCOTT: Let us take a serious issue seriously. We are running one of the largest education systems in the world. I said, as you heard me say, any incident is an incident too many. We run 2,200 schools with 800,000 students. Each of those schools is operating for 200 days a year. So I am saying that there are nearly half a million school days in an average year of the department. Any incident is an incident too many but when you look at the data you need to reflect on the enormity of the system that is being run and operated. That is simply the point I am making.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are the incidents of student-on-teacher assault reported to SafeWork NSW?

Ms O'BRIEN: The way in which incidents get reported is: Any assault is reportable, so all assaults are reported to the department. There are different types of assault. Obviously, there are some very low-grade situations where an assault may be deemed an accidental assault were children are perhaps acting out, who are very young and who have other complex issues going on, all the way up to some very unacceptable criminal-related incidents. There is quite a spectrum of variety of incidents within there. The incidents are reported

to the department. Our seconded police officers triage those and take appropriate action if we believe they need to be referred or assessed for an act of a crime. If there is an incident that results in an injury then, yes, if they meet the requirements of what is defined as a notifiable incident to the regulator, then, yes, they are reported to the regulator.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In one of the answers that was provided, you indicated that the Work Health and Safety Act is one of the legislative instruments that regulates safety in schools. I am interested in how students are considered under the Work Health and Safety Act, given that schools are quite unique workplaces in that a majority of the people in those workplaces are not employees. What mechanisms do you have to assess the safety needs of students and consult on those safety needs? How is student voice incorporated into your work health and safety planning and risk management?

Ms O'BRIEN: I will attempt to answer that. Let me know if it is not what you are asking. My interpretation of what you are asking is: How are we catering for the needs or the views of the students in our risk management processes within schools? That is my understanding of the question. The way in which that is done is: All schools operate off an overarching safety management system, so they have policies, procedures, operational protocols et cetera that they are required to adhere to, and they adapt those locally to meet the local context and environment within their schools. With any operational practice that happens inside a school there is obviously consultation through the relevant committees, bodies and processes within that local school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are the students represented on those bodies?

Ms O'BRIEN: Schools have student representative groups in a variety of different fashions. So if there are any needs, issues or concerns, they would go through those processes. Schools also talk to P&Cs about issues and they get referred into schools to identify and address any issues of concern as well. So students are not deemed our employees under the Act but we are responsible for their safety and wellbeing under the Act, as we have the duty of care of those during school hours.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have a question about an infrastructure issue. Has a site been determined for the proposed Sydney Olympic Park high school?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning can speak to that.

Mr MANNING: We have narrowed down to a preferred site for that school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you have a site in mind? Is it likely that—

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is still—the finalisation of that process is underway but we are aware that we need a high school at Sydney Olympic Park. We have been canvassing suitable sites and we are now zeroing in on a preferred position.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Does that involve a lease or a purchase of land?

Mr MANNING: It would involve a purchase of land.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: As I understand it, there are no details in the budget papers—the forward estimates—of this particular project.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but for the simple reason that—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I finish my question please?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How is it that you are able to expend funds without those funds being authorised through an appropriation?

Mr MANNING: Many of the land acquisitions that we do come out of a minor works allocation for land acquisition, rather than out of an identified major project. We have the ability to acquire land in preparation for a project. That is, most generally, how we acquire land that we need.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that a way of hiding the expenditure on particular projects that the Government does not want to report in the budget papers?

Mr MANNING: No, it is a way of expediting the acquisition of land ahead of us having finalised exactly the scope of a project, and being able to have done all of the planning. Quite often we need the land first in order to be able to do the planning. So we have identified that we need a school in that area so we can acquire—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What informs the choice about procuring the land through this minor acquisition fund as opposed to dedicated, specific-purpose funds for that project?

Mr MANNING: Within the minor works budget there is a dedicated line item for land acquisition.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Who makes the decision that something should be placed in the minor works budget as opposed to a specific purpose?

Mr MANNING: If it is a project like this one that is actually listed in the budget papers, it is a commitment. We are working our way through the planning for that commitment. We know we need land in order to deliver on that so it would come out of that minor works—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So why is that expenditure not budgeted for and reported in the budget papers?

Mr MANNING: The minor works line items are generally—

Mr SCOTT: It is in the budget paper.

Mr MANNING: I do not think the minor works items are identified in the budget paper but they are included in the budget paper numbers.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: At what point does a minor work become a project that is identified?

Mr MANNING: Just for clarity, the money is in the minor works program. We are not saying it is a minor work. It is just that there is a line in the minor works budget for land acquisition that we utilise to buy land ahead of projects as we go through and finish the planning for that project.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you able to provide on notice the details of all the projects where expenditure has occurred under that minor works budget?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you mean land acquisition expenditure?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Land acquisition or any other expenditure that ultimately will lead to being reported under another project at some later stage?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How much has been expended on the Sydney Olympic Park high school project to date?

Mr MANNING: I would have to take that on notice. I have not got that detail with me.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you also take on notice the same question for the new Marsden Park primary school? How much has been expended to date on that project?

Mr MANNING: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you also do the same for the Pendle Hill High School upgrade? How much has been expended on that project to date?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I seek the same information on Wentworthville Public School.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: While we are on the subject of specific schools, can any of the witnesses update me on the status of the promised Googong primary school?

Mr MANNING: Yes. The Googong primary school is in the planning phase at the moment. We are working our way through finalising the scope for that project so we can move that into the next stage, being procurement and delivery.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When do you anticipate that the school will open?

Mr MANNING: Once we finish the planning, we will be able to confirm the date that we will have that ready to a degree. So that planning process is ongoing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not have a specific date?

Mr MANNING: As soon as we finish that planning process, we will be able to advise that date.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When do you anticipate finishing the planning process?

Mr MANNING: We will have the planning finished probably by quarter three of this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The election commitment that was made to the public was that it would be open in 2023 with classrooms and kids. Do you believe you are still on track for that time line?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I come back to the question of Alexandria Park Community School and the question of whether it was a master plan or whether it was a two-stage development. I went over some documents in the break. All of the language in the official communication, all of the project updates, in fact, even a release from the Minister for education on Wednesday 6 February 2019 says, "The Alexandria Park Community School will be opening in 2020 with 1,000 primary and 1,200 secondary students." Are you able to provide me—and I am happy for you to do it on notice—with what date the Minister visited the school and at what point was it determined that level 4, the 400 additional places that my colleague also asked about, would become stage two works?

Mr SCOTT: I think we said this morning we would take those questions on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just asked you for some additional clarification.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the original environmental impact statement the approval says it is for 1,000 primary school students and 1,200 secondary school students.

Mr SCOTT: Can I just go back to your language? You talked about a master plan or in stages; I am not sure that they are mutually exclusive. We will come back with the detail on this, but I think you can have a master plan—this is broadly where we are going with the site—and it be delivered in stages. I am not sure they are mutually exclusive. We will get that detail for you and come back to you on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Just to provide some clarification, the local school reference group was under the impression that it would be a one-stage development. I would also like you to provide on notice whether the associated costs of going back into the site, recommencing construction and starting that again have been taken into consideration, because the information I am provided with is that that level 4 will cost \$8.24 million in addition as part of it. But to go back on site again would cost at least \$30 million. It seems as though it would be much more financially responsible to do it all in one go, not to mention that is what the school community is expecting. Can I ask you about mobile phones in schools. When are you planning on banning those?

Mr SCOTT: Ms Harrison will talk to this in a minute. The Government has quite a clear position on this. There is not a total ban on mobile phones in schools. The Government has said that we think, as primary school classrooms operate, no need for mobile phones there. There might be an occasional circumstance where a child needs a phone and schools will work that through. That has been rolled out in 2020. There is some follow-up training and working with parents and schools around safe use of digital devices that is being rolled out and implemented this year.

In secondary schools, the Premier and the Minister have both reinforced that this is a matter for secondary schools to work through—the appropriateness in their setting. Schools are doing that. Schools are engaging with the policy. There are many schools out there where the schools themselves have come up with a policy that there are not mobile phones in schools, in playgrounds at break time or at lunch time. Do you want to add to that?

Ms HARRISSON: Just that the revised policy around the use of mobile phones came into place this year and happy to provide details of that policy to the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you provide that on notice?

Ms HARRISSON: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The Victorians rolled this out in six months, but it looks like it is taking about two years.

Ms HARRISSON: The policy came into effect from the start of this year. I am very happy to share on notice with the Committee the details of that policy, but schools will now be implementing that policy as they comply with their requirements for the department.

Mr SCOTT: In fairness, you talk to experts about this—I have, you may well have spoken to them as well—and part of the challenge of this debate is that it is not just as simple as banning them in schools. These kids have phones. As much of their waking hours that they are going to be outside school than inside school, they are going to have those phones on holidays, weekends and everything else. Part of the strategy here is how you work through with kids and their families a way of them sensibly engaging with the phone, with the technology. That is part of what we are rolling out this year as well.

It is not a simple edict that we are rolling out. It is very simple to come out with an edict. It takes a bit more time to get the right kind of support materials into schools so they can have a sensible digital device strategy. That is what we have been preparing and rolling out.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Local schools, local communications?

Mr SCOTT: However you want to define it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will the ban cover smart watches?

Ms HARRISSON: The policy refers to all digital devices. So, yes, it would include smart watches. The policy includes a mandatory restriction on the use of digital devices by primary school students during class, recess and lunch unless the use is explicitly authorised by a teacher for an educational purpose.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I come back to the question of Googong public school. Can Mr Manning provide on notice an updated figure on how much has been expended to date on that particular project?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, have you now centralised out-of-area enrolment information?

Mr SCOTT: Centralised out-of-area enrolments, can I ask you for a bit more detail on what you mean by that?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We asked a number of questions around the new policy—

Mr SCOTT: Enrolment policy. The old enrolment policy I think, really. We should be precise on it. Enrolment policy has not fundamentally changed. Schools have had local boundaries and local area enrolments for a long period of time. What we have just said—and particularly given we have got 200,000 extra students coming into the system—is we need to pay close attention to that enrolment policy and how it operates in practice. That is what we are doing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We asked a series of questions about this last time. You said that a large part of the information was divulged to schools but that you were making efforts to centralise it. Can you provide us with an update on that?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning, do you want to talk about this or Mr Dizdar?

Mr DIZDAR: School by school, we keep that information in terms of how many applications we might get for out-of-area interest and how many they may accept, they will not accept. We keep that at a school level. We are able to provide to our principals and our directors in education leadership, as the secretary said, with the boundary for a school we are able to show them the in-area as well as the out-of-area mix for their school. You would appreciate that, with the enrolment policy having been in place since 1997 and only recently revised, school communities, particularly principals, want to know—particularly when they come in and are a new leader in a school—what their proportion of in area and out of area is so that they can comply with the policy and help support the system.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The department has that information, does it, centrally?

Mr DIZDAR: We are able to show the principal their boundary map and their proportion of in-area and out-of-area enrolment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you provide that information?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is a number, is it?

Mr DIZDAR: I do not know if we have got it in an aggregated sense. I know that we have got it at a school-by-school level.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How did you know that there was a problem in respect of the policy? The department made this announcement about tightening enforcement of the existing policy. Was that not underpinned by evidence and analysis? Had you not done the analysis and, if you had not done the analysis, why did you make the announcement?

Mr DIZDAR: We had a number of stakeholders wanting greater clarity around the policy. We had a number of schools where the population growth at that school was beyond what the demographic projections would look like, so we had an inconsistent application of the 1997 policy across the State. We had principals and school communities asking for clarity because the out-of-area guidelines needed updating. So we gave clarity that siblings would be first priority. To recognise the interests of families, we had to give that clarity. Principals were asking for the removal of this where some school communities have got into the habit of using academic performance as a means of an out-of-area application and we have removed that out of the revised policies.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It sounds as though you were just working off anecdotes. You did not do a proper forensic analysis of the problems.

Mr DIZDAR: No, not at all. I was saying we had stakeholder feedback, principal feedback and I just indicated that we also had—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has that been documented somewhere?

Mr DIZDAR: I also just indicated that we have school-by-school boundary, and school-by-school in-area and out-of-area enrolment data.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In delivering the progress report on the disability implementation strategy the Minister very clearly said the department would—I think the quote was—"hold yourselves to account" in reducing suspensions of students with disability. What has been done so far to reduce the suspension of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD]?

Ms HARRISSON: We continue to work through the system to meet the objectives that we have set out in the disability strategy: to build the capability and capacity of the workforce, to strengthen student and parent voice in the system, and to build the evidence base of what is effective in driving educational outcomes for our students. In terms of work around behaviour, we are reviewing the suspensions policy and we are developing a behaviour strategy through this year. We will be happy to brief the Committee on that as that work is finalised later this year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you for the general answer. I have had many parents contact me, and I am sure the department has had many parents contact it, specifically asking for consideration on ADHD. Are you looking at a particular component or doing a particular deal of work on ADHD to prevent the number of kids with ADHD being suspended in the current setting?

