

Transcript Questions

Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning
and Minister for Western Sydney

QUESTION 1 PAGE NO 2

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning, Deputy Premier. Good morning, officials. It is nice to see you all again. Deputy Premier, can you tell us when the targets that you announced yesterday were first formulated by the department?

Ms PRUE CAR: The system-level success measures that we announced yesterday, and the corresponding plans to make sure that the school excellence plans, which are currently being worked on, will be published and ready on school websites for the end of term one—we have been working on that for some time. As we made very clear yesterday, we needed two academic years of NAPLAN to be able to compare apples with apples because a lot of these success measures relate to improvements at all levels of NAPLAN. That was one of the criticisms of the OECD of the previous targets: that they were only the top two bands. I am really proud of what we announced yesterday.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to draw you back. Documents were leaked and there was an article about this yesterday in *The Sydney Morning Herald* saying that some of the targets, including those for lifting enrolment and parent satisfaction, were actually developed almost a year ago. Is that correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take on notice the detail of when the work began on this. I make no secret of the fact—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So they were not finalised a year ago? They couldn't have been released earlier than yesterday?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm being really transparent and answering your question. I make no secret of the fact that, on my insistence, the department has been working on this for some time—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For two years?

Ms PRUE CAR: —but the lion's share of the system measures, which relate to NAPLAN targets that now apply across every single level, not just the top two bands—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. I'm not asking about—

Ms PRUE CAR: —which, with respect, is what you presided over.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not asking about the NAPLAN targets. I asked specifically about targets for lifting enrolment share and parent satisfaction. I appreciate what you are saying about the methodology changes for NAPLAN; that wasn't my question. There were a number of targets yesterday around attendance, HSC, enrolment share and parent satisfaction that don't relate to NAPLAN. Have you been sitting on those targets for more than a year?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have just said really clearly that we have been working on them for some time. In order to come up with the suite of system measures, we waited for two years of NAPLAN. We haven't made any secret of this. In fact, Mr Dizdar, I don't know if you have anything to add to this?

ANSWER

In December 2023, Our Plan for NSW Public Education was released, setting the direction and priorities for the public education system.

Throughout 2024, the department undertook a rigorous process to define success measures, including extensive stakeholder consultation, data development, and collection. Significant reforms to NAPLAN assessment in 2023 also meant further data development was required for a key success measure.

Success measures were published in February 2025.

QUESTION 2 PAGE NO 5 & 6

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's not Tell Them From Me anymore; that is finished. Is that correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: But there is a survey to parents.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So there's no more Tell Them From Me. There's now going to be a new survey presumably. When will that be available? When will it be available to parents?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When was the last time you collected data from Tell Them From Me?

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

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Were you briefed on what that data was showing you?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am briefed on a range of things every day.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was it showing that parents were losing confidence in public schools? Is that why you got rid of it?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, the department advice—I'm glad you asked me about this, actually. It's not about confidence in public schools. The truth is the department advice on how we more meaningfully consult with parents in a way that they can have access to and that more of them would be able to participate in is that we do our own survey.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What will that look like, and when is that available?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: It was a detailed question. The Minister was providing a fulsome response that was relevant to the question. It would be courteous to the witness, under the procedural fairness resolution, if the Minister was given the opportunity to complete her answer.

The CHAIR: In this case I will uphold the point of order.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. You were saying, Minister, there is going to be a new survey. When will that be available?

Ms PRUE CAR: To consult with parents—in fact, it's a crucial part of our plan for public education that we consult with parents. Parents are, obviously, a crucial partner in what we do in public education. I am not sure what you're getting at in terms of whether it's a Tell Them From Me survey or whether it's another type of survey, whether it's the P&C federation, P&C meetings or it's the relationship a classroom teacher has with the parents of their children, which is an everyday occurrence for all of our teachers to be doing about how your child is going at school. That is each and every day.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My point was Tell Them From Me used to collect data from parents. Parents could go on and have a say. I'm a public school parent, and I did the Tell Them From Me survey to have a say at my local school. That's gone now. You are saying there will be something else that can collect more widespread data as opposed to just the one-on-one.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a pretty simple question. I'm not trying to trick you. Tell Them From Me is gone. You have confirmed that. What is coming in to replace it and when? What will that look like, so that parents know?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're doing our own survey, and I will take that on notice because I want to give the Committee the right information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

ANSWER

The Department of Education last collected data through the Tell Them From Me parent survey in 2024.

This survey is being replaced by a new parent survey as part of the new NSW Public Schools Surveys. The new survey is currently in development, and the department will consult with parents and schools as part of that development.

QUESTION 3 PAGE NO 8

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Chair. I have previously asked the Minister for a breakdown of vacancies per school. Your government has provided that once, back in 2023. I asked for it as recently as a couple of weeks ago, and you're not providing it by school, even though that exists and it's possible to do because you have done it once before. Will you provide this Committee with a breakdown of vacancies per school, every school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have to say, it's really nice and refreshing to see your newfound interest in teacher vacancies. Obviously, when you were Minister, that would have been good to acknowledge there was a teacher shortage crisis. I think, at the time, you may have said it didn't keep you up at night. Anyway, it's good to see that you realise now that teacher vacancies is something the education department should be focused on. In fact, it's the biggest priority of this Government. We actually started this term—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I could redirect you, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: —day one, term 1, with a 40 per cent drop in vacancies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, it's a very specific question. I'm happy for you to take it on notice; don't let this one get lost in the hundreds that you will get on notice. What we would like it a breakdown—

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, Ms Mitchell, that's not what Mr Dizdar said.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're not providing data when we have asked for it at specific points, and it concerns me as a Committee member that there's no transparency. It's been provided to this Parliament many times in the previous Government. You have done it once as Minister, not since 2023. I'm asking you for a breakdown of every school that has a vacancy, and per school, so that we can see that it's transparent, and we can track that. Will you provide that to the Committee? That is my question to you.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I will take it on notice.

ANSWER

As outlined in the response to LC QON 3289, schools began Term 1, 2025 with 1,294 permanent teacher vacancies. This is a 40% reduction from the same time in 2023, when the former Liberal National Government left office.

As per answer to supplementary question 58, of the 2024-25 Budget Estimates hearing – schools began Term 3, 2024 with 1,698 permanent teacher vacancies. This is a 35% reduction from the same time in 2022, under the former Liberal National Government.

Under the former Minister for Education, The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, teacher vacancies reached a record high of more than 3,300. Despite this, former Minister Mitchell said teacher shortages were a "beat up" and a "myth".

QUESTION 4 PAGE NO 8

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I asked about it in February and you weren't transparent, so I will get you on record today that you will provide it. That will be great. Minister, how many deputies and assistant principals are back on class, and how are you tracking that against the vacancy data?

Ms PRUE CAR: Thank you for your question—really important. We made no secret of the fact that part of our election mandate, we believed, to fix the teacher shortage crisis left to us by the previous government was to really get to the root cause of why we had such a teacher shortage crisis. In addition to giving teachers the biggest pay rise in a generation, making them more—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I have got a minute left. I asked a specific question.

Ms PRUE CAR: I am getting to the answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This isn't the LA. I have got a very specific question. How are you tracking the DPs and the APs back on class, and how many?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am well aware of where we are, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are the numbers, and what has that done to your vacancy rate? That's my question.

Ms PRUE CAR: Things are in context. I'm actually putting it in context. I'm answering your question. As a result of everything that we have done, in terms of getting to the root cause of why we had a teacher shortage crisis, in addition to, as was released today, obviously—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, that's not my question.

Ms PRUE CAR: —a lot more people studying teaching coming out of year 12.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have 20 seconds left, Minister.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking about APs and DPs. Just answer the question.

Ms PRUE CAR: We also made a point of putting deputy principles and assistant—I'm answering it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many have gone back on? How do you track that against your vacancy rate? That is my question. Could you please answer that?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are putting deputy principals and assistant principals on to class. Many of them were on class, but they are now on timetable class. I will take that on notice but, I tell you, it's obviously working. There's a 40 per cent drop in vacancies.

ANSWER

Having executive teachers (Deputy Principals, Head Teachers and Assistant Principals) back on class enables them to share their valuable teaching expertise directly with students.

A permanent vacancy can only be considered filled when a teacher has been permanently appointed to that position. An existing executive teacher in the school cannot also be appointed to a teacher vacancy. Additionally, a school cannot reduce their permanent teaching entitlement by offsetting against executive teaching time.

QUESTION 5 PAGE NO 12

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Let's just go to this question of pedagogy and what's being taught in the schools that you run. Minister, what is the Berry Street Education Model?

Ms PRUE CAR: Look, I mean, if I'm going to pedagogy—and something that we, I think, agree on, Mr Latham, a lot—something that we're making sure that all of our schools are using, and supporting them in that, is the rolling out of the focus on explicit teaching, which you called out many years ago. But I'll have to take the Berry Street Education Model on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yeah, that's good.

Ms PRUE CAR: It works.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I congratulate you on that, but you mentioned schools in south-west Sydney. Yesterday in preparation for this session, I thought I would randomly go to the annual report of one of the high schools in my district there. I went to the Elderslie High annual report released just last year. They don't make any mention of explicit instruction. They follow the Berry Street Education Model, social emotional learning structures, the Thrive Programme and quality teaching rounds. Minister, haven't you got an implementation problem? It's great that you're following the long-established advice that explicit or direct instruction works best for students, and we're all committed to that.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But if school leaders, like those at Elderslie High, totally ignore you, then isn't it just useless? Haven't you got an implementation strategy to take your great intention about explicit instruction and make sure it's actually happening in every single classroom in the State?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I disagree with that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, you don't have an implementation strategy.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're rolling it out. In fact, there's never been so much support centrally from the department in rolling out a clear pedagogy of what we expect in every classroom. Can I just say I have seen it with my own eyes many times in many classrooms. Explicit teaching has been done in many schools for many years. It is rolling out to more. I'd have to take the issue of Elderslie on notice. I'm not sure if that coexists with explicit teaching, perhaps, at Elderslie. I'd have to take advice on what is happening there in those classrooms.

ANSWER

In April 2024, the Department of Education released a statement on explicit teaching in NSW public schools. This statement provides a clear understanding of the approach to explicit teaching in all NSW public schools. Implementation support for explicit teaching is also being provided in schools.

The department has designed professional learning workshops that build core knowledge for explicit teaching, including the science of learning. On Day 1, Term 2 2024, all NSW public school teachers participated in a School Development Day focussed specifically on evidence-based explicit teaching. Further professional learning modules and advice is available to support implementation of the eight evidence-based explicit teaching strategies outlined in the statement on explicit teaching in NSW public schools.

Directors, Educational Leadership are working with principals to ensure explicit teaching is being effectively implemented in all schools.

The department is committed to supporting effective implementation of explicit teaching practice with strong fidelity and will continue to develop resources, advice and professional learning for teachers and school leaders.

I understand Elderslie High School's 2023 Annual Report affirms its commitment to explicit teaching practices.

QUESTION 6 PAGE NO 13

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Deputy Premier, we have had some reports from a number of casual teachers that schools are choosing to split regular classes rather than call casuals in, I think because of budget concerns. Have you had any feedback to that effect?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice. I know that we have less and less merged-cancelled classes because of the fact that we have had a 40 per cent reduction in teacher vacancies. But I have to take that particular question about the casual teachers and the splitting of classes on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. If you could provide even data from last term and so far this term because we have got a number of reports that casuals aren't being called and schools are choosing to split classes instead. But if you could take that on notice, that'd be great.

Ms PRUE CAR: I mean, there are 2,216 schools. I'd have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

Information on the employment of casual teachers and the strategies used schools when casual teachers cannot be accessed is reflected in the annual Alternative Supervision Arrangements Survey which is published on the Department of Education's website.

This is data the former Minister for Education refused to gather despite overseeing a teacher shortage crisis with record teacher vacancies. Under the former Liberal National Government, there were 10,000 merged and cancelled classes every day.

The latest survey shows that under the Minns Labor Government, the number of merged and cancelled classes have almost halved.

QUESTION 7 PAGE NO 15

Ms PRUE CAR: We have listened.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you haven't, because you're going ahead with it. You are just delaying it by 12 months. So no matter what, no matter how annoyed parents are or how frustrated that school community is, you are pressing ahead with that decision regardless. Is that correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have consulted with the community. The prospective parents really want the success of Freshwater to be available to younger secondary students. I know I have said this a few times but it's a very strange response considering the Liberal member for Manly is in support of this change—this is very confusing—but we will continue to consult with that community. We have listened and we're committed to providing comprehensive secondary public education. We're listening to the community. In fact, I think when we put out an EOI for year 7 and year 8, we may see the interest from the community.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you haven't done that yet. You're not reversing it. Years 7 to 12, 2027—that's the final decision. Is that what you're saying?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have delayed it a year, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but in 2027 that will be a school that will start having year 7 and 8 enrolments. That's the set position and that's not changing?

Ms PRUE CAR: That's what we're working towards.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How much are you going to spend on upgrades to that school to allow that increased capacity?

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

ANSWER

Project expenditure is published in the annual NSW Budget Papers.

QUESTION 8 PAGE NO 16

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What's the time frame of this in terms of mandatory civics and citizenship education in the curriculum?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I just said, it was 2027. But I would make the point that, as teachers roll the new curriculum out—which is a huge, huge undertaking—schools that are ready to do that can do it sooner.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So provision will be allowed, for schools that are able to, to introduce this earlier?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Will you not be playing a greater role in terms of responding in the current environment by bringing forward the 2027 deadline on this?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I just said, it will be mandatory from 2027. It has never been mandatory before. If schools are ready to go, they can go now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you be tracking if any schools bring it earlier?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you provide that publicly, to the Committee?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take that on notice.

ANSWER

All mandatory civics and citizenship content in the new syllabuses will be implemented in NSW public schools by 2027 in line with the NSW Education Standards Authority's implementation timelines.

QUESTION 9 PAGE NO 17

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, the concerning thing for parents is this level of activity and behaviour is taking place in the school environment during school hours. That's when the expectation that the code of conduct will be tested. That's the question.

Ms PRUE CAR: What's the question?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What response was taken under the code of conduct relating to political activities that are taking place in the school environment during school hours?

Ms PRUE CAR: I can only answer in generalities because you're not giving me an actual example. The department deals with every single issue in regards to the code of conduct. If you are able to provide me with any examples, I can ask the department to provide an operational update on what happened in that instance.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: As the Minister responsible, how many reported breaches of the code have been received or recorded by the department in the last 12 months?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that particular one on notice because I think it's reasonable that I don't know the actual number of the breaches. But we are very serious about the code of conduct because we expect schools to be apolitical places, which I'll say again.

ANSWER

The Department of Education releases information in relation to Teacher Conduct and Performance on an annual basis. This is available publicly on the department's website.

QUESTION 10 PAGE NO 18

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I only have a short time left. Minister, can you advise how much money has been spent so far from this year's allocated budget for the NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund?

Ms PRUE CAR: The reporting on how much money has been spent on the NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund will all be transparently available. I'd have to take on notice how much money has been spent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I could help you, this year's budget allocated \$330 million to be spent from that fund. We're now at the end of February, so you have only got a couple of months of the financial year. Surely you would know if you had spent close to \$330 million on new childcare opportunities. Are you going to meet that spend this financial year?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're actually spending a lot. As a government, we are committed to rolling out our priorities when it comes to early childhood education and care, including ensuring that we continue to support community preschools, roll out grant opportunities to early childhood education providers to find new ways of flexibly delivering longer hours, and provide scholarships to early childhood educators. We're doing a range of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you spent \$330 million this year on that?

Ms PRUE CAR: That will all be available in the budget.

ANSWER

NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity (CEO) Fund expenditure is reported at the end of each financial year in the CEO Fund Board annual report which is publicly available on the Department of Education's website.

QUESTION 11 PAGE NO 21

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, you outlined earlier your concern about the declining share of government school enrolments. The graph produced in the Herald yesterday showed the decline for the two years of this Government and a further two years of decline through to 2027, when it then turns around. What's going to change in 2027?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're hoping it starts to change before then. I understand—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's not reflected in your graph.

Ms PRUE CAR: I respect that the Herald has got a graph saying that there is a decline. I'm not disputing there is a decline. We're trying, Mr Latham, to turn the decline around through all the measures that we're embarking on—I think any reasonable person would see that—and I hope that it changes before 2027. I'm not arguing with you, Mr Latham, that there is a decline. We want to see that arrested. In fact, we want to see it going the other way. We want parents to actually choose public education. In fact, one of the things we haven't spoken about today that we're doing—in addition to the stuff we're doing for teachers and making sure that we have a standard pedagogy and getting rid of vacancies and building the schools where they're needed—is we're investing more than ever in high potential and gifted education. So parents will know, wherever their child goes to school at a public school, that they'll have the chance to realise their potential—not just for gifted students, but high potential students.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm a reasonable person and I don't think you are taking the right steps.

Ms PRUE CAR: I didn't mean to suggest that, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When you're a product of public education, it's heartbreaking for the next generation to then be refugees from it to find better schools. A lot of parents are doing that. The material published yesterday also showed that community confidence in public education is just 51 per cent. That's really a vote of no confidence in what you're doing, isn't it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would argue we inherited a system that had been chronically neglected for more than a decade. We had teacher vacancies at record levels. We had schools that did not exist in growing areas. We had teachers leaving the profession in droves. I mean, we didn't come in in a vacuum. We have had to really rebuild public education, and that's what we're in the middle of doing.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I have got five areas here where you're not really rebuilding at all. One of them is transparency about school performance. Can we get a chronology of what has happened with these school targets? We had Mark Scott here, back in the day, saying, "The school targets will make a huge difference in rebuilding confidence in public education." Now this Government has discontinued the data line, which is a problem in itself. On notice, can we get a chronology of the shemozzle of these school reporting targets? Five years on, parents are still absolutely clueless about the performance of their local government school.

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect to previous secretaries of the Department of Education, I thoroughly disagree with previous targets set by previous governments. They didn't work, and the OECD said so. They said they were top-down, they didn't work and, on any measure, outcomes were falling—NAPLAN, international testing. I would argue that's one of the reasons the people of New South Wales voted in a new government.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: A chronology would be helpful to understand the shemozzle.

Ms PRUE CAR: We'll take it on notice.

ANSWER

Please see chronology of events on school performance targets from 2019 to 2025:

2019

- Large range of school targets introduced depending on the school cohort, based on the then Premier's Priorities.

2020

- Original school targets implemented into Strategic Improvement Plans.

2021

Schools had to adhere to the system-wide targets of improving reading and numeracy in the Top 2 NAPLAN bands only.

2022

- The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority announced changes to NAPLAN taking place in 2023, including the introduction of proficiency standards, a new measurement scale and time series. The previous 'system-negotiated targets' that were reliant on NAPLAN data expired at the end of 2022. Other measures extended until the end of 2023.

2023

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released its report titled 'Enhancing school improvement reform in New South Wales (Australia)', OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 75 criticising the former Liberal National Government's "top-down", incoherent approach to school improvement.
- The new NAPLAN proficiency standards begin. The Department of Education concluded broad-scale consultation with schools on the design of new improvement targets. Schools set one year reading and numeracy improvement targets.

2024

- Schools were provided guidance about setting ambitious new improvement targets for reading, numeracy, attendance and pathways. New attendance and pathways improvement measures to mature in 2027. Schools set one year reading and numeracy improvement measures.

2025

- With two years elapsing from the introduction of the new NAPLAN proficiency standards and measurement scale, for the first time under the new system, student progress could be measured. I.e. a student in Year 3 would sit the Year 5 test and so on. Schools now set reading and numeracy improvement measures to mature in 2027. These measures are set by the end of Term 1, 2025.

QUESTION 12 PAGE NO 21

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's a real dog's breakfast. On the question that Rachel Merton was raising about values in schools being apolitical, how many teachers have been suspended or sacked for breaching the code of conduct on political activity in work time, including these Teachers for Palestine, in 2024?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I said, none of that is acceptable. We'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you can provide the data there for 2024, because there is still big feedback from the parents going to non-government schools that they want to go somewhere where it is non-political.

Ms PRUE CAR: For parents of families who really hold their faith very central and want a values-based education for their children, I want them to be able to choose a public school because everyone is welcome in a public school, and that's why the code of conduct is so important, Mr Latham. I will take that on notice.

the Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes. We want to see how it's being enforced.