Ms HARRISSON: In the review of the suspension policy we are looking at the needs of all our student groups, including those students with ADHD.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add? Here again is where data is helping us I think. As we do that review it is interesting to look at the different approaches that you can see in different schools around suspension as shown by the data. Sometimes it certainly will be appropriate for a student to be suspended. But we are interested in looking at the pattern over time and to learn from those schools that have seen a significant reduction in suspension rates and what could be seen as improvement in the teaching and learning environment of the school. That can be a real achievement. As we learn from those schools, it is the kind of work that the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] can pick up on and we can disseminate those lessons of good practice to all our schools in New South Wales.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I agree data is useful, but when it comes to ADHD most of the kids are not being recorded as having ADHD because it is not a recognised disability. What are you doing? Ms Harrisson, I come back to the same point: A general statement about every cohort being looked at in a general kind of way, is not really addressing my question. Are you looking specifically at ADHD? If not, why not?

Ms HARRISSON: We are looking throughout our work at the needs of all student groups. We work on the basis of the nationally consistent data collection and, in terms of the way we are reporting, we are using that as the framework. So we continue to work with our Commonwealth counterparts as well on the best way for us to address the needs of students with ADHD and to capture that information effectively.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you have data at the moment? Are you capturing the information about students with ADHD in a manner that satisfies you?

Ms HARRISSON: We capture the data around suspensions through the system—the number of suspensions. We have provided some of that information to the Committee in response to previous questions around the number of suspensions and the types of suspension.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We are going to come to generalised questions about suspensions and numbers. I am asking about ADHD.

Ms HARRISSON: Unless we have a way of recording that information I am unable to provide it to you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I come back to where I started. Why can you not identify, given the extent of the concern in the parent body, a specific body of work addressing the concerns of parents with kids with ADHD have? Is it slipping through the cracks somehow or other?

Ms HARRISSON: It is not slipping through the cracks. It is a part of our work with the disability strategy to make sure that we are addressing those issues. I absolutely want to reassure parents who have children with ADHD that our schools are absolutely focussed on meeting the needs of those students and that we are committed to making sure that our environments support their needs.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You say that, but I have asked you to identify a specific body of work associated with ADHD and you cannot. I am now going to ask you if you are doing anything specific with ADHD in your update of the discipline and suspension policies? Is there a specific component about ADHD in that?

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to come back to you with advice on the components of our work that relate specifically to ADHD. As you will be aware, in the community ADHD is not always diagnosed. It is one of the areas that our teachers recognise and this is why we use the assessment tools that we use where teachers identify the additional learning needs rather than relying on diagnosis because they are not always present in our schools.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When are we going to get to that point where we are talking about not a sort of diagnosis space but a functioning kind of capacity criteria for determining additional resources or additional policy responses? When are we going to get away from this diagnosis problem we have?

Ms HARRISSON: We use the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data as the way that we drive resourcing the system. That is the way that resourcing flows through a number of our programs.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you agree with me that that is not picking up ADHD at the moment? We seem to be having a circular argument. You come back to the same problematic starting point and I do not see that you have a way through that?

Ms HARRISSON: I am confident we have work underway. I would like to come back to you on notice with the detail of that work in relation to students with ADHD.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Downey, do you want to add something?

Ms DOWNEY: Just to reiterate that the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data is specifically designed to ensure that you are capturing cases where you do not necessarily have diagnostic criteria. So you will pick up students with ADHD who do not have a diagnosis.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You may pick up students with ADHD?

Ms DOWNEY: What you will be picking up is teachers who recognise additional needs for those students that meet the criteria.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What training have you given to teachers specifically to deal with kids with ADHD? When will you get to a position that all teachers have that training?

Ms HARRISSON: I can come back to you with details on the training that is available. Obviously the department provides some training and many schools that recognise the needs of their students locally provide training locally within the school, and access training from other providers. I am very happy to take on notice the information we have centrally around this issue but I would like to make sure that the Committee is aware that there is further training that is used by schools and delivered in schools that we may not have information on.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add as well, the Gonski funding model recognises this. That is why there is additional money that is put into place in schools through the Gonski funding model for the support of students with low-level disability. I noted comments in your report on this, Mr Chair, but money is allocated to schools recognising particular needs of these students and also the training demands that may be required on top of that. I just want to

make sure that there is no misapprehension that we are not recognising these students have needs and we are not funding support for these students.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You say that but ADHD is not even mentioned in the behaviour section on the department's website. How can that give comfort to parents? On the key point you go to about behaviour it is not even mentioned.

Ms HARRISSON: I would like to come back on the training question, if I may. ADHD is recognised in the training we provide on disability standards for education and it is provided in the context of the Disability Discrimination Act. In 2019 we recorded 3,600 course completions and the Disability Discrimination Act training will now be a mandatory requirement for our principals through the balance of this year. So all principals will have completed that training by the end of the year.

The CHAIR: Can I ask how many schools in New South Wales and how much money is spent on the Grow Your Mind Program, with its worksheets on animal yoga, shark versus dolphin thinking, growth mindset tree and gratitude meditation? What is the evidence base that is being used for this Grow Your Mind Program to lift the State's academic results?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Does the department agree with the assessment of Geoff Masters at *The Sydney Morning Herald* Schools Summit that essentially looking at the PISA results, New South Wales has the fastest falling results in the world? Not just Australia, but the world.

Mr SCOTT: I heard Mr Masters speak. What he really identified—and if you listen to the context of his speech—is that the Australian PISA results have been disappointing over the 20-year period and New South Wales is absolutely part of that. We have seen a decline and that is unsatisfactory. None of us were happy with those results. I will talk a little about PISA because we said that we would get to it this afternoon. This PISA assessment took place in New South Wales about 18 months ago. It is an assessment of students in year 10 and 166 schools sat it. It is an attempt to assess high-level thinking and how students can apply their learning. Every State, every Territory, every system and all government and non-government schools have experienced a decline. In fact, government schools performed as well as independent schools and Catholic schools when socio-economic status was taken into account. But they are disappointing results.

As I said this morning, they stand a little bit in contrast to the results we have seen in NAPLAN, where we have seen a lift in NAPLAN performances identified thus reaching the Premier's Priorities targets. And it does not correlate with what we are seeing in the longitudinal review of HSC performance over time. But they were disappointing results for the Australian education system and disappointing results for the New South Wales education system. That is why, even in the past 18 months since PISA was out, there are a whole series of reforms that we have been looking at to improve and invest in the leadership of our principals because, as your report identifies, strong principals are a key to high-performing schools.

Hence the School Leadership Institute and now putting nearly 800 school leaders through evidence-based education and tailored support. We know the right kind of evidence in the right kind of schools is important. That is why we now have hundreds and hundreds of schools as part of a tailored support program and more than 5,000 teachers delivering effective reading support for them. We do know what the evidence says on how to lift performance. We are disappointed in the PISA results as we have seen them. We are very, very focused on improving learning outcomes.

The CHAIR: How did we end up with those disappointing results in the context of record expenditures on schools and education, and who in the department takes responsibility?

Mr SCOTT: Let us look at this carefully. As I said, that assessment took place 18 months ago and as we can see it—and if you look carefully and you are talking about the New South Wales results—some of those results around the country are banded and we are, with a number of other States, within the margin or error in the PISA reporting. I think that needs to be recognised. But I think the broader question is—as the commentary has suggested—what is really happening in Australian education? Fundamentally, the results for the Australian education system are strikingly similar over a 20-year period. So what are the characteristics of the Australian education system that are different to other systems around the world?

That is why I would dispute some of the commentary that says it is the technology, for example, and because kids are all on their phones these days. Phones are not a unique Australian or New South Wales education phenomenon. It does lead to questions about the curriculum: What are we teaching, how are we teaching it and what support are we giving teachers to teach it? That is why I think it is terrific that the Government has

commissioned an education curriculum review by Professor Masters. I have noted your comments on his initial paper and that you have set up another inquiry to question it when that report comes down. I think we should have active engagement in that.

But to fundamentally ask what are we teaching, how are we teaching it, how are we supporting our leaders in schools, what investment are we making in leadership and in tailored support, and what are the accountability mechanisms are all things that are vital and that the global research would suggest.

The CHAIR: How much time and effort would the department have spent on its diversity and inclusion employment strategy?

Mr SCOTT: I have noted your comments on this. As I look at your @RealMarkLatham Twitter feed, which is always engaging, I note from your commentary that you feel that we are obsessed with student wellbeing or obsessed with diversity and inclusion. I simply do not think that is the case.

The CHAIR: No, you should answer my question. How much time and effort was taken to development this strategy?

Mr SCOTT: I can take that on notice. But every government department has a diversity and inclusion strategy. It is what a modern workplace does. I can get you an assessment of how much it cost to develop that.

The CHAIR: Good-o. What role do you think this strategy will play in lifting our academic results?

Mr SCOTT: Let us talk about that. One of the characteristics of a high-performing system will be whether you can get great leaders in the right positions. What I want to make sure is that we have no impediments to people who could be great leaders becoming leaders in the system. One of the things about the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is to ensure that there are no impediments, structurally within the department, for people rising to leadership roles. One of the things that the strategy identifies is that we want to have more male primary school teachers. We think that would be a good thing for role modelling for students.

At the moment, fewer than 20 per cent of primary school teachers are male. We think it would be beneficial to have more primary school teachers who are male. We think that would be good for boys in primary schools. Again, that is part of a strategy that we have to ensure that we have the best possible environments in our schools so that students can flourish. There has been some commentary on women in leadership roles. I just think that when nearly 80 per cent of your workforce are women you want to make sure that there are no impediments for those women rising to leadership positions at all. It about ensuring merit and that you do have a culture where there are no inhibitors to merit.

The CHAIR: When does 60 per cent become the new gender equality in those senior roles and what message does that send to the men you otherwise want to recruit into the system when you say you can become a teacher but you are going to be down to 40 per cent senior roles in the department on a gender basis—not on merit, but just because of your gender?

Mr SCOTT: Let us just think it through for a minute. At the moment 80 per cent—

The CHAIR: Do you think it is all going well?

Mr SCOTT: If nearly 80 per cent of our staff are women and about 53 or 54 per cent of people in senior positions are women, on their first entering the workforce it is far more likely that a male will rise to a senior leadership position than a female. It is far more likely that a male will rise. I can understand the logic if, in fact, you assume that that leadership capability is equally distributed between men and women. If I followed your logic argument you might well be saying to me, "Why aren't 80 per cent of leadership positions held by females?" because 80 per cent of our staff are female. That target simply asks the question for us: Are we doing everything that we can do make sure that there is no structural impediment to women rising to leadership positions in the department?

The CHAIR: My logic is that our results are so bad that we cannot afford the luxury of doing anything other than getting the very best people in the key roles to lift the results. That is all.

Mr SCOTT: Exactly. We are in agreement.

The CHAIR: I do not care whether they are male, female, black, white or Callithumpian—whatever they are—as long as they can do a better job.

Mr SCOTT: I think the data would simply pose the question: If nearly 80 per cent of your staff are women but only 55 per cent of senior leadership roles are women, is there anything structurally in place in the

department that is blocking women rising to leadership positions on merit? Are there any impediments there? I would hope that you would agree with me that if there were impediments there we would be assiduously following that through.

The CHAIR: The impediment that we have is the fastest falling PISA results in the world. That is the impediment. That is the only thing that matters.

Mr SCOTT: Do you think that will be answered by holding more women back from leadership positions?

The CHAIR: No, I am not talking about that. Promote people on merit and do not waste your time on strategies that are all about tinkering with identity politics instead of the thing that matters. But we better move on to the Hon. Mark Banasiak. We can talk all day about that other thing.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I did not want to interrupt the Chair; he was on a roll. Mr Scott, according to the Public Service Association's guidance for reporting bullying, a report or complaint of bullying should always be made as a report of a work health and safety issue, rather than a grievance. Given that most of the staff who I have spoken to about this seem unaware of this report and have been told to go through EPAC or the director, does the department produce any literature informing staff in leadership—

Mr SCOTT: Let me check that and I will come back to it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I do note that last time round you stated that there is always a default position to protect the students, and I would agree with that. But also you are bound to the workplace health and safety laws. From my understanding, one school has already been threatened with failure to comply with New South Wales SafeWork orders totalling to \$30,000. You might need to take this on notice. How many other schools have had SafeWork NSW inspectors called in to investigate workplace bullying in the past five years?

Mr SCOTT: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Switching to EPAC, what has happened in EPAC since a principal quite publicly in the media was reinstated by the Industrial Relations Commission after it was found that the complaint was overturned because EPAC upheld false, vexatious and unfounded allegations?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that specific matter on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: In line with that, is Deidre Mulkerin still acting in the role? I noticed her absence.

Mr SCOTT: No. Much to our grief, she has taken a secretary position in Queensland. She has left us. But Ms Harrison is acting in the people and culture deputy secretary role.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What procedures or policies are there around employees of the department presenting to conferences that are not run by the Department of Education? If an employee wanted to present at a conference on a particular education matter that was not connected to the department, what are the policies and procedures?