ANSWER

Minor breaches of the Code of ethics and conduct are handled in the workplace under usual management processes. The Professional and Ethical Standards directorate (PES) provides guidance to principals and workplace managers about what should be reported to PES as allegation of employee misconduct.

QUESTION 13 PAGE NO 23&24

The CHAIR: Order! I am going to ask a question now, and then I will pass over to the Hon. Mark Latham. I just have a quick one. I know that this was raised, I believe, with Minister Kamper last year as well. In relation to the teaching of special religious education, in particular, Hindu SRE classes, which I understand, according to a report produced by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, there were allegations that children were being seated in those classes based on caste hierarchical order. There is concern about caste-based discrimination in schools. Has this been brought to your attention, and what is your response?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. That would greatly concern me. Sorry, I think that's absolutely something that would concern me if it was brought to my attention. We work very closely with the Faith Affairs Council with Minister Kamper. I work with the Faith Affairs Council as Education Minister quite closely on special religious education, and we're committed to ensuring that this is offered to students across New South Wales appropriately. I myself represent a part of north-western Sydney where a lot of students and their families want to access Hindu special religious education at their local public school.

The CHAIR: I understand that this has been raised with the department, and the department just responded saying everything was fine. Could you have a look into that issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm more than happy to take a look.

ANSWER

The Department of Education takes discrimination seriously. The department is working with the complainant's representatives to establish the parameters of the concerns. Under Section 32 of the Education Act 1990, the approved provider is responsible for the content of the SRE lessons. The religious education must be authorised by the religious body that the SRE teacher represents. In addition, under Section 33 of the Act, no child can be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to their child receiving that education. In other words, any concerned parent can remove their child from an SRE class if they are unhappy with the lesson content.

Further, the religious intolerance helpline was launched in August 2024 to strengthen support for students, families, staff and community members in NSW public schools who have experienced or witnessed religious bullying or intolerance.

QUESTION 14 PAGE NO 26-27

PART A

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Have you had any discussions with Minister Kamper about the transfer of that Crown land site?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are working with Minister Kamper, his office and his agency.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Has he told you if there is an impediment to transferring the land?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going to go into the detail of all of this, but we're onto it.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Is there an impediment to transferring the land, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take that on notice, because I'm not going to go into a rolling commentary to provide some Liberal councillor on Penrith council with some fodder.

ANSWER

I am advised that this land is owned by the Planning Ministerial Corporation. As such, this question should be directed to the Minister for Planning.

PART B

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Would you agree that the cost of delivering that project was, at the time, \$106 million and there will be an escalation component in relation to the delivery of that project today?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not sure of that, and I will take that on notice.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Will you make a commitment, in relation to the delivery of that project, that if there are any escalation costs, Penrith City Council will not be asked to put in for those escalation costs?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will take questions on the detail of delivery of this commitment made by the previous Government on notice.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 14 (a).

PART C

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: What did you reply to him in terms of the delivery date?

Ms PRUE CAR: The Mayor of Penrith and I would probably talk on most days. That's not an overestimation. On this particular matter, he raised it with me on the weekend. I said to him, "Yes, we're onto this. I am personally onto this. Let's talk about it soon." That's as transparent as I can be. That was the conversation I had with the Mayor of Penrith.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Some months ago when it had previously been raised, did you have a similar conversation?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have regular meetings with Penrith council and the mayor. You're not going to catch me on this, Mr Tudehope. I spoke to the Mayor of Penrith about it on the weekend. We're onto it. I will take the questions on notice.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: It's not a question of catching you, Minister. It's a question of whether you have a real commitment to the delivery of this project. That's

the question. The fact is that it is two years down the track and there is no transfer of land. Is that the case?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not going to be lectured to about the delivery of projects in my electorate of Londonderry by the Liberals, because my electorate knows very well that you could have built the schools, the roads, the transport links and this basketball stadium as well, over 12 years, and you didn't do that either. I will take the question on notice.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 14 (a).

QUESTION 15 PAGE NO 27-29

PART A

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: There are four stages. I'm coming to the various stages. In relation to that project, the Commonwealth Government has now only committed \$115 million. Is that right?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice, but the Commonwealth Government did —

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Minister for Roads.

PART B

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Take it from me that that's the number included in their documentation. In the previous partnership agreement—that's the October budget 2022-23—the commitment by both the New South Wales Government and the Federal Government was \$230 million each. Would you accept that from me?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice because you're pointing at a document that I don't have in front of me.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART C

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: The commitment made by the Federal Government was \$230 million and the State Government commitment to the project was also \$230 million. That was for stages 2A and then 5 and 5A—5B, I think it was—of that project. The current commitment is \$115 million by the Federal Government. How much is going to be committed by the New South Wales Government?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have to take that on notice. I can assure you, Mr Tudehope and the people of Penrith and surrounds who drive on Mulgoa Road every day, like myself, that as Minister for Western Sydney, as Deputy Premier, I could not be more committed to getting progress on the various stages on Mulgoa Road. I'm not going to pretend here that I can answer as to the funding, any sort of funding reduction from the Commonwealth Government. We have been very, very forthcoming in opposing that and I can assure you that, at any available opportunity, I will be pushing for as much funding as possible for projects like Mulgoa Road.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART D

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: I'm just putting to you that there was funding available for \$230 million in 2022-23. In 2024-25, what was the commitment by the New South Wales Government to the funding?

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

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART E

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Do you know whether there has been a reduction in funding by the New South Wales Government to the Mulgoa Road project?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have taken that on notice.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART F

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Do you know whether there has been any reduction by the New South Wales Government in funding for the Mulgoa Road project?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know how many times I do have to say this. I'm really trying to give you the correct answer, Mr Tudehope. I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: You don't know.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have taken it on notice.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART G

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: The National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects funding agreements for 2024-25 show that the New South Wales Government has reduced its funding for this project from \$230 million to \$115 million. Does that accord with your recollection?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take the details of the profiling of this particular project on notice because I'm sure it won't be news to anyone on this Committee that the projects of the various stages of the upgrades of Mulgoa Road will take years and there will be different funding allocations in different years to deliver what is a very long project—a large project that started under the previous Government and we're continuing with. It's a very big commitment.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: I thank you for that answer because the federation funding agreement goes out to 2028-29, so why wouldn't you have expected the various stages of the funding agreements to be included in the out years, Deputy Premier?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have taken it on notice, Mr Tudehope.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

PART H

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Will you give a commitment that the \$115 million, which has been taken out of the funding for Mulgoa Road, will be recommitted in the coming budget?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will give a commitment—I have taken it on notice—that I will give the Committee the information on notice to ensure I give the Committee the right information. The Mulgoa Road project is something that both the New South Wales and the Commonwealth governments are committed to.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 15 (a).

QUESTION 16 PAGE NO 32

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I want to know, what's the plan and the policies in place to fix failing schools. It used to be the tailored support program. What do you do now as the Minister and what does the department do?

Ms PRUE CAR: We do a real level of tailored support for these schools that really need a lot of individual attention. Mr Dizdar, I'm sure you have got some details on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to. We still have that in operation. It was quite a successful intervention off the last lot of targets, where we have universal support—so everything that's required from the system. Explicit teaching is an example of that. When I reference the statement, that's universal across the system. Then we provide intensive support to those sites that need it most. These are our curriculum experts and wellbeing experts.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you take on notice a performance assessment of the tailored support program and examples where it gets results, and obviously examples where it's still struggling?

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to.

ANSWER

The Department of Education has revised and strengthened the School Support Delivery Framework following extensive consultation with schools, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation review of the Reading and Numeracy aspects of the support and feedback from the OECD which indicated that greater alignment was needed between the support provided and schools' improvement needs, self-assessment and external validation processes.

The new approach to Differentiated School Supports which has commenced in 2025, responds to this feedback by:

- Maintaining multiple types of support – Universal, Guided, Strategic, Intensive Strategic and Collaborative Support for Unique Settings
- Using schools' self-assessment against the School Excellence Framework (SEF) as part of the process for determining interventions and support
- Prioritising support for schools that have completed External Validation and are developing a new School Excellence Plan
- Using the SEF elements and SEF Improvement model to ensure it is based on a schools' improvement needs
- Revising guided support to provide collaboration between networks of schools is including literacy specialists, Directors, Educational Leadership and schools that are excelling in the relevant practices.

QUESTION 17 PAGE NO 33

Dr AMANDA COHN: Minister, I'm sure that you're aware of the situation at Chatswood High School with the synthetic turf field that deteriorated. Parents circulated photos on social media of torn-up bits of the turf in their children's shoes. Last year during budget estimates Mr Dizdar told us that natural turf is the preferred mode of delivery on any capital upgrades. I understand that the field will have to be replaced. Can you confirm that it will be replaced with natural turf?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will ask Ms Harrington to confirm what's happening at Chatswood.

LISA HARRINGTON: I think we talked about this last time. I mentioned that we try to install natural turf. It's definitely not our desire to put artificial turf in. I do need to come back to you on Chatswood. If we can do natural turf, we would do natural turf there. Obviously we're also looking at the report we talked about last time in terms of any changes that we may need to make. But, at a high level, we certainly don't strive to install artificial turf. It's only if we can't—if the natural turf won't thrive in that particular location.

ANSWER

The Department of Education oversees use of this facility during school hours. Willoughby City Council maintains this pitch under a Licence Agreement, and I am advised they have engaged specialist contractors to address surface issues reported by users of the field. Comprehensive remedial works were completed before students returned to school in February this year. The department continues to work closely with Council to ensure the turf remains safe and functional for both school and community use. The Council has advised the department they will continue to inspect and monitor the field and undertake any further works, if required.

QUESTION 18 PAGE NO 33 & 34

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thank you for taking the Chatswood question on notice. Similarly, we have discussed before the Educational Facility Standards and Guidelines and the planning department's guidelines for synthetic turf, which are both pretty clear that synthetic play surfaces need to be shaded to stop kids from getting burnt on them. I have seen extensive lists of synthetic turf surfaces at primary and high schools that are not shaded. How is the department dealing with this inconsistency?

LISA HARRINGTON: One of the things that is covered in the report is, obviously, all of those considerations: the health, environmental and social considerations. They're things that we're looking at. It's my understanding that the report and the guidelines are not finalised, so it is something that we're looking at now and monitoring. As I mentioned, we are very conscious of natural turf and the benefits of natural turf from an environmental perspective, but also the concerns you raise around students. We also engage really closely with the Rural Fire Service in terms of bushfire risk and those sorts of things. It's a consideration that we have when we're looking at whether we put in turf, what type of turf and what type of shade.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm sure you can appreciate the urgency for people who are concerned about this, that more and more synthetic turf seems to be going in while this work's undertaken. Have you got a timeline for the work that's being done?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'd like to come back to you on the "more and more synthetic turf is being installed" because it's not a preference of ours. We would only install artificial turf if the natural turf is not an option, so I'm not sure about it being installed widespread. I can come back to you. Certainly my understanding is that the asset management units work very closely with schools to try to make sure that natural turf is installed at every particular school.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Can I direct you a particular example, which is the Lindfield Learning Village. I understand its construction certificate in 2018 said that there must be no use of artificial or synthetic turf play surfaces on the site unless a stormwater management plan was prepared and approved detailing how stormwater would be treated prior to it being discharged into the national park. I'm told that synthetic turf has since gone in at that school. I appreciate this one may need to be taken on notice, but was the stormwater treatment plan done and approved, and how does this fit with—and I appreciate that it's been stated repeatedly, and Mr Dizdar has agreed—that you support natural turf when possible?

LISA HARRINGTON: I will definitely take that on notice and have a look at that. If there are particular conditions that are imposed on us with new schools and upgrades, we have to adhere to those conditions. If there's an example where there's a concern that something hasn't been followed, I'll definitely look at that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: As part of that, I have a second question about Lindfield Learning Village. I appreciate you will take it on notice. That 2018 construction certificate also stated that no artificial turf should be used for the proposed fire trails. Does the synthetic turf that has gone in impede on the approved fire trail design, and is it possible to make the fire trail plans publicly available?

LISA HARRINGTON: I will definitely look at that and take that on notice.

ANSWER

The synthetic turf playing field at Charles Bean Oval, on the corner of Eton Road and Shout Ridge, is a Ku-ring-gai Council facility and was not installed by the Department of Education.

A small area (approximately 60sqm) of synthetic turf was installed in a playground area south of Lindfield Learning Village, adjacent to the fire trail, as it is a high-use zone without adequate sunlight. The fire trail has been replaced with a sealed roadway providing access to the area.

While the Principal Certifying Authority has certified that the works at Lindfield Learning Village are compliant with the relevant building regulations and codes, the department is now looking at whether natural turf can instead be installed at this location.

Stormwater management requirements under the State Significant Development conditions were met through the preparation and submission of stormwater management plans to the certifier.

Bush Fire Risk Management Plans, including the location of fire trails, for the Ku-ring-gai area can be obtained from Council or the NSW Rural Fire Service.

The CHAIR: At the last budget estimates hearing we spoke about education providers for people working within the ECEC sector who had been closed down, or it had been determined that their qualifications were no longer valid. At the time I asked the questions of Mr Dizdar and was told that the collapse of a number of these providers led to a number of people not having appropriate qualifications. Do you have any update on that and what is being done to ensure that there are more training places within TAFE and other government-run providers?

MURAT DIZDAR: I will maybe get Mr Barraket to dive in, but my recollection there was that we worked very closely with ACECQA, the national authority. What seemed to be appeared to be a major concern by way of potential workforce impact pleasingly didn't play out like that. We did communicate with the entire sector and indicated to them that we're here to support. My understanding is that no service actually became non-viable from a staffing point of view. I think most of those that had their qualification cancelled were not actually employed in the sector. That's my recollection and briefing that I had, but I'll get Mr Barraket to give you a bit more detail.

MARK BARRAKET: Thank you, Mr Dizdar. We did work very closely with services when we identified that there was a worker within an early learning setting who had a qualification that might not have been compliant. Those workers had their qualifications cancelled. From my recollection, and I'm happy to take on notice the exact number, it was around 200 that we might have been looking at, but I will confirm that on notice. We were able to work service by service to make sure that they could retain their operations and minimise any impact that they may have had.

ANSWER

NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Regulatory Authority (ECEC RA) has concluded its investigation into the impact of cancelled qualifications issued by Luvium and Gills College.

NSW identified 194 students with cancelled qualifications for both Luvium and Gills College. NSW ECEC RA issued a warning letter to all 194 students and contacted 169 providers who are impacted. No provider has reported service viability issues as a result of these cancelled qualifications.

NSW ECEC RA will continue to provide support to providers in relation to cancelled ECEC qualifications as required.

The Australian Government's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations issued a fact sheet with FAQs for employers and the general public, which includes advice on options for impacted students to get appropriate qualifications.

The NSW Government continues to make available subsidised and fee free training in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Certificate III and Diploma qualifications.

Affected students who are eligible can access subsidised training through existing Smart and Skilled arrangements.

QUESTION 20 PAGE NO 35

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What have you done differently in schools out there since you have been in government?

Ms PRUE CAR: What we have done at a system level in response to the Auditor-General's criticism of the previous Government's approach—it's not me saying it; it's the Auditor-General saying it didn't work—is we have a significant, very targeted rural and remote strategy rolling out to target schools, to support schools, to have a focus on teacher housing, to look at hard-to-staff locations with specific targets for rural and remote schools at a central level. That is in response to Auditor-General's report that clearly said, "I'm sorry, but in respect to the previous Government's strategies, they just did not work."

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But your answer is teacher housing and rural strategies, all of which have been in place for some time. Are there fewer vacancies at a school like Walgett Community College now? Can you tell me how many vacant positions there are?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice about Walgett, but I tell you that across rural and regional New South Wales, they're down even more than they're down across New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It would be great if we could actually see that school by school, which goes back to my earlier request to get it for every school. That would be great.

ANSWER

Since 2023, there has been a 18% reduction in vacant positions at Walgett Community College - Primary School and High School.

QUESTION 21 PAGE NO 36

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am pleased you are aware of that. I don't know if you are aware—you should be, because I asked your officials about it last year—that there is no longer a bus run in Ivanhoe. I did ask about it and it was taken on notice. The response back was that it's a matter for Transport. But the P&C have advised me that the reason that school bus isn't running anymore is because the school lost funding. The school was actually running that bus run for families, but since they have had budget cuts, they can't run that anymore. That means parents are doing several hundred kilometres per week round trip to just get their children to school. Will you look to reinstate that funding for Ivanhoe so that their bus run can continue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to take what you're saying as true.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is.

Ms PRUE CAR: You're saying that the school funded that. I'm not sure of that. Usually, it is a matter for Transport, and that's why you would have received that answer. I will have to take that on notice, Ms Mitchell. I'll have to assume what you're saying is true, and I'll have to take that on notice about Ivanhoe.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's the P&C saying it. I believe they have also written to the local member about it, Roy Butler, who I thought had also referred it to you.

ANSWER

Queries regarding the provision of school bus services in regional areas should be directed to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads.

QUESTION 22 PAGE NO 35 & 36

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: ... There are also some concerns at that particular school that the preschool program, which used to be run through School of the Air, isn't running anymore. They're now doing a get ready for kindy program, and the numbers for that have gone down significantly. Are you aware of that issue?

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

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you look to see whether a proper preschool program could be reinstated at Ivanhoe Central School?

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me take that on notice. You're saying that they're doing a kindergarten readiness program instead?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but the numbers are down significantly in terms of the enrolments for that as well.

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me take that on notice.

ANSWER

Ivanhoe Central School has participated in the Community Safety Net (CSN) Pilot program since 2022. The CSN program has been adjusted to accommodate the requirements outlined in the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law.

Children are eligible to participate if they are 3, turning 4 by 31 July in the year before they commence kindergarten.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You might remember at the end of last year the member for Northern Tablelands asked you a question about Burren Junction Public School and the parents fundraising to pay for a teacher after, again, money was cut from the budget to allow those additional teachers to be in those rural schools. You said in response to the member, "I look forward to resolving the matter raised by the member." Have you given more funding or an extra teaching position back to Burren Junction Public School?

Ms PRUE CAR: I do remember the member for Northern Tablelands asking me this question about Burren Junction, which is in the electorate of Barwon, I believe.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, it's in Northern Tablelands. Sorry, you're right, it's in Barwon. The member for Northern Tablelands asked you about it.

Ms PRUE CAR: The question was about something in Barwon. I did say that. I'd have to take on notice whether there was any update from any of the officials about what's happening at Burren Junction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does it concern you that parents are fundraising for a teaching position that they want for their children at their local school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I tell you what, as a system every change we have made is about making sure that schools spend their money on teachers. In fact, the whole decision we made to ensure that money was not saved up for anything other than the teaching and learning for children—that guides every decision that we make.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but you have got a scenario here where a P&C is fundraising—

Ms PRUE CAR: It concerns me about Burren Junction—of course that concerns me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Unfortunately, it's not in isolation. The P&C at Gravesend Public School is also fundraising.

Ms PRUE CAR: Gravesend? Okay, we'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know where that is? Gravesend? Any idea where that is in the State?

Ms PRUE CAR: I just said I would take that on notice. I have not been to Gravesend.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know where it is?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I don't know where Gravesend is. I'm not going to pretend that I do, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Where is it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's just outside of Moree—between Moree and Warialda.

Ms PRUE CAR: I did come with Mr Dizdar, who is a renowned geography teacher, but I didn't think I was going to get a quiz test on where things are in New South Wales.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: You have got to know your schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It's *Mastermind*.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, it's not a joke to that P&C, which is now fundraising to pay for a teacher a day a week.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I know, and I have taken it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I still have questions to ask you. There are also concerns about work health and safety for the staff in those small schools. You have got parents in a number of schools in regional and remote areas literally now fundraising to pay for a teacher because of your budget cuts. How is that restoring

any faith in public education, when you have got multiple P&Cs forced to literally pay the bills to keep a teacher that they want in the classroom?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, if you give me examples of where this is a concern, I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Burren Junction, Gravesend, Rowena, Pallamallawa—they are all looking at it. And Croppa Creek.

Ms PRUE CAR: Okay, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you look to reinstate funding at those schools where P&Cs are paying teacher salaries?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are going to take those particular schools on notice and have a look at what's happening at those schools and how we support those schools in the provision of high-quality public education of children. That's what they deserve.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, they do. So, will you look to reinstate teaching positions in those schools if that's what the parents and the communities are fundraising for?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are going to be working with those schools. I have just taken it on notice.