Mr SCOTT: Line managers would need to approve that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The executive director of the employee performance and conduct directorate is running a workshop at a LawSense conference. The workshop is called "Dealing with 'Toxic' Staff Behaviour and Understanding When the Lower Level Issues Can Be Used For Lawful Performance Management or Disciplinary Action". To me it sounds like we are trying to manipulate a policy to use performance management to get rid of troublesome staff. Is that what that presentation is about? Who approved it?

Mr SCOTT: I can check the approval mechanisms. I do not think we should judge the presentation on the title, just as we should not always judge news stories on the headlines. I will inform you on the approval mechanism.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. There are others. Ms O'Brien is presenting one as well and a Margaret Baker who is talking about dealing with vexatious parents and parent bullying. I am wondering how those presentations on vexatious parents and toxic staff behaviour mesh with the School Community Charter that was introduced late last year and the new Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration that talks about supporting educators and developing stronger partnerships, especially with parents.

Mr SCOTT: I am happy to talk a bit about that in general. We have talked about this previously at this Committee. It would be two years ago now that Ms Harrison, Mr Dizdar and I did, I think, 10 events around

the State where we met with school principals, saw the best part of 1,700 or 1,800 of them. We always allow some considerable time for questions and discussion. The biggest issue that principals were raising with us at that time was the challenge they were having in managing and dealing with parents and, at times, vexatious parents. Part of the response to that was the development of a charter of behavioural expectation for parents. We expect our parents when they are at school to be civil and respectful of professionals and to engage appropriately with the school, just as we expect schools to have open doors to engage appropriately with parents.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: By way of clarification, does that parental code of conduct extend to digital communication? We know parents are emailing teachers now, requesting homework advice but also—

Mr SCOTT: You are quite right. It is very demanding and it goes to the entirety of the engagement. We will continue to review that over time. I think it is fair, again, when you think of the scale of the system we are dealing with here—more than 1 million people have children in New South Wales public schools—even if a tiny percentage of them behave in an inappropriate way or a vexatious way, even if you are dealing with mental illness in the community as can manifest itself sometimes at a school gate, these will be complex issues for our staff to deal with. So, yes, we need to provide advice and support for schools at times for dealing with some parents, given the scale and enormity of the system. Margaret Baker, whom you referred to there, is a senior lawyer with us. We do need to provide advice and guidance to schools, and we are not the only organisations that deal with this. I have spoken to colleagues in the Catholic and independent sectors and this is an issue that they need to deal with too.

The CHAIR: The Hon. Penny Sharpe is a participating member.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I have been listening very closely. You would know that the upper House has been asking many questions about the decline in the outcomes for New South Wales students. My question is: How is it that it has taken us 20 years to miss the decline?

Mr SCOTT: That is a good question. I think it is fair to say that the kind of debate that occurred in December when the PISA results landed was a national conversation and it is a national issue we have dealt with.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Scott, can I interrupt you for a moment?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I understand that but the reality is that we have had more testing in schools over the last decade than we have ever had before. People like yourselves have been sitting in front of these committees for that entire period. Throughout that entire period issues have been identified and you or your predecessors have been asked about them. Yet, here we are, and now we are in the position where we are saying that we still do not really know. I do not want to go into the root cause because we have had a lot of discussion about that. I do not want to take up time with that. I am asking you: How is our system of monitoring our students and their outcomes failing so badly that we have this result? Obviously, that has been cumulative. When were the warning signs and why has action not been taken earlier?

Mr SCOTT: I would say a number of things. I would say PISA is a piece of evidence. It is not the only piece of evidence.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, but there are also issues with NAPLAN, for example, like science literacy for kids in year 10.

Mr SCOTT: But we can also see that we have seen a steady lift in NAPLAN over time. As I said earlier, we met the Premier's priority target about moving more students into those top two bands, and we have not been able to detect through NESA's assessment any deterioration over time.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So are you saying there is no decline?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

Mr SCOTT: No, no, I am saying—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am trying to clarify. I am not interrupting.

Mr SCOTT: I am saying that it is not necessarily binary. I am saying there are numbers of signals that we are looking at, and PISA is one of those signals but it is not the only signal that we look at.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What have we been doing for the last five years?

Mr SCOTT: Let us look at that. One of the things that PISA looks at is high-level thinking and application of learning. I think concerns that the curriculum was not fit for purpose gave rise to the creation of the curriculum review that Geoff Masters is doing now. That was not triggered after the PISA result. That was triggered 18 months ago now. Our recognition that we needed to provide better support for schools so that they use evidence to drive their decision-making gave rise to the creation of CESE, which is the envy of the rest of the country, and the tailored support program that we have now rolled out to in excess of 5,000 schools looking to—

The CHAIR: Five hundred schools.

Mr SCOTT: —five hundred schools—sorry, Chair—on our way to servicing in excess of 2,000 schools.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What do you think the time frame is to turn it around?

Mr SCOTT: I can tell you—and this goes to the Chair's comments earlier—that there is no conversation that is more central to our work than improving teaching and learning outcomes in schools. We have studied intensively the systems around the world that have seen sustainable lifts held over time. We have looked at what are the elements that are hallmarks of that system: strong investment in leadership and leadership development and also reinforced, as identified by Hattie, as particularly important; strong investment in teacher quality and support of teachers, which goes, centrally, to the tailored support program, and increasing the standards of those coming into the system; and, finally, the accountability—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am aware of the programs you are talking about.

Mr SCOTT: Well, you have asked what we were doing.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I asked you what you think the time frame is to turn it around.

Mr SCOTT: We are assiduously at work now. The global evidence is that you do not bring about sustained lift—if you look at the Canadian system they talk about 20 years of intensive work to see strong, sustained growth over time. I think in New South Wales we have not just started this with the PISA results. One key element has been to identify additional funding and put it in the hands of the schools, then developing the leadership capability, then developing the tailored support, increasing the standard of those who come in and teach—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: So it could be 20 years?

Mr SCOTT: No, I have not said that. What I have said is that it is a strong, sustained, consistent effort over time. As the Chair was referring to, it is not suddenly twisting and lurching from one way to the other. That is where I think the Government has said—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not suggesting that. I am asking—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: No. The meeting will come to order. Mr Scott, the member has asked a clear question. She is trying to get a time frame on when you would expect an improvement in these results.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I have been listening very carefully all morning. You are canvassing a lot of the programs you are already doing. I do not need you to go through those. I have a number of other questions that I need to ask.

The CHAIR: When do you expect to turn it around?

Mr SCOTT: We are doing all that we can to see a lift. We have clear targets that we have identified around improvement in NAPLAN and other outcomes by 2022. That is spelt out in the business plan and the outcomes-based budgeting approach that we have, and that is what we are looking to deliver.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Your previous testimony to this Committee was that it would take six years to uplift. Is that—

Mr SCOTT: What I have said is, if you look around the world, there is some evidence that says—and this I think is the McKinsey work on lifting school improvement—that, yes, systemic application of the key elements of research takes six years to see lift. I do not think we are starting today though, because the key elements that they also go and identify are money for schools to spend locally, investment in leadership, investment in professional development and accountability as well.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: We have had that list, thank you. I have got other questions.

Mr SCOTT: We are not starting today.

The CHAIR: Did you have more questions?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, I do have more questions about kids with disability. The disability strategy and the progress report has a lot of words around inclusion for students and, regardless of disabilities, they should be able to access and fully participate at their local school. Are you able to tell me how many students, parents or other caregivers have not been granted the placements in their local schools that they have requested when trying to enrol in the last year?

Ms HARRISSON: I can take the details of that on notice and come back to you with what is available for us to provide centrally on that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Is that data collected?

Ms HARRISSON: We did survey parents recently and it was around—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Did you survey schools?

Ms HARRISSON: If I can give you the information of the data we do have. We have surveyed parents recently and the feedback we have had from that is that 85 per cent of parents are in their school of first choice for their child.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not the question I am asking. The question I am asking is how many families have been turned away from their local school because they have got a kid with a disability?

Ms HARRISSON: That is information we have to take on notice, but I think it is important, as the Minister has recognised, that parental choice is part of the system on offer—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is not the question I am asking.

Ms HARRISSON: So 85 per cent of parents have reported to us—

The CHAIR: They are taking it on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My understanding is there are around 125,000 students in New South Wales in the public school system who have disabilities, is that about right?

Ms HARRISSON: That is about right.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many of those kids have an NDIS package?

Ms HARRISSON: That is not information I necessarily have available today, but I am happy to go and see what we do have on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How is that tracked? If a child is in a school and they have got an NDIS package, how is that managed within the school?

Ms HARRISSON: Obviously an NDIS package is a package that is given to the young person and their family, not a package that is given to the school and that information would be—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: No, but obviously with support in relation to that young person in that public school there needs to be a discussion about how that is managed.

Ms HARRISSON: There would be discussion in many of our schools supporting families in going through their NDIS planning processes and other things. I am very happy to take on notice how many of our students have an NDIS plan that we are aware of.

Mr SCOTT: I think that would be the case. I think it would be fair to say there would be some NDIS plans that involve the school, others that do not and so we may not—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do you really think it is possible that a young person who is at school—

Mr SCOTT: There are—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I would be quite shocked if they got an NDIS package and the school was not aware of that.

Ms HARRISSON: We are very happy to take on notice the information we do have. But I think it is important for context that we understand the NDIS package is something that is provided to a family for an individual; it is not provided to the school. I guess what I am saying is that is not my information.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I understand that. That is not my question. Are you able to provide me with information about any children or young people who have been denied requested supports or reasonable adjustments in relation to attending mainstream education? You might have to take it on notice. It goes back to whether they have been knocked back from attending a school.

Ms HARRISSON: Very happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many children and young people in out-of-home care are currently in public schools in New South Wales?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, I have some information here. As of 31 December 2018, which is the most recent information I have available, 11,680 school-age children and young people were in out-of-home care and 8,646 of those attended New South Wales public schools.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: With children in out-of-home care, does the department do anything in respect of monitoring them? I am particularly interested in their transition to high school and their transition post-school in respect of the information and support that they get.

Ms HARRISSON: Very happy to provide details on notice. Schools work in partnership with out-of-home care providers and with the young person themselves to provide the best transition through our school system from primary schools to secondary schools. We look carefully at the data we have and we work closely with Family and Community Services to understand the needs and presentation of those children in out-of-home-care. So very happy to provide additional information on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am particularly interested in the number of young people in out-of-home care who have been supported by schools to get extended care post-18 around their educational outcomes.

Ms HARRISSON: Very happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Following up on the response of the department to the child death review, the report into deaths of children 2016-2017. There was quite a number of recommendations that dealt specifically with the response of the education department when it comes to suicide prevention in schools. There was a particular recommendation around rapid interventions in schools where there has been a suicide and where there is a likelihood or possibility of a suicide cluster. Are you able to provide an update on what action has been taken in relation to that recommendation?

Ms HARRISSON: We provide support to schools who are dealing with the tragic circumstances of a young person's suicide. We do that both for the school if it is a member of the school community as well as if it is someone closely associated or a former student. We provide support through our school services directorate, who go in and provide support both to staff and to students around the needs of that community.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Has there been a review into possible suicide clusters across the State and the school response?

Ms HARRISSON: I would like to come back with the details on notice. We have done some work in some communities, which I would like to make sure we provide you the right information on.

Mr SCOTT: We have worked intensively with some communities—additional counselling services on the ground, also working with non-profit support agencies, working with broader community groups. And that has happened on a number of occasions now.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What is the follow-up after that in respect of seeing what the impact is? A terrible thing happens; there is a response. The issue I am particularly concerned about is clusters, where there is not just one suicide in a community, there might be two or three or four in a very short period of time. What evaluation is taking place after those interventions around what is going on there? The child death review was specific about school being an incredibly important place for managing that.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Ms HARRISSON: Schools are at the heart of community and a place where young people are every day. So, unsurprisingly, they become a focus of those recommendations. I think in the broader community context, suicide is a real issue for all of us to grapple with and we work in partnership with Health.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Ms Harrison, thank you. That is a platitude around that issue. There are very specific recommendations. What are the department and schools doing?

Mr SCOTT: As I have said—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am aware of a particular community at the moment that I am not going to name here that I have been told has had three or four suicides—a very small community in western New South Wales—and I am not sure that anything is happening.

Mr SCOTT: I would appreciate you passing that on to us.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I will.

Mr SCOTT: Because I am aware of, I think, at least three other communities where there has been intensive engagement by the department, provision of additional counselling services, working with organisations such as headspace and Beyond Blue, working with community groups and over a sustained period of time. I am happy to do two things: I am happy certainly to hear any information about a community that you think needs additional support that you feel has not been on our radar the way it should be, and I am happy to provide you with more detail on notice about the interventions that the department has been involved in, working with local communities on when we have had a cluster of incidents.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: And any review of that intervention.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Again, there is a lot of input. I am interested in what you are learning.

Mr SCOTT: Sure. Happy to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am not trying to accuse you of not doing anything; I just want to know what works.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman's inquiry into behaviour management have been implemented?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: How many teachers with disability work in New South Wales schools? Are you able to tell us that?