ANSWER

All NSW public schools are provided a centrally funded staffing entitlement, based on student enrolment. This formula-based staffing model includes a specific provision for small schools.

As of the start of Term 1, 2025, none of the schools listed had a vacant teaching position.

QUESTION 24 PAGE NO 38

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For Willyama, it's been a year since you announced that you would do a knockdown and a rebuild. I appreciate, with the site, that you don't have to have done the knockdown to start a rebuild, but why has nothing happened for 12 months?

Ms PRUE CAR: There is something happening.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're planning for the rebuilding of Willyama High School.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you haven't started the demolition of the old school.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're working with the insurer, and Willyama will be rebuilt.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You said you're in discussions with icare about that. Have you received any advice from icare about what sort of funding you will be getting for that rebuild through the insurance?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will have to take those commercial-in-confidence matters on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you got a funding amount for the entire amount through insurance?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know how much clearer I can make this. The rebuild of Willyama High School will be funded. The Premier has said it, the Treasurer has said it, and I have said it.

ANSWER

The demolition of Willyama High School's existing buildings will not impact the rebuilding of the new school. The Department of Education continues to work with the insurer, icare.

QUESTION 25 PAGE NO 40

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great. We will come to you with those questions, and we'd appreciate a proper response. Are you still committed to a high school as part of the St Leonards education precinct?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take on notice what's happening at St Leonards, unless Ms Harrington knows what's happening at St Leonards.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can come back to Ms Harrington. The budget had an allocation for a primary school, but there's no mention of a high school anymore. Have you walked away from a high school in that particular—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take on notice what the plan is for St Leonards.

ANSWER

After 12 years in office, the former Liberal National government had undertaken very little work to progress this project.

The Department of Education continues to plan for the precinct and monitor the service demand in the area.

QUESTION 26 PAGE NO 40

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The metro dive site at Chatswood, for the new primary school there—there was \$23 million allocated in the budget for that school. I think it's meant to be part of a mixed-use development on the site. Do you have any updates in relation to that particular school project?

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

ANSWER

The former Liberal National Government had 12 years to deliver a new primary school in Chatswood, including 6 and a half in which the local Liberal member was either the Treasurer or the Premier. During that period, the former Liberal National Government did not deliver a school.

There is currently capacity at existing primary schools within the local area, including Chatswood Public School which recently underwent a major upgrade. The Minns Labor Government is also upgrading Cammeray Public School and Northbridge Public School in the local area.

An update was shared with the community in 2024 regarding the works that have been done at schools across the local area to deliver more capacity.

QUESTION 27 PAGE NO 41

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, Ms Harrington, we'll come back this afternoon. Moving now to the old Meadowbank Public School site, do you still intend for the Department of Education to retain formal ownership of that land?

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

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you rule out ever selling or developing that land in the future?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take that on notice in regard to the land at Meadowbank, as I just said.

ANSWER

The ownership of the land will be retained by the NSW Government. The land has been rezoned from its original use as a school to recreational use.

QUESTION 28 PAGE NO 42

The CHAIR: It seems unlikely, in a cost-of-living crisis, that voluntary contributions are going up because people are suddenly flush with cash. So there's something happening here. Will you publish the school-by-school data so that we can see who the offenders are?

MURAT DIZDAR: We have also capped voluntary contributions: It's \$101 for a high school and \$51 for a primary school. We have capped those in the last four years. We actually haven't allowed escalation to occur, to recognise the cost of living. I want to repeat, voluntary contributions—

The CHAIR: Sorry, in terms of my question, though, will you release the school-by-school data?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure if I have got it school by school. Let me go back and have a look. I have got the system-level data, but I'm happy to have a look.

The CHAIR: Do you think that parents are forking out money because they see their school not having sufficient funding to actually be able to provide the education for their kids?

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not acceptable by any stretch of the imagination. So whether it comes to the issue that Mr Dizdar was pointing to—about parents being asked to pay "fees" that are not applicable to public schools in New South Wales—your question does go to a broader challenge about resourcing for public schools. We did inherit this system. We are spending record amounts on public education, and we have to get full funding for our schools to try and get to the root cause of some of those challenges.

The CHAIR: I understand, Minister, that the school-by-school data was published previously, because I know that we had a good look at it in the past. But it hasn't been released for 2024. Will that be released?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to go back and have a look at it. I only have the global figures in front of me from 2017. Pleasingly, there is a drop from 2017. But you are right in saying that between 2022 and 2023—2023 is the latest I have got. We might not have the 2024 data. Let me go back.

The CHAIR: The 2024 data was in the annual report, and it's just under \$51 million in contributions from parents and the community.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back with accuracy because there's something called voluntary contributions, and there's also something called subject contributions in the high school area. So let me get the accurate figures.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The annual report for 2024 also has a little line in it about \$20 million worth of Restart NSW grants being returned to the Restart fund. What's that about? Were there cancelled projects?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice or ask Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm just looking at Mr Grant, if he knows anything about that. We might just get him up to the microphone. He leads our finance area. He might have the answer.

MARK GRANT: It is best taken on notice because there's a combination of amounts that contribute to that figure, and it would be quite easily outlined.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's come back.

The CHAIR: That would be useful to know. Obviously, \$20 million could go somewhere.

ANSWER

Calendar year school level voluntary contribution data is published annually in June/July by the Department of Education's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). The 2024 calendar year school level data is expected to be published in June/July 2025. General information about voluntary school contributions is outlined on the department's website at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/schools-funding/voluntary-school-contributions>.

The \$51.4 million 2023-24 'School generated contributions' published in the department's 2024 Annual Report, under Note 3(d) 'Grants and other contributions' relates to donations from school P&C organisations as well as non-P&C organisations. It does not include voluntary school contributions. The department's financial statements contained in the Annual Report are prepared on a financial year basis (1 July to 30 June).

The \$20 million was returned to the Restart NSW Fund (Restart) after the completion of a funding reconciliation to reflect the progress of the Restart funded projects. The amount did not relate to a cancelled project or projects.

QUESTION 29 PAGE NO 42

Dr AMANDA COHN: I would like to come back to the Minister, having had my discussion with Ms Harrington. I have been told multiple times that natural turf is preferred on all school sites. Clearly there are schools across the State that have unshaded synthetic turf. That goes against the Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines. Does that concern you? What work have you done to actually understand the extent of this issue across the State?

Ms PRUE CAR: That does concern me because, when it comes to the safety of our students, on said synthetic turf that's unshaded, that's obviously a concern. I think we probably need to go and have a good look at this, and I will need to ask the department to come back to me with what is the plan in areas where this actually applies.

ANSWER

Natural turf is preferred on all school sites, with synthetic material considered only in high-use zones, shaded areas, where the growth of natural turf is difficult. In some instances, synthetic turf is installed by lessees for sporting facilities as part of community use agreements.

QUESTION 30 PAGE NO 43

Dr AMANDA COHN: I would like to come back to the Minister, having had my discussion with Ms Harrington. I have been told multiple times that natural turf is preferred on all school sites. Clearly there are schools across the State that have unshaded synthetic turf. That goes against the Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines. Does that concern you? What work have you done to actually understand the extent of this issue across the State? .

Ms PRUE CAR: That does concern me because, when it comes to the safety of our students, on said synthetic turf that's unshaded, that's obviously a concern. I think we probably need to go and have a good look at this, and I will need to ask the department to come back to me with what is the plan in areas where this actually applies.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can also add that it is an area of importance for us, particularly with NESA's rollout of the new curriculum, to use that opportunity to call out not just the traditional PDHPE domain of K-10 but also where the intersectionality sits across the early years framework and other subject areas, to support our workforce in how they can address respectful relationships. It's a focus area of ours, where we are doing some work.

Dr AMANDA COHN: As part of that answer, I'm also interested in what evaluation is being done to assess people's capability to teach this curriculum, and also the impact of that education. I appreciate it's new; it's a cultural change.

Ms PRUE CAR: We'd have to take that all on notice, because it is quite a change. It will be rolled out age appropriately for every stage, because respectful relationships education in year 10 is so different to the respectful relationship discussion you might have with a year 2 child, which is, "Don't snatch something off someone in your class, without asking, at least." I don't know. But it has to be age appropriate, so we'd need to take the evaluation on notice as well.

ANSWER

An evaluation plan is currently being developed for the Department of Education's Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) program. This is being developed alongside the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework for the Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2028.

In NSW, respectful relationships education is essential learning and included in each stage of learning from Kindergarten to Year 10. In the new NSW Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) K-6 and Year 7-10 syllabuses (2024), age-appropriate respectful relationships education has been strengthened and made clearer through essential content. There is now explicit inclusion of consent in each stage of learning in an age-appropriate way.

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) develops and publishes a range of resources to help teachers implement the NSW K-12 syllabuses. These include syllabus introductory videos, a glossary, teaching advice, teaching resources, professional learning courses and a record of changes, publicly available on the NESA website. NESA also develops and publishes parent and student resources.

To support the teaching and learning of respectful relationships and consent in the new PDHPE K–6 and 7–10 syllabuses (2024), NESA provides examples and teaching advice to illustrate ways in which the content can be taught. NESA has also developed a teacher resource on respectful relationships and consent to support teaching and learning of consent in online and offline environments.

QUESTION 31 PAGE NO 43 & 44

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, thanks for your answers today. I think it has been quite a good session. Along those lines, can you outline progress you have made in reducing teacher workload outside of classroom teaching, which was a big election commitment of yours?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going to sit here and say that reducing teacher workload outside of the core business of teaching is an easy undertaking. It is going to require—and we're in the middle of this work—everything possible, including ensuring that we get rid of and streamline as many policies and procedures as possible, and slowing the rate of change that we impose on our teachers. Every time the department thought that it had a new idea—that has slowed down. We have streamlined mandatory training, which began at the beginning of this year, in term 1. I'm receiving lots of feedback about how that has worked. Teachers have all sorts of mandatory OHS training and things like that. But for those who have done it, we are making sure that it can be streamlined so they don't have to keep doing the same hours and hours at the beginning of every year.