Mr SCOTT: We will have that data. We will take that on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you break that down in respect of other staff as well, so it is not just teachers?

Mr SCOTT: Sure.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: In relation to training of staff around inclusive education, what percentage of staff have been trained in inclusive education?

Ms HARRISSON: We do not have specific information on the number of staff that have been trained in inclusive education to hand. I am very happy to come back to the Committee on notice with the information we do have. As I indicated to the Committee earlier, we have now moved to ensure that all of our principals, as part of their mandatory training and with a regular continuation of that development, will engage in specific disability training. That is part of our commitment under the strategy. We can provide more information to you on inclusive education and come back.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: In response to inclusive education, there were specific recommendations around schools for special purposes and the disability and strategy report says that we want to have less segregated schools. Why have we gone from 113 to 115 schools for specific purposes? Are you able to tell us why that is the case?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar can speak to that.

Mr DIZDAR: Ms Sharpe, one of them was an annex—Norree Annex. Following an external assessment after a well-publicised matter there, recommendations were given to the department. The top recommendation was to establish that as a standalone special provision. I can report to the Committee that we have done that and commenced that this year. It had six classes; it now has nine classes of high-need students. It was attached to Riverstone Public School and under the leadership of Riverstone Public School. It was between an eight to 10 minute drive for the principal to have oversight of that. So we have enacted that external expert

recommendation. So that is one of them. I think, if I have got it right, the other one would be—did you say in the last calendar year?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes, I believe so. In 2019 there were 115 and the information you gave us previously was that there were 113.

Mr DIZDAR: I am thinking, if I have got it right—and I am happy to come back to the Committee—we opened a new School for Specific Purposes [SSP] in south-western Sydney there. The name escapes me—it might be Yandelora—but I will come back to the Committee with that.

Ms HARRISSON: If I can just add? Some 97 per cent of students with disability do learn in mainstream public schools. I think it is important that we recognise that with growing enrolments, and with parents making choices around where they would prefer their children to attend school, that SSPs are likely to remain a feature of the public education system in New South Wales, recognising that we want to make sure that we have as many students as possible in mainstream settings, well supported and provided with a high quality education from well prepared and well trained professionals.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: In the disability strategy you have got 200 scholarships for the Master of Special and Inclusive Education. Are you able to provide a breakdown of how many of those scholarships are going to special education courses as opposed to inclusion education courses?

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to provide that breakdown and to provide the numbers on notice. If my memory serves me correctly we have already identified 238 successful scholarship receivers, for want of a better word. We are exceeding that. I will get a breakdown for you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Teachers need to be trained everywhere—I am not trying to argue either way.

Ms HARRISSON: They do.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: What I am trying to get to is that if we are serious about getting kids with disability into mainstream education as much as possible, teachers need more support and more training. I am concerned that we are still slanting the training opportunities just in the special education end rather than in the inclusive end. That is what I am trying to understand what is happening in that program.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to provide with more detail.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, Ms Downey has more information.

Mr DIZDAR: Just to your earlier question, Yandelora is the one. I just had confirmation it was term 1 2019.

Ms DOWNEY: Can I just add? Ms Sharpe, you rightly called out that our focus needs to be on ensuring that all teachers can accommodate the complexity that is in their school systems. You will also note that a feature of the disability strategy was the roll-out of trauma-informed training. One of the single biggest factors that came out through the disability strategy is having a big impact on ensuring that principals were comfortable to accommodate the wide range of needs in their communities. That has been very much a feature of this first year with a 1,000 additional placements.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you provide how many people have been trained it?

Ms HARRISSON: I believe it is 1,000 this year and there is more to be rolled out. We will come back with the specifics on notice.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Obviously my concern here is that every time we raise an issue the department says it has a program for that and it is rolling something out. I understand we have a very big system in New South Wales with 2,200 schools, as you keep saying. For us to change this around my concern is when will we be certain that every teacher has the training that they need to do what we are asking them to do?

Mr SCOTT: It also goes to our engagement with the higher education sector about this. Our concern is that too few graduates are emerging with the skills that they need, given our strategy suggests that overwhelmingly they will be dealing with students with disability in mainstream settings.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, was the New South Wales department consulted before the Federal Government announced its very recent proposed \$3.4 billion funding announcement for the Catholic and Independent sectors?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Graham is here, and he is our expert on all things Commonwealth-State, but my understanding is this is simply the roll out of the Commonwealth-State funding agreement that was resolved about a year ago. This is an announcement about being operationalised. But when you say it is "new", it was an announcement last week. This was something that was part of the working through of that 80:20 funding split that was a feature of Federal-State politics 18 months ago.

Mr GRAHAM: That is the Choice and Affordability Fund, which the Commonwealth announced. It was not an announcement with the State, no agreement with the State.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of any obligation that that places on the Catholic or Independent sectors to take kids with disability and provide more than 3 per cent of the places in New South Wales schools for kids with disability? Is there any obligation in that funding?

Mr SCOTT: I am not aware of requirements or restrictions that come as a basis of that. I think the full details on how that funding is going to be allocated is yet to be resolved.

Mr GRAHAM: We do not have those accountabilities. The signatories to those would have the accountability.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of any efforts that the New South Wales department or the New South Wales Government has made to try to ensure that the Catholic and Independent sectors do their fair share of educating and providing educational opportunities for kids with disability?

Mr SCOTT: The thing I would say—and Mr Graham may want to add to this—is that additional money, as has been well documented, goes to all education systems, with additional funding coming in for Gonski. Then finally the decisions that are made by the non-government sector on how they spend that money are matters for them. Do you want to add to that?

Mr GRAHAM: A recent memorandum of understanding with the sectors includes an enhanced requirement that particularly systems report back on how they distribute their funding to align with the Commonwealth, which requires them to particularly outline the loading including for disability.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was about to come to the memorandums. The memorandums, as I understand it, will require greater transparency in terms of the student populations and reporting back on the standards. Is that right?

Mr GRAHAM: That is right.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are they going to require that the Catholic and Independent sectors to do their fair share in providing educational opportunities and a requirement to educate a fair share of the kids in this State who have disabilities? Is there any part of the memorandum of understanding that will address this issue given the discrepancy—the 97 per cent.

Mr SCOTT: No, it does not go to that matter.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will address that with the Minister. Mr Scott, by any chance did you come with any numbers about suspension rates or numbers over the past two school years?

Mr SCOTT: I came with a lot of material but I am not sure I have suspension numbers. I can just say that we are reviewing our suspension policy and we are attempting to benchmark schools that have had real success in managing down those suspension rates.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you provide the Committee with the data for the past three years of suspension numbers from a primary and high school basis?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I am happy to do that.

Ms HARRISSON: I have some information available. In primary schools in 2017 there were 14,908 suspensions and in 2018 there were 16,206. It is important to note we had increased student numbers between those two years, which I can provide on notice if you want to understand it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Was that 2017-18 and 2018-19?

Ms HARRISSON: It was in the school year 2017 and the school year 2018.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Calendar year 2017 and 2018?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes. That was for short-term suspensions. The short-term suspensions in secondary schools in 2017 were 36,468 and in 2018 were 36,553.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You do not have 2019 data?

Ms HARRISSON: We do not have 2019 data. That is not available yet. When we have that available I will be happy to provide it to the Committee. That was short suspensions. I also have the long suspension data if you would like it?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, please.

Ms HARRISSON: The number of long-term suspensions in primary schools in 2017 was 4,020 and in 2018 was 3,709. The number of long-term suspensions in secondary schools in 2017 was 13,834 and in 2018 13,527.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Again, you will take on notice the 2019 data on that?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, absolutely.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you provide any break down on those suspension rates based on Aboriginality? Do you have that data?

Ms HARRISSON: We do record that data and I can provide it on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am assuming, based upon data that I have seen in the past, that there will be substantially higher suspension rates for kids who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Ms HARRISSON: That is correct, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What, if any, policy changes have you initiated to get those numbers down to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids are not being suspended at such high rates?

Ms HARRISSON: This is one of the other areas of focus in our review of the suspension policy and the way it is implemented. We have a Premier's priority to increase the number of Aboriginal students who achieve the HSC. What is very clear to us is that we need to address the suspension issue as part of that to ensure that we are maintaining the engagement of Aboriginal students in education for longer and that we are keeping them in school and keeping them committed to their education. It is a core part of our work to deliver that Premier's priority. I am very happy to provide you with some more information on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you. When you provide that data could you also provide the data on stages? I think suspensions go through stage one and stage two.

Ms HARRISSON: You mean short and long?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes.

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, I can provide a break down by short and long.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In other budget estimates hearings last year we heard about the significant number of kids who are in residential care in what is now the Communities and Justice cluster. One of the most disturbing features of that evidence was that the median time for kids in residential care missing school was some six to nine months a year. What are you doing, or have you done anything, to work with Communities and Justice to ensure that kids in residential care are dealt with as a special cohort and actually go to school?

Ms HARRISSON: We have projects underway on exactly this issue that I would very much like to provide the detail on notice. We meet and discuss the cases regularly with Communities and Justice. I am very happy to provide more information on those projects. We have data-sharing protocols in place so we are able to identify those students and we are at work on making sure those students are engaged in their education.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you give us the numbers in the response?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: I have a question for Ms Egan. Why did the recent CESE reports looking at wellbeing programs at Warwick Farm and Liverpool West public schools make fairly frequent reference to improved educational outcomes but not provide any supporting data on what has happened on the academic front there?

Ms EGAN: They were closely monitored with regard to the wellbeing and academic. We know schooling is a mixture of both and we value both. There was a significant process for those studies to provide our

schools with two case studies linked to the wellbeing programs, the partnerships they have had with their local communities and, indeed, the engagement they have had with school services and CESE. They were limited in that regard but, as you would be aware, there are other case studies that provide academic and other examples.

The CHAIR: In its research does CESE regard wellbeing programs as a means to a bigger end—that is, academic growth for the students?

Ms EGAN: I think they work in partnership. As all educators would understand, schooling is more than the academic and it is more than wellbeing. Schooling is about learning and both of those interchanging when we think about student engagement, student learning and student growth.

The CHAIR: Will future research projects looking at wellbeing programs in schools contain some hard data on academic outcomes that resulted from these initiatives?

Ms EGAN: Yes, we can do that. I would be happy to look into that.

The CHAIR: I think those other reports would have benefitted—

Mr SCOTT: I can answer that. I must say, as Ms Egan said, we do see it as a whole and not a false dichotomy. We think kids who feel safe, who are engaged, who are thriving at school are more likely to learn. We want to make sure that we are improving teaching and learning outcomes. So we would not be going and doing best practice reviews of schools that have a great wellbeing program whose academic results are not achieving. We want to find the sweet spot and we are doing that. I think those school had good results—

The CHAIR: Mr Scott, maybe you can answer. Why did the Warwick Farm and Liverpool West reports not contain any academic data. If what you are saying is true, would it not logically follow that you would have that material in the research?

Mr SCOTT: Except, as I heard Ms Egan point out, there is an acknowledgement—and it may have been what you said, Chair—that these schools had achieved those results. What we were really focusing on in those reports was: What are the wellbeing strategies that are working at those schools? There are many, many other reports that we do, like Blue Haven and others in recent times, where we look at what they have done to specifically receive an academic boost. I do not think it is a false dichotomy. It might well be that the report would have been strengthened by some paragraphs that talked about the lift of academic outcomes. That is perfectly—

The CHAIR: That is what I am saying. When I read constant references to positive educational outcomes I wanted to see some data. Is it asking too much for CESE to produce data?

Ms EGAN: Not at all. But I think any school that is chosen has their data looked at before they are chosen in consultation with their school and looking at the Scout data you are familiar with to recognise what other aspects—

The CHAIR: Yes, but these are public reports and readers obviously do not have access to the Scout data.

Mr SCOTT: I accept that.

The CHAIR: I am just saying that if you could include it, it would help to educate poor old MPs like me and others. I will turn to NESAs. I congratulate Mr Martin on his appointment and note that you also have a new chairman.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Be careful what you ask for.

The CHAIR: The Auditor-General's report struck me as being as scathing of NESAs as any report could be on an organisation in education. What are you doing to fix up the mess?

Mr MARTIN: I might differ in the opinion that it was a completely scathing recommendation. I think it identified some issues that we need to repair. There were three main thrusts of the Auditor-General's report. One of them was in relation to the training of school principals and teachers in the accreditation process. A second was in relation to streamlining the identification process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers [HALTs]. The third was the capacity of NESAs to audit across teachers who reach the proficient or minimum standard. We had a couple of years where we had an IT system that simply did not work. Over the course of NESAs' 20 years—it was previously the Institute of Teachers—we were able to audit across the top of those proficient teacher reports. We had two years where we were unable to. We are back doing that now. All three of the major recommendations of the audit report are underway now.

The CHAIR: How does an organisation like NESAs not have a functioning IT system for two years?

Mr MARTIN: It did have a functioning IT system, but it was not functioning in all of the ways that it needed to for all of the parts that NESAs is responsible for.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That sounds like a non-functioning or partially-functioning IT system.

Mr MARTIN: Let us call it partially functioning then. The key issue though was that we accredited 60,000 teachers at the beginning of 2018 for the very first time. The priority for that accreditation process was making sure that they had Working With Children Check clearances. We put all of our priority in the IT system into the assessment and gathering of qualifications and Working With Children Check clearances for those teachers who were accredited over that period. The other part of the system, which is the 4,000 to 6,000 teachers who achieved accreditation at proficient in that same period, was a priority. It still occurred at the school levels, and data was gathered, but our capacity to audit over the top of that was limited. We have now repaired that and we are engaged in it.

The CHAIR: How quickly do you think you can fix up the deficiencies identified by the Auditor-General?

Mr MARTIN: In the first case, with the training, it is already underway. We have been training department schools, independent schools and Catholic schools extensively all of last year as a subsequent issue after the Auditor-General's report and after the Committee hearings here. The Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers policy, I gave a commitment at *The Sydney Morning Herald* forum a week ago that we would have a new policy out by the end of this year.

The CHAIR: What will that achieve?

Mr MARTIN: That will achieve a streamlined approach to identifying the best teachers so that they put their hand up for identification, they get recognised more quickly and they get placed in schools where they are needed most.

The CHAIR: What numbers can we get out of that? I have to say that in our parliamentary inquiry it was very disappointing to see that teachers have to pay so much, it takes so long and the numbers are so paltry in terms of giving them that recognition, support and enhanced roles in the schools.

Mr MARTIN: I think that any external observation would come to similar conclusions. It is a reasonably new process—it is new across the country. At one point we had higher numbers than any other State or Territory. Part of the issue was that, as I said, our most experienced teachers were not accredited until 2018-19. So, the ones who were more likely to put their hands up for those highly accomplished lead teacher positions were not part of the system until they were mandatorily brought in at that period. The second thing, of course, is that I think that the process was convoluted and I think that has been found to be the case by both the Auditor-General and in previous analyses by NESAs. We are simplifying that in consultation with the stakeholders now. So we need to identify, we need to promote and we need to bring them through as quickly as possible.

The CHAIR: I turn to a curriculum matter. In the secondary history syllabus, how was the course on the pro-democracy movement in Burma established? How many schools are now teaching that course? Has it faded away in light of the allegations of genocide against Aung San Suu Kyi?

Mr MARTIN: I will have to take all of those questions on notice and report back to you.

The CHAIR: I consider it to be one of the fads that somehow gets embedded, as the Minister has described. We will move on to the Hon. Mark Banasiak.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Mr Scott, are you aware that in a recent EPAC investigation, a member of EPAC allegedly contacted an employee's GP and falsely portrayed himself as a doctor on behalf of the department to procure confidential information about the employee's mental health diagnosis and treatment? If you are aware, can you advise the Committee as to what has happened with that employee?

Mr SCOTT: I am not aware that. I would appreciate you passing on any information that you have.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will provide some details offline afterwards.

Mr SCOTT: I would want to check. I need to check that out, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That is why I used the term "alleged".

Mr SCOTT: Yes, thank you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Will you provide the Committee with an update on the Tedeschi report and the department's progress in fulfilling all the report's recommendations, given that, I believe, the Government said that it would support all of them? I am particularly interested in the issue of EPAC denying workers access to stored documentation to which they are legally entitled pertaining to a complaint, as well as the funding of EPAC, which is also a big focus, obviously.

Mr SCOTT: Sure. Ms Harrison can give you an update on that.

Ms HARRISSON: Certainly. Sixty recommendations were made as a result of the review and all of them were accepted or accepted in principle. The implementation of the recommendations is on track to be delivered by mid this year, with the exception of the procurement of an enhanced case management system, which will, because of the nature of the procurement, take slightly longer. An additional \$2.7 million was provided to EPAC to employ additional staff. Seventeen positions were created to meet the recommendations of the EPAC review, including 13 additional investigator positions. EPAC is now funded for 48 investigator full-time equivalent positions who undertake preliminary investigations and focus on investigative work. In terms of the specifics you have asked about, I can take the details on notice around those recommendations. I am very happy to come back to you with further information.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, sure. That would be appreciated. Has the policy on medical retirements changed? I have received concerns about people who are on workers compensation for psychological injury being directed by a director to attend an independent medical assessment and feeling pressured to accept medical retirement, rather than being transitioned back into the workforce in some capacity.

Mr SCOTT: Let me speak, in a sense, generally to this. Ms Harrison and Ms O'Brien may want to add further to it. It is a very complicated issue of management for us, particularly when it pertains to mental health issues. Of course, our preference is for people to be able to return to the workforce, to transition back in. We invest a lot in back-to-work transition strategies and do our very best to support that. We do have some staff who have been on leave for protracted periods of time. We run a student-centred system. Particularly if these people are teachers, we are keen for them to be back teaching and flourishing in that environment so that kids can flourish under their care. If they have been out of school for a considerable period of time, we know, just through broader work health and safety research, that the longer people are away from work, the less likely it is that they return to work. So there will be occasions when we ask for an independent medical assessment to be done of someone who is on leave for a period of time. They might be upset by that but we are operating under important legal provisions that exist and on protocols on case management. So, fundamentally, that has not changed.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you ask or do you direct?

Mr SCOTT: There will be times—many a time we will say, "Well, we need to get an independent assessment," and someone will be happy with that. There will be times; however, when someone will not want a medical assessment done and we are entitled, under our legislative provisions or under the operations of the Act, to say, "No, no, we need an independent medical assessment done". So someone might be upset by that but that is an important provision, as I am sure you would understand, particularly in cases that have been running for a long period of time.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can you provide data on notice about the numbers of psychologically injured employees who have been medically retired in the last three years, just so we can get some time to get around the numbers?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we can do that and Ms O'Brien can add a bit.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Banasiak, do you mean those who have been on workers compensation?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I mean the number of employees over the last three years who have been on workers compensation who have then been medically retired.

Ms O'BRIEN: Medical retirement decisions are based around medical evidence. It is not based around negotiation and agreement with the employee. If there is medical evidence provided—if it is for a non work-related health condition or a work-related health condition—which indicates that the person is unable to return to their substantive position in the foreseeable future and an extended period of time has elapsed, then there is an independent assessment that is undertaken in accordance with the government guidelines.

Where that comes back as an assessment to say that there is no capacity for them to return, the department then looks to see whether there is any alternative—other redeployment opportunities inside the department that

meet the medical restrictions for that person. If there is nothing that is available, then a recommendation is provided to the employee with notice to advise that we intend to medically retire them. They are given, at that stage, an opportunity to provide additional contrary medical evidence, which may change that decision before it is finalised. If not, then, of course, a decision will be formally made.

During that process an independent medical assessment also has an appeal provision. So the employee gets a copy of that medical report and they are able to apply for an appeal to a medical panel to have that decision reviewed as well. So there are a significant number of checks and balances in this process. If they are on workers compensation, there is also the Workers Compensation Commission and the Workers Compensation Independent Review Office, which are also there to protect the protocols and assessments for people.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given that, it would be good to get a breakdown of the comparative numbers of those on workers compensation and those who are not, including the median time between notification of illness and injury and actual retirement.

Ms O'BRIEN: Sure, absolutely.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: With the indulgence of the Chair, can you provide, on notice, a breakdown of how many people provided more information to, essentially, appeal the decision or proposed decision to medically retire, and how many people have had the decision or proposed decision successfully overturned? What percentage of those occurred?

Ms O'BRIEN: I am not sure that that data is collected specifically. There is not a large number of cases so we may be able to have a look at that manually.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Whatever you can find would be great.

The CHAIR: That completes the round of questioning. I propose we take a convenience break until 3.15 p.m. The hearing will conclude at 4.20 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We recommence, and the secretary has indicated he has a matter of clarification.

Mr SCOTT: On the non-government school funding provisions, we were talking about a Choice and Affordability Fund. There is \$1.2 billion in Commonwealth money around the Choice and Affordability Fund. The \$3.4 billion is for the direct measurement of income changes. As we indicated, these were all identified earlier. They are Commonwealth funds; they are separate to the National School Reform Agreement. The overriding principle of the answer applied but I just wanted to put those numbers correctly on the record.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge is not here; he is over at the other table. We will wait for him to come back and go to the Labor Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, I want to follow up on the suspensions. If we can get them via short-term, long-term, early stage one, stage one and stage two.

Ms HARRISSON: Is that based on year groups you are trying to get to?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is right.

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, very happy to provide that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, have I forgotten a stage? Early stage one—

Mr SCOTT: Stage three.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Stage three, yes. All of the stages in primary and secondary.

Ms HARRISSON: All of the stages, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to provide us with a breakdown of which of those students had a disability as well?

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to go and look at what is available on that and provide whatever is available.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you could give us by disability by the different year stages as well that would be useful.

Ms HARRISSON: If that is available, yes, I am happy to provide it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I come back to the question of out-of-area enrolment figures. Perhaps this is for you, Mr Dizdar. What information is collected centrally on out-of-area enrolment figures?

Mr DIZDAR: We do not collect them centrally; it is at a school level, school by school. We do have visibility, school by school, as I was saying earlier about the proportion of students that are in area and out of area. We are able to show that to the principal and school community. We have got it at a school-by-school level. Unless Mr Manning wants to correct me, that is my understanding—that we do not have that centrally.

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you explain to me, you say "We can show that to principals at a school level" but it is not centralised? What does that mean?

Mr DIZDAR: We can sit down with every school principal and show them for their school what the boundary is, the drawing areas which they will know on a map. We can give them the percentage of students that are in area and out of area for their school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What is the data that feeds that?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How can you say we give them that data? That implies that you have the data and you are sharing it with them.

Mr DIZDAR: What I am trying to indicate is that we keep that school by school; we do not have it in an amalgamated format.

Mr SCOTT: Aggregated format. We have school by school in- and out-of-area enrolment data.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am going to come back and I will lodge some supplementary questions on what it is that you are keeping and how you are actually monitoring that in respect of an area.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Both Mr Dizdar and Mr Scott made the point that this is enforcement of an older policy regarding out-of-area enrolment. Are there any specific allowances or what are the grounds that you are allowed to apply for an out-of-area enrolment?

Mr DIZDAR: What I indicated is that it was a revision of the policy; it was not a new policy. Let me bring up the out-of-area criteria that we made sure we firmed up in the revision. I indicated earlier that if we gave preference for out of area the top preference would be for siblings already enrolled in the school. We had lots of feedback, lots of representations from families about the complexities that that causes for families with travelling arrangements. The second factor is proximity or access to the school. We privileged the sibling factor, now I am reading out the other factors. Proximity or access to the school, access to single-sex education or to co-education, safety and supervision of the student before and after school, availability of subjects or combination of subjects at the school—which really comes into play in a secondary sense—are the factors we have called out.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is there provision for any additional factors?

Mr DIZDAR: We also say in the revised policy, as we did in the original policy of 1997, that outside of that, because we cannot be exhaustive, there will be a range of situations that come into play. There will be extenuating circumstances that the principal may want to consider in an out-of-area application. The principal will run that by their Director, Educational Leadership because they may want to undertake that enrolment. You might say to me; What is an accepted extenuating circumstance? I will give you an example. We at times have had families that are under the protective provision of the police where the family has got to have their identity suppressed because of family situations. We have enrolled them in a school that is totally out of area to where they normally would be.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What about educational pedagogy? What happens if a parent decides that they want to go to a different public school to allow that?

Mr DIZDAR: One of the criteria that I read out was the availability of subjects and offerings. I said that really comes into play around high school. That can be a representation that a family may want to make about why they want their child at a particular high school, around the combination of subjects, which really comes into play in stage five and stage six, years 9 and 10 with electives, and years 11 and 12 with the preliminary and HSC course.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I move on now to demountables. Are you able to tell me how many demountables you have in reserve?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning is the expert on demountables.

Mr MANNING: At the moment we have got nearly 700 demountables either in storage or undergoing refurbishment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me an exact figure?

Mr MANNING: Six hundred and eighty-five.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Either being refurbished or being stored in the Hunter?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me how many are in storage?

Mr MANNING: No, I cannot. I can tell you there are 685 that are either in storage or undergoing refurbishment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide that for me on notice?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I thought it was good to have that number off the top; I was impressed by that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How is the contract going? There is a contract for a refurbishment, is that right?

Mr MANNING: Yes, there are several areas where we are going to get the refurbishment. Yes, we have contracts for that refurbishment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: One of the contracts was up this year?

Mr MANNING: Yes, and we were looking at where we go with that contract. I think we have an option to renew it for a further year before we necessarily go back out to market to look at what other providers there are out there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Was that for refurbishment and maintenance?

Mr MANNING: Yes, I think so.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But the construction is still done in the prisons?

Mr MANNING: Again, we have a mix. We have providers outside of Justice that provide us with new builds. Justice tends to be the refurbishments rather than new builds.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are going to renew that refurbishment contract for a year?

Mr MANNING: I think we have the ability to renew it for a further year. I am waiting for some advice from my procurement team as to exactly what the best course of action is next.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When do you anticipate releasing that advice?