Also, this might sound a bit "you know", but the stuff we're doing with AI has really helped teachers in terms of workload. We have our platform called EduChat, which has meant that, for example, if you are a teacher taking a class on an excursion, because the EduChat is in-built with the department policies, you could type in, "I'm taking year 5 to the zoo. Please help me with a risk assessment." It will spit something out that you can use instead of you having to spend hours doing that. I am not declaring victory yet on that. We're looking at every possible avenue, because teachers want to teach—a novel idea—and we need to be able to support them to do that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have you got a bottom line on the time that has been saved in the average teacher's working day?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice in terms of the time. It's not an easy thing to do but we're trying it from every angle.

ANSWER

See answer to supplementary question 128.

QUESTION 32 PAGE NO 46

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, are there still department offices in George Street?

Ms PRUE CAR: Are there still in George Street—where?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just down the road, 259 George Street—the Department of Education office there.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there currently a refurbishment underway of some of the offices, including the secretary's office in that building?

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

ANSWER

I am advised there is no refurbishment underway at the Department of Education's half floor office space at 259 George Street, Sydney.

QUESTION 33 PAGE NO 46 & 47

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just confirming that, thank you. Minister, you made some public comments towards the end of last year about bullying in schools and said that kids who repeatedly engaging in bullying behaviour will be shown the door. How many students were suspended last year specifically for bullying?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice. We are very serious about bullying. In fact, not only are we serious about bullying within our own public education system but this Government is actually leading the first cross-sectoral approach to bullying via NESA and the Schools Advisory Council, for the first time ever. It's pretty outrageous that that never happened before.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You did media last year talking about the number of kids suspended in the first six months of 2024, saying your policy is having an impact and saying that bullies are going to be shown the door, but you don't know how many students were suspended specifically for bullying last year?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm taking it on notice because I think it's fair and reasonable that I don't have that number in the back of my head.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Rough idea?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm taking it on notice so that I can provide the Committee with the correct answer.

ANSWER

The Department of Education collects suspension and expulsion data, with published factsheets made available online at <https://data.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/nsw-education-suspensions-and-expulsions-in-nsw-government-schools>. 2024 data is not yet available.

QUESTION 34 PAGE NO 49

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not arguing about that. As I said, I was interested in the excursions. In terms of EduChat, how many people in the department are currently working on that?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We have had 30,000 staff members who have accessed EduChat. It's available to all staff members now, both in schools and in the central office as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a team in your area, Mr Graham, who is responsible for it? I'm more interested in the DOE end.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes. The Chief Information Officer has control of the technical side. They do the architecture and all of the technical bits. Our teaching and learning people work on the teaching and learning side, but they do other things as well. They're not just dedicated to that. They integrate it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take on notice—and I appreciate what you're saying about multiple responsibilities—how many departmental staff are working, in some capacity, on EduChat?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes. We can look at that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been a cost so far on that project and the value per school? How are you managing that?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We can come back to you with that. The reason we have done it is it's very cost efficient. It's much cheaper than getting a subscription to any of the major services. It's been a very small project given the impact it has had.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide the budget on notice?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: There is no cost to schools. It's pro bono.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. I just meant how much is the department spending on it? I'm just trying to work out the spend and what that value equates to per school. That was my question.

MARTIN GRAHAM: It's excellent value.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have there been any external contractors or services helping you with the development of EduChat?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm not aware of any, but we can look at that.

ANSWER

NSWEduChat is currently the safest and most cost-effective generative AI tool available for our schools and staff.

There are a total of 7 Department of Education staff working in some capacity on NSWEduChat. In 2024, the project engaged additional contracted services to assist with skilled tasks required for accessibility and safety. The budget for financial year 2024-25 is approximately \$5 million.

QUESTION 35 PAGE NO 53

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What about NSBTS back on class? How many have gone back into class?

MURAT DIZDAR: We have been realigning. We answered to the Committee previously, division by division. We have had some NSBTS return back to the classroom. Can I also make it very clear to the Committee—you'd really appreciate and respect this; it was the same when you were the Minister of the day—NSBTS are on a term appointment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that.

MURAT DIZDAR: They're taken from the classroom to provide expertise. It's often a one-, two-, three-year appointment, and they go back to the classroom.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When we were here last year in estimates, we got some figures from Mr Graham about those roles that either hadn't been filled or weren't continuing.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many of those are now back on class allocations?

MURAT DIZDAR: I will just see if Mr Graham has got the figure, but there have been some that have returned.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you got it, Mr Graham?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have the final figure. We can come back with the final figure. There were empty positions and there were people who moved to other divisions. We can come back with how many actually went back to schools as a result of the realignment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide that by the end of the day, or on notice? When will we get that?

MARTIN GRAHAM: That will have to be on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you can give me a figure on notice?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We have to go through each individual case to find that out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you can provide that on notice?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes.

ANSWER

120 Non-School Based Teaching Staff have returned to a school-based role.

QUESTION 36 PAGE NO 53

The CHAIR: Can I ask you, Secretary, whether the department has done any investigations in relation to providing air conditioning at Balmain Public School?

MURAT DIZDAR: I would have to take the specifics on notice, unless Ms Harrington—I'm looking at her. No. Around installing air conditioning at Balmain Public School?

The CHAIR: If you could.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me look into it.

The CHAIR: Yes, whether there is capacity to install the air conditioning and also what the outcome of those investigations has been.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back on notice, if that's okay.

ANSWER

A project to upgrade the distribution boards at Balmain Public School is in planning and will be completed by the end of Term 2. This will balance the electrical load to allow for the installation of air conditioning in the future.

QUESTION 37 PAGE NO 53

The CHAIR: Has someone already raised with you the overcrowding on buses going to Balmain Sydney Secondary College?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't recall. I'm again looking at Ms Harrington around that. I don't recall. If you have got any representation, we're happy to take it.

The CHAIR: I'd ask you to have a look at that one.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, we're happy to look at that.

ANSWER

This question should be directed to the Minister for Transport.

QUESTION 38 PAGE NO 54

The CHAIR: In the latest icare annual report, they talk about a 20 per cent increase in motor accident claims over the past year for the Department of Education. Do you have any visibility over what that is about? Why has there been a spike in claims?

MURAT DIZDAR: I will see if our chief operating officer has any details. Icare is the government insurer, as you know. We do look at our fleet. We have got a fleet of vehicles—not only in the support office arm, but we have got schools that also purchase or lease minibuses et cetera for transportation. Chair, you may or may not know that all government vehicles have got to be fitted with something called telematics, which is a log-on and log-off system for the safety of the driver. It can give you data. If I had one of my employees, for example, speeding, it can give you that and I can take that up as line management. That, I'm going to tell you, has come into play in about the last 18 months. It has been a government requirement. They weren't previously fitted on vehicles. I'm not across the increase in accidents you refer to. I'm just looking at Mark Grant—he may not either.

MARK GRANT: I'm sorry, no.

MURAT DIZDAR: We might need to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: It's just quite a significant increase in one year—a 20 per cent increase. If you could take it on notice, that would be good.

MURAT DIZDAR: It is. Let me look at that.

ANSWER

I am advised the Accumulated Damage excess was not initially charged when first introduced by icare in the Insurance Statement of Cover in July 2021. In December 2022, icare notified the Department of Education that charges would begin, with the first payment made in November 2023.

To minimise excess payments, Fleet Administrators enhanced processes by conducting regular vehicle inspections, ensuring any damage was recorded closer to the incident date. This process reduced the accumulated damage charges, however increased the number of individual claims.

QUESTION 39 PAGE NO 54

The CHAIR: How many teachers are currently off work due to a workers compensation claim?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me see if I have got any data. Just bear with me, Chair. I might have to take that on notice, if that's okay. The number of teachers currently on workers comp?

The CHAIR: That would be good, and also knowing what percentage of the workers compensation claims involve psychological injury.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, let me come back to that. We have got a health safety directorate that works with health safety advisers on the individual case and the insurer. Obviously, it is paramount to try to get return to work as expediently as possible. Let me get you the data on the number of teachers, I think you asked, and also psychological injury.

ANSWER

The Department of Education is currently supporting 2,338 employees (2.2% of workforce) in their recovery and return to work following workplace injury. The majority of teachers being supported in their recovery at work are undertaking suitable work duties as part of a recovery at work program.

23% of all reported workers compensation claims in the 2024-25 financial year to date are psychological injury claims.

QUESTION 40 PAGE NO 55

The CHAIR: As one of the departments that has historically had a relatively high rate of psychological injury claims, you'd obviously be paying close attention to the announcement that was made yesterday by the Premier about reviewing workers compensation in relation to psychological injury. Have you been consulted by Treasury on that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I care sits under Treasury. We work very closely with them. We do, as an executive, look at our workers comp data. I have been concerned with the increase over time. We are a very large workforce, Chair. There are 95,000 classroom practitioners, about 140,000 on a fortnightly payroll in the organisation. We are large, but I don't want to use that as an excuse. This goes to what Mr Ruming was talking about by way of retention and looking after your workforce. I can tell you that, last year, with Ms Summerhayes's leadership, we did roll out mandatory psychosocial training in principal networks. That was vital, important information to our principals, who are the site leaders at every site, around how to minimise psychosocial injury—how to best avoid that as a risk in the workforce and how to best deal with it and seek system support when it does exist.

The CHAIR: When were you consulted on those reforms?

MURAT DIZDAR: The announcement you referred to just happened yesterday.

The CHAIR: I understand Treasury has been working for some time, consulting.

MURAT DIZDAR: The mandatory training that we rolled out, which is obligatory on every agency—we undertook that throughout last year.

The CHAIR: But in relation to actually consulting on the reforms being proposed to the workers compensation system in relation to psychological injury, I understand from various annual reports that there has been consultation between the Department of Education and the Treasury.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we have definitely had input. If you're after specifics, I'm happy to come back to you.

The CHAIR: It would be good to know when that consultation started.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

ANSWER

The Department of Education works closely with all NSW government agencies to ensure the best outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

QUESTION 41 PAGE NO 55

The CHAIR: Can you come back on the number of teachers currently off work, the average time off and the percentage of psychological injury? Could you break that down by age as well just to see whether or not those psychological injuries are within the younger workforce or whether they're across other ages?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure. If we have got that, I'm happy to do so, Chair.

ANSWER

As at March 2025, approximately 652 teachers are currently not working. These teachers have lost on average 187 days from work. This number may include days lost during periods when an employee was working reduced hours as part of a graded return to work program, as well as days lost during periods of total incapacity for work.