Mr MANNING: I hope to have it in a matter of weeks.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I come back to the question of air conditioning. That was you again, Mr Manning, is that right?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You said that you were going to be installing it as quickly as possible. Are you able to tell me how many applications you have received for round two? You can provide that on notice. That is fine.

Mr MANNING: Yes. I have not got that here.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have not announced the successful round yet, have you?

Mr MANNING: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The second round is still open?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the first round that have been installed, are you able to provide on notice a list of the schools that were about 30 degrees and the schools that were below 30 degrees?

Mr MANNING: Any school above 30 degrees is already automatically included in the program. The further rounds of funding were only about those that were over 30 degrees. I can provide you with a breakdown of all the schools that have received infrastructure as part of that and where they fit in—the above-30 or below-30 category.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If it has been installed and they are above 30 or if it has been installed and they are below 30?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Does the program give any consideration for low temperatures—under-5 degrees under-10 degrees, those southern parts of the State?

Mr MANNING: You mean in terms of heating?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

Mr MANNING: It is predominantly aimed at the hotter parts. In terms of the below 30 degrees, no, I do not believe there is a critical point in terms of what temperature are you experiencing. We recognise that by installing the system we are installing—it is heating as well as cooling. We look to spread that across those two. I am not aware there is any particular cut-off point for us. I will come back and provide that on notice.

Mr SCOTT: It is an air-cooling scheme. So even though it does have the capacity for heating and cooling, the prioritisation has been around taking the extreme heat temperature into account.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There is no separate scheme for heating schools such as Tumut?

Mr SCOTT: There is heating in Tumut. I think part of the challenge you find is the feeling, "Was there air cooling?" There are heating provisions in Cooler Classrooms.

Mr MANNING: We often find that some of the hottest and driest parts of the State also can become the coldest parts of the State too. It is automatic if you are above 30 degrees, regardless of how cold you might get, and then the further round of funding is really up to schools to apply. We work our way through those.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I asked you on notice how many—

Mr MANNING: Yes. At the moment, it is 1,250 learning spaces as at end of January 2020 and 93 libraries that have received equipment. I will have to provide the breakdown of that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are the 1,250 classrooms already installed?

Mr MANNING: Yes, 385 of the 900 schools have already received all their equipment that we identified at the beginning.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are there any unflued heaters left in New South Wales schools?

Mr MANNING: Yes, there are.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you provide a list on notice of where they are? A total number would be useful as well.

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And when they will be removed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is there a program for their removal?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The ones that pump the carbon dioxide back in and make the whole classroom drowsy.

Mr MANNING: Part of the Cooler Classrooms Program where they have unflued heaters, we are removing those heaters as part of that program because it is actually heating and cooling the system provides.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you prioritising the unflued heaters for replacement through the Cooler Classrooms?

Mr MANNING: No, as a consequence of the Cooler Classrooms Program they no longer require unflued heaters.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Where they cross over?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The question was: Is there a program to get rid of unflued heaters?

Mr MANNING: That is the only program we have at the moment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, please direct me to the appropriate place. I want to ask about the return-to-work policy for immunosuppressed teachers. What happens with a teacher who is immunosuppressed from having cancer treatment or something else that caused their immune system to be suppressed?

Ms O'BRIEN: The department has a return-to-work program, or a recovery-at-work program, for work-related and non-work-related health conditions. That would cover the situation you have explained. For anybody with a non-work-related health condition that requires additional workplace adjustment or recovery at work program, they merely refer that matter into the health and safety directorate. They are established under what we call a care claim. There is a return-to-work program that is negotiated between them and their workplace to support them, particularly in a situation where they are going through progressive treatments. That plan might be closed off for a little while and then if treatment were to recommence or they needed some additional assistance it would merely be reopened and reactivated, depending on the individual circumstances.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am happy for you to take this question on notice. Can you provide how that works in with the "All Roles Flex" policy of the Government that is being implemented? What kind of flexible options are you looking at for these people to return to work? It might not be appropriate for a teacher who is immunosuppressed to be operating in a classroom, so are we looking at providing them opportunities within the department elsewhere?

Ms O'BRIEN: I can advise that these situations occur regularly in all sorts of return-to-work management programs. If for any reason—it may even be somebody who is pregnant and there is an outbreak of whooping cough is another equally relevant example. We have a temporary placement program inside the department so we can temporarily, for a designated period, place somebody in an alternative position pending their recovery for them to be able to transition back to their substantive position. That is an active program that is in place every day within the department which is aligned and based on suitability and obviously medical evidence.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How would an individual teacher access that program?

Ms O'BRIEN: Again, any individual teacher who has any health condition that requires adjustment, workplace adjustment, just needs to notify us in the health and safety directorate and they will be assigned an injury management adviser, who will work with them and work through those processes between them and their doctor. The only thing that we ask for under our policy for non-work-related health conditions is that they give us consent to talk to their treating medical practitioners, of course, so that we can ensure their health and wellbeing and make sure that the decisions and offerings that we have provided are commensurate with their medical restrictions.

If they do not agree to allow us to work with their treating doctors, and they are unfit for work then we have to unfortunately ask them to use their personal leave until we can get a clearance from their doctor. But that does not happen often. Most times people work with us and we get some really good outcomes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I have one more question for you on an issue with which you are familiar—that is, school swimming teachers. There was a particular incident on the North Shore in the northern suburbs of Sydney where they did not have access to local pools and therefore they could not work the six hours. They were working five hours and, as a result, they would turn into casual employees rather than permanent employees. Where is that up to?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that on notice and come back to you on that, I think.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you provide whatever the latest information is and the reason that they were moved on to casual rather than retaining their permanent position?

Mr SCOTT: I am happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Riordan, I just want to square the circle. In the last round I asked about the pay and equity issue. I understand there was a resolution of that. Could you inform us of what the outcome was?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes, I can. As I said last time, that was an issue to be discussed as part of the award negotiations with the teachers during the latter part of last year. Those negotiations concluded in December of last year and we have changed the transitional arrangements so that all pre-2016 teachers will move on to standards based pay from 1 July 2020.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it correct to say that the cost of that measure was actually discounted from the 2.5 per cent under the wages policy?

Mr RIORDAN: No, that is not correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So it was over and above the 2.5?

Mr RIORDAN: It was part of the transition process standards based pay.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you clarify it? The wages policy is clear: It is either incorporated within the 2.5 or the additional costs—it is an employer related cost, is it not?

Mr RIORDAN: It is.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And so it was either incorporated in the 2.5 or above it. Which was it?

Mr RIORDAN: It is a cost that we have brought forward to resolve the issues. So over time everyone would have moved onto standards based pay. That is the way that transition process was designed. We have brought forward everyone moving to that. So it is an additional cost this calendar year that would have been borne anyway in the future.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How far forward has it been brought?

Mr RIORDAN: It depends on where people were in terms of their progression. So we have quite a few temporary employees. As you would appreciate, their incremental progression is based on the number of teaching days they perform. If they do 50 days in one year, they get 50 days worth. If they do 100 days next year, that is 150. Then 202 days they get one year of increment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Did that require an exemption from the wages policy?

Mr RIORDAN: It was approved by ERC as part of the negotiating parameters agreed in negotiations for the new teachers award.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So the Wages Policy Taskforce ticked it off?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am not sure who to direct this question to—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is good, by the way.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask about split classes.

Mr SCOTT: What do you mean by split classes?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Rather than engaging a casual, the classes are combined into a single class under one teacher.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Composite?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No.

Mr SCOTT: It is not quite a composite.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is not a composite. It is a practice where, rather than engage a casual in the absence of the classroom teacher, the classes are split and some of the students are allocated to one class and some of the students are allocated to another so the number of students in the classes increase. Are you aware of this practice?

Mr DIZDAR: We encourage the hiring of casual and temporary teachers as far as possible to cover classes. Sometimes that is not feasible; it is not possible. Our employee may have given us late notice that they are sick and we cannot find a casual. Some parts of the State are hard to staff in terms of casual workforce as well. So from time to time, despite the best efforts of the school, there might not be a replacement available. Our duty

of care and our obligations still hold for the young people in front of us. If that is the scenario that you are looking at, we would then ask that that class be shared.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there a policy around that?

Mr DIZDAR: No, it is just operationally the principal would look at maintaining the education provision for those kids. If you are across any other examples I am happy to hear from you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Just to clarify, there is no policy around the circumstances in which it is permissible for a split class arrangement to be put in place?

Mr DIZDAR: Not that I am aware of.

Mr SCOTT: Can I say that the decision-making around class allocations and class sizes and how it actually operates in the schools generally lies with the school principal. The school principal is the one who is making the decisions to run a year four at one size and a year five at one size and even around the deployment of casuals.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This is not for a whole year; this is—

Mr SCOTT: No, no, no. I am just saying that even for a whole year principals are making decisions as to how big certain classes will be, what elective options will be on offer and what elective lines will look like. They are decisions that are made locally. How a school deals with a circumstance where they may not have a casual on a day for the reasons that Mr Dizdar identified is not determined by broad department policy. That is just a principal managing the school operation on the day.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I take it from your answer that you actually do not track this? It sounds like you are not particularly aware of this practice and how frequently it occurs in classes. Is that fair to say?

Mr DIZDAR: Like we indicated, it is an operational decision that the principal and the leadership team put in place as needed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Clearly it can be used as a cost-saving measure. If you split the class you do not incur the additional cost of engaging a casual. My concern—

Mr SCOTT: I must say that in my encounters at schools the conversation is not really about, "Gee, casuals are expensive. I'm looking forward to pocketing money by not employing them." The greater debate is where we are going to get good casuals from. One of the reasons there is a challenge around casuals is that through Gonski money schools have put on staff. People who were casual five years ago are now working permanently in our schools five days a week. I think it is a little bit curious to say—and I would really like examples—that principals are deciding to not employ casuals because they think it is better to keep that money in their bank account. That is not what we are hearing. But if you have examples we would be happy to see them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just establish that there is no central mechanism for the department to track this practice in schools? Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: We would receive feedback from schools through DELs if they are having ongoing difficulties in procuring casuals. Our human resources department has details around that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is not the question I asked. I asked whether there is a system in place for the department to track this practice. I am assuming that the answer is that there is not.

Mr SCOTT: No, there is not. Those decisions are made locally, like the hundreds of decisions that are made locally every week by school principals.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How do you guarantee that the class sizes that are mandated are being adhered to? At what point does a practice like this impact in a way as to see a school not meeting its obligations for class sizes at the mandated level?

Mr DIZDAR: Mr D'Adam, when a principal and leadership team are splitting that class because they cannot find a casual, it is remiss to think that the classes that these students are going into are at the class size capacity—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What about for professional development? It might occur in that circumstance as well.

Mr DIZDAR: Let me just finish there to help the Committee. That is another operational aspect that they will take into account. In my teaching career I was able to support colleagues. I worked at a south-western Sydney school where from time to time it was challenging to find a casual teacher. When I was teaching year nine geography and our colleague was away and there was no casual available, we were able to split that class across three classes because year nine geography was timetabled on at the same time and my colleagues and I were able to pick up five to seven students each. We were able to continue their education. That was not—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Does that impact on student learning?

Mr DIZDAR: I welcomed having those students in front of me. I welcomed the fact that we were able to continue their geography education because I was very passionate about geography, like my colleagues were. I was glad to be able to continue to foster that development and I was respectful of the leadership because they had done their darnedest to get a casual for the day and were unable to. In being unable to, within our class size policy, we were all able to professionally support each other. That does happen from time to time.

Mr SCOTT: It is a good example of where principals juggle. The advantages in Mr Dizdar's circumstance were that he would know those students and those students would know him. That is how they manage it in the moment. If you have examples of schools that have highly qualified and valuable casual teachers knocking on the door but not being employed because schools want to keep their money in their bank accounts, please let us know. But that is not what we hear and understand. The issue has been—and we have talked about this in this Committee in the past—the continued challenge of finding good, high quality casuals who are available. One of the reasons that is a challenge is that so many of the people who were once teaching casually now have permanent jobs or full-time jobs working in our schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I will move on to another issue. Is there a mechanism for tracking the professional learning hours that teachers take? Do you have some record to see how many hours each teacher is being afforded in terms of professional learning opportunities in schools?

Ms HARRISSON: All teachers are required to continue their professional development in line with maintaining their accreditation. Mr Martin can provide further information on those requirements.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am not interested in the requirements. I am interested in asking what mechanism the department has in terms of the allocation of professional learning time in schools.

Ms HARRISSON: All professional learning that is accredited with NESAs and delivered through the department, whether centrally or through schools, is administered through a system called MyPL. Through that system we can get some high level information about what types of professional development are being engaged in. We do not have access to that information at a teacher level necessarily, but I am happy to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Let me put it this way: Is the department in possession of information to ascertain where the spread of professional learning opportunities between the various grades of staff is? I am trying to get to the question of whether professional learning hours are actually distributed fairly across the staff in schools. Is there information available to the department to make an assessment about whether there is a misallocation of professional learning opportunities in schools?

Ms HARRISSON: The first thing I would like to comment on in relation to your question is that we provide additional release time for professional learning for early career teachers, in recognition of exactly the issue that you are raising, around making sure that professional development is provided to those teachers at points of need. All teachers—as I have said—are required to at least meet minimum requirements for professional development to maintain their accreditation. We are confident that all teachers are able to do that through their schools and through the professional development that is offered by the department. I am very happy to take on notice your question and provide further information around the professional development that is—

Mr SCOTT: In addition, of course, there are five pupil-free days that are set aside for professional development for all of our teaching and non-teaching staff.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That goes to another point that I wanted to query about whether you have the capacity to assess the amount of professional learning that is done outside of the school context or inside—the professional learning that is delivered external to the school and the professional learning that is delivered internally in the school by, presumably, the school leadership. Do you have information on that that you could take on notice?

Ms HARRISSON: Just to clarify, professional development that is offered inside a school may also be supplemented by additional capacity provided by the department through our tailored support for our school

services staff, Directors, Educational Leadership and others. It would be wrong to suggest that inside a school is just to that school. But what we do know, and what the research tells us, is that the best professional development happens as close to students as possible in school context, focused around the issues that that school context is grappling with and that those teachers are dealing with in the moment—not separate from the reality. That is why we have the Quality Assurance Framework in place for the professional development we provide as a department. That is why we have that aligned to the self-accredited courses that we provide in the department. That is why we have been in the process of reviewing our professional development policy to make sure that we are delivering impactful professional development for our workforce.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have limited time. I want to ask one more question around instructional leaders. Are instructional leaders required to be highly accomplished and leader teachers? Is that a prerequisite for instructional leadership?

Ms HARRISSON: We do not currently have prerequisites for instrumental leadership around being highly accomplished and leader teachers.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So your instructional leaders do not need to be highly accomplished?

Ms HARRISSON: The instructional leadership program has been running for a number of years and has crossed over the introduction of those high levels of accreditation. We have been encouraging our instructional leaders to undertake the higher levels of accreditation and, wherever possible, we are supporting staff in schools who are in those instructional leadership type roles—whether they be an instructional leadership leader in literacy and numeracy or providing support to a number of teachers from outside the school gate to acquire those levels of accreditation. Mr Dizdar can provide some more information on that work.

Mr DIZDAR: Ms Harrison has captured it fantastically.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I come back to the suspension data. You are giving it to us by year stage. Can you also provide a gender breakdown of those?

Ms HARRISSON: Certainly.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Harrison, I am sorry to keep returning to the suspension data but we may as well get a comprehensive chunk of data from you. The other issue that has been raised with me about my inadequate questioning earlier was that I did not ask whether we could have reasons identified—to the extent that the reasons are captured in the data for the suspensions—and potentially also the regions if you have it by regional breakdown.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to look at what we can provide on both of those issues on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you. Mr Murphy, I know the Chair asked you some questions about Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher programs. Or perhaps this question is for you, Mr Manning?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Martin.

Mr MARTIN: It is probably me.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, Mr Martin.

Mr SCOTT: Over there somewhere—NESA.

The CHAIR: Mr Murphy is from NESA too.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Martin and Mr Murphy are both from NESA. Is that right?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Mr Murphy has not answered a question yet.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will ask you, Mr Murphy, and you might refer it on to Mr Martin. Do you have the number of teachers who were accredited as highly accomplished teachers in the last year and the number of teachers who were accredited as lead teachers in the last year?

Mr MARTIN: Yes. I do not have them in front of me but I will get them to you as soon as possible.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I went onto the website earlier. Previously it published lists of them but I could not find the lists. They seem to have gone.

Mr MARTIN: Yes, I will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is there a reason?

Mr MARTIN: No, I am not sure that there is any particular reason why we have taken the names off the list. We are trying to celebrate them.

The CHAIR: The IT system?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It might be the IT system. Can you give us the numbers going back? I think the Committee was given some numbers during the hearing last year, but if you could give us the last few years—

Mr MARTIN: I can give you the totals and all the breakdowns over years.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it your understanding that more teachers have been accredited as either highly accomplished or lead teachers?

Mr MARTIN: More at highly accomplished or more at lead? Sorry, I am not quite sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: More at either level. Previously the number of people in any given year could have fitted into a mini cab.

Mr MARTIN: No, there are some hundreds. As I said, it is a new scheme nationally. It is not as if there is—it is a new scheme right across the country and New South Wales had the highest number. We have more applications for highly accomplished than we do for lead, and we are in the process of trying to expedite the ones that are in the application process and give them as much support as possible. So it is an increasing number but it does not meet any level of high expectations or it could be criticised for being low.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Teachers who have spoken with my office about it say that it requires a large amount of paperwork and significant effort but they get almost no return from having accreditation as either highly accomplished or lead teacher. It is not clear what the educative role is and other training options exist that will provide them with significantly increased remuneration benefits. Are you aware of those critiques?

Mr MARTIN: Yes, of course I am aware of those critiques. Teachers across all three sectors that receive highly accomplished or lead teacher status are eligible for higher remuneration. That is the case, I think, in government, Catholic and independent schools. I am not sure what other qualifications are available that would increase a teacher's pay. I would be interested to know that. There are not enough teachers—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Moving towards head teacher or those kind of—

Mr MARTIN: Yes, okay. I would not have called that a qualification.

Mr SCOTT: Promotions.

Mr MARTIN: Yes, the promotions pathway is a more common pathway. The Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers process was an attempt to try to get people to stay in the classroom while, obviously, being recognised. As I said earlier, we are in the process of simplifying. It is largely paper-based, apart from the two days of observations that come from outside. The motivation for people applying in the first five or six years was largely intrinsic—being called a highly accomplished or lead teacher. After that the department put in place an award process to recognise them with additional salaries. The next step, I think, in discussion and conversation right around the country is whether there are designated positions in schools, whether they intersect with things like instructional leadership—so bringing together highly accomplished and lead teachers with a range of functions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My next question is probably to you, Mr Scott. Some of my colleagues asked questions earlier about the instructional leadership program. It does seem beyond strange that, on the one hand, you have the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers program over there and, totally separate to that, you have the instructional leadership program in an entirely separate bucket. Are you going to bring the two together so that we have a coherent body of policy and instructional leadership in schools? Surely instructional leadership should come from highly accomplished and lead teachers.

Mr SCOTT: We continue to monitor the space. As Mr Martin said, the HALTs has been a national initiative. New South Wales had more take-up of that than any other State and the department did more than any other—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given the numbers, it is hardly gold-star territory.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but I am just giving you a bit of context. Prior to that we aggressively went down the road of recruiting instructional leaders so, in a sense, it predated the HALTs and, as Mr Dizdar said, we are encouraging instructional leaders to do the HALT accreditation program. But it is an area of continued debate. I think the Grattan Institute put out an interesting report on this the other day. I think, nationally, there is a discussion around: Are we doing all we can to encourage classroom teachers to continue to upgrade their skills and a career pathway that may not be a school leadership pathway? We are going at all fronts actually. We are trying to increase HALTs and instructional lead teachers and provide incentives to do that, we are encouraging our instructional leaders to become part of that program and I think we have said that we will review and consider the ideas that are in that Grattan Institute report. I think you referenced some of these as well, Chair.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That sounds to me like we are going to continue to have a bits-and-pieces approach—

Mr SCOTT: But this is a national strategy, though.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just let me finish the question. You have got Mr Martin dealing with Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers and, admittedly, plugging into a national strategy.

Mr SCOTT: That is what they do. That is what NESAs do—the accreditation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The instructional leadership program does not require a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher element; it is encouraged. We know for a fact that quality teachers are leaving the classroom to follow promotional routes up to deputy and principal. We have known that for a while. When are we going to integrate the two and have a comprehensive program that acknowledges really high-quality teaching and pays them? It seems to me that getting the two programs to work together is the way we do that.

Mr MARTIN: If I can just add that there are approximately 1,000 teachers pursuing an application for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher currently—480-odd for each of the two. I think that the programs in independent, Catholic and government schools for things like instructional leaders and various other forms of positions need a pool to draw from. At the moment the small numbers of highly accomplished and lead teachers can provide that pool. I think that the point that you are making will be resolved over time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do we all agree that data is useful in schooling?

Mr SCOTT: Data, yes.

Ms HARRISSON: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can I ask you about the data on special religious education? What proportion of primary school kids spend their time in "religious instruction"—if I can put inverted commas around that—during special religious education classes throughout the year?

Ms HARRISSON: That information is held locally in schools. I do not have that available at system level.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, they are spending an hour a week on this. Is that right?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, I believe that is correct.

Mr SCOTT: Not more than an hour.

Ms HARRISSON: Not more than an hour.

Mr SCOTT: Not less than 30 minutes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They are spending up to an hour on this per week.

Mr SCOTT: Up to an hour, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do we agree that it is a very crowded curriculum?

Mr SCOTT: Well, Professor Masters has talked about decluttering the curriculum. That goes to curriculum content in a range of subjects but, yes, time in our school timetables is valuable.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Time is valuable. Why do you not collect the data on what kids are doing for that hour a week that is set aside for special religious education? The anecdotal reports that come to my office suggest that the bulk of the kids are doing no instruction, are not going to any kind of religious class or religious instruction and an hour a week of class time is being wasted. Why do you not collect data on that?

Ms HARRISSON: I think, as my colleagues have indicated, it is up to an hour and no less than 30 minutes. That information is held locally at school and parents can ask their school for some information if they want to find out what is going on in their local school.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are responsible for running the system. Why can you not tell us how many kids are doing this and how many kids are watching DVDs, doing recycling or just getting up to trouble?

Mr SCOTT: As you are well aware, this has long been an area of policy debate and conjecture. There has been a review of special religious education and special education and ethics, and a policy decision has been made by the Government that time will be provided for special religious education. In fact, it is in the Act.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Fine, but I am not asking about that decision. I am asking about your job, which is to collect data about it.

Mr SCOTT: No, no. Basically our job has been—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To turn a blind eye.

Mr SCOTT: No, no. Our job has been, in following that edict which is in the Act, to ensure that that time is allocated to schools. Then the decision as to how schools, in a sense, operationalise that and provide that, that is a decision that is made locally and partly in response to demand for special religious education that takes place, which is quite different in different contexts. Our responsibility is to ensure that that time is provided, as is required under the legislation under the current policy settings set by the Government.

The CHAIR: Mr Scott, for how long has the department known that the Gonski equity money would be flowing into the system in such substantial amounts?

Mr SCOTT: I will go to Mr Graham on this but, really, we are now, I think, at the six-year period, about the sixth year of the first Gonski funding.

The CHAIR: Has anyone ever thought that it would be useful to have enforceable guidelines for how schools should use that money, consistent with the evidence base as to what achieves academic results? I must say that in visiting schools there is a head-shaking element of, "Wow! Whoever would have thought a school would do that?"

Mr SCOTT: In how they are spending the money? I think, as I said earlier, the commitment was made to put the money into schools. Frankly, a lot of that money was back-end loaded, so most of the money has really landed in schools in the past two years. That is when you have seen the steepest increase in the funding that has become available to them.

The CHAIR: But in the six-year period, did anyone think that it would be a good idea to have enforceable guidelines and systems in place to ensure the money would be spent to maximum effect for the benefit of students?

Mr SCOTT: I think what we can see in the past couple of years is significant work that has been done to ensure that money is being spent in an appropriate evidence-based way to improve teaching and learning outcomes. We have covered some of those things today.

The CHAIR: What are the systems around that? Do not tell me sharing and goodwill. What makes a school use its money productively?

Mr SCOTT: I think, partly, one of the things we have done is reduce the number of schools that DELs look after from 35 to 20. So the Directors, Educational Leadership—the person the principal reports to, the person who should be involved in the school—have closer and stronger visibility of where schools are spending their money and can correlate that to the performance that is evident around that school. I think the tailored support program saying: What does the evidence show us about the things schools need to do, the support that schools need, in order to see a lift in teaching and learning outcomes? The fact that we now have 500 schools that are involved in that tailored support program, which is steering those schools towards investment of time and money on the interventions that are likely to see a lift in teaching and learning outcomes.

The fact that we have trained 778 school leaders on evidence-based training to help them use evidence and use data to guide their decision-making locally—this is all part of the supporting infrastructure that exists around Gonski to ensure that you have strong leadership to make the decisions around spending that money. You are giving a lot of evidence through CESE and through the tailored support work to guide that decision-making around evidence-based decision-making and increasing the accountability that comes to bear with school-based targets they are putting in place. If you look at global research on how systems lift, these are all hallmarks. And

then you have got the comments that the Minister has made today about giving schools flexibility within a framework that is driven by evidence. These are all things that we have been rolling out and putting in place in the last two or three years at the same time as the—

The CHAIR: In answer to my question, it is an amazing oversight, is it not, that the department has no central systems of quality control and enforceable guidelines for the way in which the money could be spent? Is there any limit on what a school can spend equity funding on?