63% of teachers not currently working have psychological injuries.

Listed below is a breakdown of employee psychological injury cases by age as at March 2025:

Age Group	Number of cases
20-49	157
50-79	258
Total	415

QUESTION 42 PAGE NO 56

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I have a couple of workforce issues. Have all of the unvaccinated staff come back now?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think we wrote to them when those orders were lifted indicating to them they're welcome to join us. If their accreditation had lapsed, we were happy to support them in their accreditation. As you know, Mr Latham, we followed the orders of the day. As soon as they were lifted, we did communicate. I'm happy to come back on notice, if you want me to, on the number that did return and take up that opportunity.

ANSWER

Following the removal of the requirement for all employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 contact was made with all current and former employees subject to Professional and Ethical Standards Directorate investigations for non-compliance with the previous vaccination mandate, to advise of the individual impact of that change.

Employees who separated or were dismissed were eligible to apply for roles and have their approval to teach reinstated if they had active accreditation with NSW Education Standards Authority, a current Working with Children Check Clearance, and there were no other issues or concerns being managed in relation to their performance or conduct at the time of separation from the Department of Education.

There is no available data on which of these eligible employees were re-employed by the department.

QUESTION 43 PAGE NO 58

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Then are you also able to provide on notice, Mr Dizdar—I know you talked about the staffing allocation of numbers per school. Would you be able to provide, for each school, what their actual staffing entitlement is to the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: The census date for that is 17 March that the student numbers go in. You'll remember we put in anticipated enrolments in October the year before. So the actual numbers come off 17 March, and we finalise staffing at the end of term 1. So we don't have that now, but we will.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have that data for last year then if you could provide the most recent data you have for that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Of what we provided by way of staffing entitlement?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: We would have that. We can definitely give you that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. I appreciate it will be quite a long spreadsheet, but just interested to know what the entitlement is for each of those schools. If it's from last year, that's fine. We will ask you for this year's when we see you all again.

ANSWER

Entitlement data in relation to the 2025 census date has not yet been finalised.

QUESTION 44 PAGE NO 58

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but there used to be—and I appreciate your point. A lot of schools use their own budget allocations to employ above entitlement. Do you keep a list of the schools that are employing above entitlement, or is everyone now just back to what their staffing allocation is?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, they have got their staffing allocation and they have still have ACIP roles.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so could you provide that for each school? If it is last year's data, that is fine. How many ACIP roles and which schools have them.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we can take on notice and provide is—I think we have got the quantum of ACIP teacher roles. We can do that. If I have got it by school, we can do that.

ANSWER

Above Centrally Identified Positions (ACIPs) are roles that a principal has requested the recruitment team to create and are funded from non-centrally funded entitlement. ACIP positions can be fully or partially paid for by centrally funded entitlement.

ACIP categorisation is not mandatorily captured.

QUESTION 45 PAGE NO 59

MURAT DIZDAR: We struck a new five-year staffing agreement. In that staffing agreement, we moved up in the pecking order transfer points. What used to happen was you accumulate transfer points for years of service in a school: one, two, four, eight, 12. Those points—this is how people characterised it to me as secretary, a bit like Qantas frequent flyer points. You couldn't use them, you couldn't get to any flights, so they'd become worthless. So we moved them up in the order so that the transfer points can count. Colleagues that have given us good service in more complex settings, or in rural and regional, had primacy to then move into other locations.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When did that change?

MURAT DIZDAR: We struck the staffing agreement in 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Do you have any data—and I'm happy for you to provide it on notice—of how many merit selection or local appointment from a principal saying, "I really want Mr Dizdar. You're here at the moment. I want you to be in my permanent role, but I have got people who might have been out in the Far West who are coming to my school in the beachside suburb". Has there been a reduction in that local principal merit selection role? That's what we are hearing and I wanted the numbers.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll see what data we do have, but they can't say—just giving you an example—they can't say, "Murat, we want you." They can only run a merit process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. Are there less merit processes now because of that change? That is essentially my question.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go have a look at the data.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you provide some data as to how many merit selection appointments there have been?

MURAT DIZDAR: I just put on record that moving those transfer points up has been a really good move because those colleagues who have done great service in complex settings were unable to use those points at all; they were worthless.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not disputing that, but my question goes to some concern from principals who have now not got the opportunities they had in the past because of the changes. I just want some raw figures around that, as best as you can provide them.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's see what data I have got, Ms Mitchell.

ANSWER

From the period 29 April 2024 to 31 December 2024 (that is, the first three school Terms that the current Agreement has been in operation), 15% of all classroom teacher vacancies and 82% of executive and principal vacancies were filled via open merit selection.

Further information about transfer points including a list of schools with 4, 6 and 8 points is available at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-at-education/roles-and-locations/roles-at-education/teaching/staffing-procedure-appendices/transfer-system#Schools1>.

QUESTION 46 PAGE NO 60

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, does the department monitor antisemitic incidents? Is there a central list kept in terms of monitoring this level of activity?

MURAT DIZDAR: We do, through that hotline, now monitor. Somewhere between August and October we established it. We do monitor any reported incidence of religious intolerance and we act on it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, there was a media report in September 2024 where an Education spokesman said that reports of antisemitism were fully investigated, with students disciplined if they were found to have acted inappropriately. How many investigations took place in the calendar year of 2024?

MURAT DIZDAR: Every incident has been dealt with at the school level system support. We have seconded police in the NSW Department of Education. If the matter is of a potentially criminal or serious nature, we work with those police. I urge the Committee, like the Faith Affairs Council has reminded me, to always respect the age and stage of an individual, and to respect their mental cognitive capacity. We have got students with disability, students who are new arrivals et cetera. I'm not offering those as any excuse for any action of religious intolerance. But I'm also the education arm, and educating young people around it is really important. Where we have needed, we have taken disciplinary action and, where we have needed, we have taken police action. I don't apologise for that, because the community want and deserve safe schools and safe communities.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Picking up that point, Mr Dizdar, how many students were disciplined in 2024?

MURAT DIZDAR: Disciplined for?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Relevant to what you're speaking of.

MURAT DIZDAR: For acts of religious intolerance?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Correct.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have data in front of me. I'm happy to take it on notice.

ANSWER

Incidents relating to acts of religious intolerance are managed promptly by the relevant school and in line with appropriate policies including the Student Behaviour Policy which is available on the Department of Education's website at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2006-0316>.

The department does not hold centrally kept records for school level behaviour response.

QUESTION 47 PAGE NO 62

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, if I could move to acknowledgement of country, in the current budget environment parents are asking around costs relating to specific payments for welcomes to country and acknowledgements of country at events that are organised, sponsored or otherwise convened by the Department of Education and any associated bodies or entities—in terms of some of the costs of these ceremonies.

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to thank the New South Wales AECG. I want to thank Aboriginal community liaison officers, the land council. We work with them and they often provide volunteers—sometimes it's students, sometimes it's an Elder in community, who deliver those in the main. But I'd have to take on notice—I don't have it in front of me—if we have paid for any of those at large events.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I make reference to the New South Wales education showcase in September 2023. On the agenda, there was a welcome to country by Gadigal Elder Uncle Allen Madden. Would there have been payment for that service?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, what event was that, Ms Merton?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The New South Wales education showcase, September 2023.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll have to take that on notice. It was a great event. Uncle Madden is a very respected Aboriginal Elder. I think he says in his welcome to country, which always sticks with me, there's only two things sure in life—taxes and death—and that Aboriginal land always was and always will be. He's delivered welcomes to country for us on a number of occasions and they have always been meaningful, but let me take on notice if there was a payment or not.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. Parents are also asking that a lot of welcome to country ceremonies, or smoking ceremonies, are being held across the schools, and they're wondering what the cost may be relevant to those?

MURAT DIZDAR: Unless Ms Summerhayes has any different working knowledge, my working knowledge on the ground is that largely it is done by our great colleagues in the AECG Elders in the community, and it's not a fee for service. In the main, it's done voluntarily and that goes to the heart of education in community. But there will be formal instances, large occasions, where we do work with land council, and there might be a payment around that, so I'm happy to come back to the Committee.

ANSWER

There is no fixed cost for delivery of a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country for events that are organised, sponsored, or otherwise convened by the Department of Education.

For the 2023 NSW Education Innovation Showcase, there was no payment made by the department to Uncle Allen Madden.

QUESTION 48 PAGE NO 62

The CHAIR: You know I love looking through annual reports. One of the annual report disclosures that interested me was in relation to work health and safety prosecutions being brought against the department. Can you tell us what that's about?

MURAT DIZDAR: There can be injury management claims. There can be claims that are around our handling of particular matters, whether they be asbestos or whatever. Is there a specific you want to refer to?

The CHAIR: It says, "There was one legal proceeding by SafeWork NSW against the department." There's just the one. Do we know what that is?

MURAT DIZDAR: We work very closely with SafeWork NSW. Let me take on notice what that particular one may be. We are to be a model litigant in proceedings like this, but we work very closely with them. Let me come back on detail.

The CHAIR: I'm not aware of disclosures previously about legal proceedings from SafeWork.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not aware of it, but you're calling it out from the annual report, so I'm happy to come back with details.

ANSWER

The legal proceeding referenced in the Department of Education's 2023-24 Annual Report refers to the Safe Work NSW charges related to asbestos management practices and building works done at Castle Hill High School between 2015 and 2018.

The CHAIR: Something completely different. Can I ask about the numbers of people employed by the department who have a disability? I understand it's still only 1.6 per cent for the Department of Education, which is really low and way below the targets of the previous Government that they never reached, either, across the whole of the public sector. Why is that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I think you'll be heartened to know that this has been a topic of discussion at secretaries boards with all agencies. I know that the Public Service Commissioner is indicating that we're reporting on two datasets, both PMES and also workforce data. You might be reading out our workforce data, and I want to improve that, Ms Boyd, because I still believe there's a reluctance from our people to say, "I have a disability", because of perceived or genuine fear that that may impact on their employment. But the PMES results are a lot stronger for Education in people calling out the fact that they have got a disability. I guess I'm saying, Chair, there's this dichotomy between the PMES results and the workforce data, and we have got to improve that. The way to improve that is to make sure that our diversity, inclusion and disability strategy in the workplace is very strong— that we do accommodate and make adjustments. In Mr Latham's line of questioning with workplace presence, we have got to emphasise the fact that adjustments can be made in the workplace.