Mr SCOTT: When you say "equity funding", you are talking about Gonski funding. We expect schools—

The CHAIR: No, not what you expect; what they do. You see? This is the trick—not what you expect but what schools are actually doing. Is there any limit?

Mr SCOTT: We have visibility into how they spend that money through the line management, through the DELs, and the DELs are involved in a conversation with school principals as to why money is being invested in certain places.

The CHAIR: But there is no limit.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They can spend equity funding on waterproofing, can they not? And they do.

Mr SCOTT: No, fundamentally we expect them to be spending that money on improving teaching and learning outcomes, and we are looking to document that.

The CHAIR: How many schools and how many students benefit from after-school tutoring using equity money for struggling students?

Mr SCOTT: I have been to some schools that have set up some tremendous programs for after school—HSC clubs, after-school tutoring. They have decided on engagement with their local community. This was the priority and they have set up those programs. I have seen them in place.

The CHAIR: Can we get some data on that across the system?

Mr SCOTT: I am happy to provide you with data on that. I saw an outstanding one. We went to Woonona High School because Woonona High School had seen a significant lift in its HSC outcomes. We looked at what the ingredients were there. One of the things they did was they decided to use some of their funding around the creation of an HSC study program, and we documented that and spread that information widely in the department.

The CHAIR: Is the after-school tutoring all done by teachers from that school?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to check on that.

Ms HARRISSON: Before and after school.

The CHAIR: Or from outside services?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar may have more.

Mr DIZDAR: Schools that run homework centres, after-school tutoring, often ask for staff who want to volunteer.

The CHAIR: Are external experts brought in to assist?

Mr DIZDAR: As well as employing external experts, yes.

The CHAIR: It would be very handy to have a breakdown of the data as to how the money has been spent, if you have that.

Mr DIZDAR: I can get for the Committee those sites that run those sorts of programs.

The CHAIR: Okay. What about vocational education? It seems to me that an obvious use of the Gonski equity funding is to buy in vocational education services that would keep years 7, 8, 9 and 10—mostly male students—engaged with learning.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: Is there data on how much of that is happening?

Mr SCOTT: We can provide you with information on vocational education provision. I think there are a number of things happening in this space that are significant. Not least is the report that is imminent from Peter Shergold who, as you know, is the new chair of NESAs. Shergold has been commissioned to do a report on behalf of State and Territory education Ministers on vocational education in schools. I think there is a shared understanding of Ministers, and certainly a shared understanding in New South Wales, that we need to do better on the provision of vocational education. This is a matter we can take up when we meet next week with Mr Lee, who is very keen on improving pathways.

We have now done some very significant data tracking of students, looking at their NAPLAN achievement levels, the provision of vocational education in schools and tracking them for a decade on leaving school, so we can see the power of quality vocational education. I think there are concerns. There are concerns that Geoff Masters has indicated about, in a sense, the power that the ATAR can have to dissuade people from doing vocational education in schools, so this is a matter that we need to look at as well. So, vocational education is important and we can give you examples of where schools have used their Gonski money to drive student engagement in schools by effectively using vocational education.

The CHAIR: But you are waiting for the Shergold report. Why was—

Mr SCOTT: No, what we can tell you about next week—we have a pilot of, I think, 24 schools that are looking at pathways programs that involve vocational education in schools. What I am saying is that, as I understand it, we are only a month away from the Shergold report, which we think will be valuable as we continue to look at how we get the settings right to improve vocational education in schools.

The CHAIR: So you are taking on notice, for the benefit of the Committee, all that information about the use of equity funding.

Mr SCOTT: Of vocational education, yes.

The CHAIR: In terms of the development of the new school planning and targeting and reporting system, what is the feeling as to what will be different this time that did not work last time?

Mr SCOTT: I will get Mr Dizdar to answer this.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar told the Committee that schools are doing this reporting. It is all covered under the School Excellence Framework. There does not appear to be much there, other than NAPLAN and HSC results. What will be different this time that will make schools comply with what the department wants?

Mr DIZDAR: The targets are the first thing that we intend to have in the new school plan. So the improvement measures that we have agreed upon with the school on a consistent basis. Whenever the Committee or the public pick up a school plan they will be able to see the top two Premier's Priorities for reading and numeracy. They will be able to see if it is a secondary site or a site that services secondary students that we are committed to increasing the proportion of Aboriginal students obtaining a HSC, which is a Premier's priority. But alongside that, attendance, well-being, equity measures as well. That is the first thing.

The second thing we intend to have an enhanced endorsement process that the Director, Educational Leadership not only endorse the school plan that has been collaborative developed but also that the equity discussion in terms of the loadings are factored into the school plan. We are looking not only at the activities but also the impact that we are driving to drive across those loadings for those students most in need. We are looking at greater rigour around the Director, Educational Leadership approving that school plan. The data helps us here. We do not envisage a situation where a school, for example, is not calling out literacy as a key component of the school plan when the data is showing that the literacy results at that school need focus and attention.

We also intend to call out the tailored supports. Ms Harrison and Mr Scott spoke about the 500-plus schools that are benefiting from that shoulder-to-shoulder expertise inside the school gate. We intend to do all of those things, and tighten up on our external validation process. We are cognisant of the Auditor-General's findings. We are looking at having a four-year cycle, instead of a five-year cycle. We are looking at a school going with its new school plan each time after external validation because external validation is a rich, powerful process for a school community to have a good internal look with the Director, Educational Leadership as the external ends of where they are at and to go with a new cycle of a four-year school plan.

We note that their recommendations that the Auditor-General has also picked up and given us from the teacher quality audit that we intend to enact. Then this should flow through, Chair, to annual reports. I know you have looked at lots of annual reports. If you look at annual reports at the moment, we do account for the equity loadings in terms of dollars, but we talk more about the activities we have put in place. We are also looking to put

the outcomes. What are the outcomes for those at risk proportion of students in our schools—whether that be low socioeconomic, Aboriginal, additional language or dialect [EALD], what is the impact those dollars are having on those learners? They are some of the mechanisms we are looking at tightening up.

The CHAIR: Do you personally feel you are on your last chance here?

Mr DIZDAR: Sorry?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Point of order: I do not think that is an appropriate question to put to a public servant. Intention or otherwise there is an element of a kind of threat to that.

The CHAIR: I am in no position to threaten anyone. I am just saying we have heard a lot of verbiage but people want results. At some point we have got to get this right—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am taking a point of order on the question before it is answered. I am asking you to rule on it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I draw your attention to the health and safety directorate and the concerns raised previously. You spoke about Health Check that was done by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I turn your attention to page 15 of that report that states:

Throughout the course of consultations there were several instances where individuals raised instances of unacceptable behaviour that they believed constituted bullying and/or harassment. Investigating these allegations was outside the scope of the Health Check.

Given that a lot of the concerns about the health and safety directorate was centred around allegations of that issue, why was the decision taken to exclude that out of the scope of this investigation? It creates the perception that you are trying to deliberately exclude evidence?

Mr SCOTT: I am sorry if you feel that is the perception, that was not it.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: It is not my perception, it is the perception of people in the public.

Mr SCOTT: I am sorry if there is that perception. Those complaints had been investigated and then they had been independently investigated, as I recall. There were some people who had worked in that division who were unhappy. They were unhappy with some of the personalities in that division. They made some complaints and those complaints were investigated. They were not upheld. Still I think the decision was made—Mr Riordan had oversight at the time—to get someone in to take a look at the health and culture of that division. They provided some valuable feedback. We have paid attention to that feedback. I think if you are an aggrieved member of staff who had worked in that team that may not have given you satisfaction but we did investigate the complaints. We did implement the health check. I believe that that division is now making good progress.

Can I add that over the past three months I can hardly recall a time in my leadership roles in different organisations where a part of an organisation has had so much pressure dealing with fires that have affected more than 200 schools, then dealing with floods, now dealing with daily updates and meetings around coronavirus and they have done an absolutely outstanding job.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No doubt but a lot of these complaints date back to 2007 when we were not dealing with the coronavirus.

Mr SCOTT: Exactly right. They do go back a long way. They have been investigated. We have had a health check done. This division is doing outstanding work and I would say—perhaps well-meaning people will disagree—I think we have done a thorough and important job investigating this. We need to allow that leadership team to get on with their important work. They have done outstanding work in the past three or four months. I think we just need to allow them to get on with it now.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms O'Brien, will you inform the Committee on how many psychological workers compensation claims have been lodged by employees at the health and safety directorate since the time you have been a director in charge?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice. Can I say to you, Chair, I think Ms O'Brien is here representing the Health and Safety Division. They have done very important work on fires, floods and coronavirus. We have been through this area a long time and I think, in a sense, I question the appropriateness of personal questions about her leadership at this time. I am happy to take those questions on her behalf.

The CHAIR: What do you mean by "personal questions"?

Mr SCOTT: I think it is now going to specific questions about Ms O'Brien's history in leading leadership of that unit over time, that is all.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I was not mentioning her leadership, just in terms of her management. It could encompass other workers that were involved.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Maybe if you restrict it to the last two calendar years it might be useful.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If you and Ms O'Brien are that concerned I will put that question on notice.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I agree. I think that would be more appropriate.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You can take this question on notice as well. Because of the way in which the health and safety directorate is organised—it draws employees from all different areas, not only from school-based positions. I know you have employed people from the NSW Police Force—

Mr SCOTT: True.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How is recruitment managed? Is it managed in a different way than it is at the school level? How are things such as conflict of interests being managed in terms of people knowing one another through personal relationships or longstanding colleagues et cetera? Given that you are drawing people with vast experiences in work history, there may be a time when someone employs someone they have known for many years.

Mr SCOTT: That is not unknown across the education department, I must say.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Exactly, so how does that work?

Mr SCOTT: Merit-based processes apply and those same processes will apply in that division as in other parts of our People and Culture Division and in other parts of the department. If you want to put a specific question on notice, I will deal with that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: My final question, Mr Scott. Do you think there is too much white noise and mixed messages in relation to educational readings and theories that have been put out by the department, CESE—I will include private providers in a second. If you look at some of the things that have recently been put out as things for teachers and principals to look at—you have Hattie's *Visible Learning*, *21st Century Learning Skills*, the Quality Teaching Framework, how you code lessons and assessments, literacy and numeracy continuums that then transfer to literacy and numeracy professions, *Great Teaching*, *Inspired Learning* versions one and two, STEM and then all the private providers trying to flog their wares. Mr Dizdar would attest that of a morning you look at your pigeon hole and say "Oh my God, someone is trying to flog me something". Is there too much white noise? Are teachers and schools being peppered with too many mixed messages, theories and programs about how we improve performance? Do we really need to focus and narrow down some of these things that are being thrown at schools and focus on a clear key message?

Mr SCOTT: I think it is a valuable question and a good insight. One of the reasons CESE was created was to be able to synthesise a lot of that information and to test it. If you look at *What works best: Evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance*—which has been our most downloaded document from CESE and has been downloaded tens of thousands of times and attracted international attention and praise and is now being updated with a version about operationalising it—that is an attempt to synthesise lots of different information for very busy, time-poor classroom teachers. That is one of the reasons it is such a valuable product.

I think also—picking up lines that the Premier and Minister have said and that the Chair has been saying too—it is about providing clarity to schools. It is not everything that is on offer, but for a school at their stage of development it is the important things that they should be focused on. To provide clarity around that is what schools are asking from us too. I find that when I visit schools and they talk about curriculum, part of the decluttering thing they are saying is: fewer checklists in curriculum and more specific advice on how to teach this in an effective way. That is what we are looking to deliver to them.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What is the time line? You mentioned the operationalisation of *What works best*. I mentioned in the House last week that it was thrown out there but nothing was really done.

Mr SCOTT: Thrown out there and downloaded tens of thousands of times. It is the most cited documented that we have got.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, it was. But there was no structure for implementation. This operationalisation is talking about how you do that. What is the time line for that? I agree that it is a great document, but what is the time line for it actually becoming—

Mr SCOTT: Ms Egan is running CESE for us. She can fill you in.

Ms EGAN: The time line is that within the next month we will have a practical guide for our teaching workforce to be able to put the research into practice. The title of that will be *What works best in practice* for that reason. I will say that for all teachers in New South Wales we, first and foremost, refer to the syllabus. The syllabus is our first point of call and whatever program or additional resources a school or teacher uses is in addition to that. *What works best* is closely aligned to the effective classroom practice within the School Excellence Framework.

I recognise what the Chair said today. But at the same time, what we know about a school moving from good to great to excellence is that excellence recognises what works best in practice. What we need to do from a CESE point of view is: We have provided the research and we enable our schools to access that and now we are providing our schools with the way in which we can implement that.

Ms HARRISSON: Can I add that the research coming out of CESE is then taken by other bits of the department. It is the cornerstone of what we provide in professional development for our teachers for both specific curriculum areas around how to best approach the teaching and the more generic programs around teaching practice. It is the cornerstone of what we provide in terms of professional development through our quality assured professional learning.

The CHAIR: Our time has just about expired. I thank all the witnesses for their time and participation today in this estimates hearing. I declare the meeting closed.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.