The CHAIR: I think that's one of the issues we have seen in other non-public workplaces—the difference between people who identify as people with disability and people who feel that they are in a position to ask for adjustments. The idea that people feel that they can't ask for an adjustment is problematic. As you say, there is stigma and other things. But also it can be an indication that the people who are more likely to require adjustment are just not getting employed in the first place. Obviously, the cohort of disabled people is broad and diverse. What are you doing to encourage specifically people where, I guess, perhaps we need to do things slightly differently and accommodate people with differences?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just assure you, Ms Boyd as Chair, that this is a matter that's very close to my heart, and I'm representing the whole of government with the Public Service Commissioner as the co-chairs of the disability advisory council across government—because the issue you're talking about cuts across all agencies. I refuse to hide behind that. I think there's room for improvement, both in our employment practices at the time of employment, making sure that our advertisements are welcoming, embracing, and indicate that we do look for diversity, people with disability are welcome, they will be welcome and adjustments will be made. I think there's room for improvement there, and then how each of us, as line managers of divisions can embrace that as well. I don't deny there's a way to go here. Mr Ruming might talk to some of the work we do have underway that we have got to report on, back to government.

The CHAIR: Okay.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just also, while he's coming up, take on notice—because I want to give you the PMES figure of disability in education versus the one you have read out, which is a lot more heartening. But the workforce data says where the workforce is still reluctant. That data should be the same—one and the same.

The CHAIR: Yes. Just before we come to Mr Ruming, one of the issues we have discussed before is in relation to school infrastructure not being accessible across the board. The responses that I have received in the past are that if a student has a particular need—for example, a student in a wheelchair who can't go up steps and

things and there are no lifts or other accommodations—there is a legal responsibility to then accommodate that person.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The CHAIR: But when we're talking about teachers and other staff who might be applying for positions, are you concerned that that lack of accessible infrastructure is also providing a barrier to hiring people with disability?

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, I wish I could start from a blank canvas. As you would respect and appreciate, I have got schools that have been there since 1848, since we kicked off, so it looks very different to Wentworth Point that I just opened with the Deputy Premier, or Melonba primary and high school—full accessibility. That would be the ultimate A-grade ticket. I have got to maximise the funding available to me, and that makes me always, with Ms Harrington, make sure I can make adjustments for any student or staff member with disability. I have got to prioritise that, and obviously I want to go across my footprint and have that in place everywhere, in time, so that I can embrace and welcome. At the moment it is a little too reactionary and it would be beneficial if I can get to a stage where I can be more proactive around that.

The CHAIR: What are you doing to ensure that particular individuals who want to work in a particular school aren't disadvantaged by the fact that the school would then need to have adjustments to accommodate?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I first of all say they're welcome if they're going to be new employees or ongoing employees who may have a disability, encounter a disability. They should reach out in the first instance to their principal and us so that we can help them and make those adjustments that are required. If there are accessibility issues, it's obligatory on me to go with Ms Harrington and sort those out.

SHAUN RUMING: On the PMES number—because I do have that number—it's actually 6.2 per cent. There is a big difference between our workforce data, which is what we actually get from our payroll data when people sign up and join the department. We're trying to work out why they feel more comfortable over time and, then, whether it's because the PMES survey is anonymous. That number, at 6.2 per cent, is far more encouraging than the 1.6 per cent. We're talking about that as a group of chief people officers as well because that's very similar across all agencies, it would appear. That number in our PMES is much higher.

This year we launched a workplace adjustment procedure. I can come back to you on notice with how many people have engaged with us to tell us about what that adjustment might be. We did launch that policy, which was a step, I think, in the right direction. Whilst we launch that policy, we're also finalising an internal research project to understand what people's perceptions, realities and lived experiences on the barriers faced by people with disability are to really understand that. We do expect, once we have finalised that report, to test that with our internal stakeholders, and it will form part of the upcoming disability inclusion action plan—our DIAP plan. We're looking to pursue that this year.

The CHAIR: Do you have a breakdown of the numbers of people? When they're self-identifying as people with disability, how many of them have physical disability versus a psychosocial disability, a cognitive disability or an intellectual disability?

SHAUN RUMING: I will come back to you on notice if we can provide that. Certainly we looked at that within the research but whether we're capturing that when people start, I'll have to come back to you on notice. If we have got it, we'll certainly provide it.

The CHAIR: I'm aware of the difference in the self-reporting versus the people who, at the time of actually applying and being employed, are identified as having

disability. When we're looking at up to 20% of the population identifies as having a disability, 6% is still quite small so it would be interesting to know what active steps are being taken to ensure that, at that point of employment, it's clear there'll be no discrimination or penalty for someone who simply won't just be able to get around a particular school, for instance.

SHAUN RUMING: Agreed.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Ruming also mentioned that we do have—sorry if I'm repeating it—a disability staff network too that also gives us guidance and input into our action plan and how we're tracking in the workplace.

ANSWER

The Department of Education's workforce profile data is available in the Workforce Profile Report 2024 at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-12/workforce-profile-report-2024.pdf>.

Further breakdown of the department's workforce profile is available in our annual reports at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/annual-reports>.

Workplace adjustments are agreements between a staff member and their manager. The department does not require staff to provide data on specific disability types.

QUESTION 50 PAGE NO 65

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay, we might come back to that when matters are finalised. Coming back to non-vaccinated staff, on notice, can you inform the Committee of how many have returned to the workforce and the Department of Education? Were there any cases where people were rejected or not allowed to come back?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me definitely look at that. Those orders were lifted. If any are listening to the proceedings or read *Hansard* on notice, I'd welcome them back. Please come back and apply.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Will you take on notice how many have come back?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We still have 1,294 vacancies. I'd welcome them coming back into classrooms with us. We remain ready to assist them, Mr Latham, if their accreditation has lapsed as well.

ANSWER

See answer to transcript question 42.

QUESTION 51 PAGE NO 66

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Mr Ruming, I keep asking you to come back up. You should probably just stay. I only have one for you on the figures you gave before around permanent and temporary staff. Just for clarity, are they full-time equivalent?

SHAUN RUMING: That was headcount.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have the same for full-time equivalent numbers?

SHAUN RUMING: No, I don't. I can come back on notice. That was headcount.

ANSWER

FTE workforce profile data is published annually in the Department of Education's annual report and relies on the data series produced by the Public Service Commission as part of its workforce profile data series.

QUESTION 52 PAGE NO 67

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Back to Wollumbin, are classes being offered online to year 11 and year 12 students at that school—an online-only offering?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I'd need to take that on notice.

ANSWER

To provide a wide range of subjects in Stage 6, Wollumbin and Murwillumbah High Schools are partnering to deliver some subjects across both schools using online technology. Where possible, the schools maximise face-to-face delivery of Stage 6 courses. Decisions around curriculum delivery have been made in consultation with students, parents, staff and community stakeholders.

QUESTION 53 PAGE NO 67

The CHAIR: Ms Gudu, when complaints come into the department or to the regulator, how many of the investigations are desktop versus how many involve a person going out and investigating?

SHARON GUDU: I'd like to come back to you on notice with specific details, but I'll just tell you a little bit about the process, which might help. Approximately—and I can come up with specific numbers—5,000 complaints came in last year, and approximately 8,000 serious incidents. One team triages all of those. They come in and, within 24 hours, the goal is to do an initial risk assessment. That means they look at the information that is provided. If the notification is from a service, they look at what the service has said, not just about the issue but also what the service has done about it. If the service fully explains what they have done, they have undertaken their own risk assessment, and they have undertaken action to address the issue, then it may not need follow-up.

But if it is something that is far more serious or it's come from a parent and it needs more follow-up, then it will go through a more detailed risk assessment, which will involve phoning the person who has complained and asking questions and so forth. There's quite an intensive process for a couple of days. Then it can get referred either to one of our geographical teams for follow-up if it's of a lower risk, and they will build it into their visit schedule, or, if it is a very serious matter such as an allegation of sexual assault, it will go to our specialist investigation team, who will then allocate it according to risk and they will contact the police and start that process of working out the approach to investigation. I hope that gives a little bit of flavour of the different ways that we approach it, but I can come back to the Committee with more specifics.

ANSWER

From 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024 the regulatory authority received 5,859 notifications of complaint.

All notifications were triaged through an initial risk assessment process, including contact made with complainants and services where additional information was sought for accuracy of triage assessment, and to acknowledge receipt of the complaint.

4,912 (84%) of total complaint cases were allocated to field staff for further follow up and investigation, of which 385 were allocated to the specialist investigations team.

Depending on the risk of the case and the service's evidence of a response, investigation may require an immediate visit or may be noted for review at the next scheduled visit.

902 (15%) of cases were closed with 'No Further Action' by the triage team after initial risk assessment and peer review – they did not require a visit. 466 of those cases closed with 'No Further Action' were linked within the national regulatory database (NQAITS) to an active case already being managed by a field team related to the same incident or concerns, and therefore already being investigated.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Barraket, I want to come back to you. Before the break, we were talking about the particular fund that is only for the high-demand areas. I was asking the Minister earlier today about where you are up to with the spend through that \$330 million allocation in the budget. Can you provide any updates on how much has gone out of that money, and what for?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes. There is a range of initiatives underway through the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund. There is a Flexible Initiatives Trial—we have had two rounds of that. We have got the building ECEC places, which we just discussed, the Business Capability Development Program—and some of those are multi-year programs. The spending might be allocated in one financial year, but the payments will be made over multiple years. I'm happy to take on notice what the spend has been to date, noting that we would not have this current financial year in its totality just yet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The reason for my question is that in the 2023-24 budget the allocation in the budget papers was \$100 million, and only \$40 million was the revised actual spend. There's quite a big jump to then say that this financial year, which we're nine months into, there was going to be a \$330 million allocation. I don't think that much money has been flowing out the door, with respect. I am trying to work out where it is up to. There's quite an underspend in that fund, I can see.

MARK BARRAKET: What I would say is that within the legislation, as you'd know, there is allocated money for each of the first financial years, and any underspend then carries forward. Because the Act limits the fund to initiating test and trial initiatives in the first instance, until the strategic investment plan has been approved, the ability to move those funds is limited by the Act. As I said, some of those test and trial programs, while the money is committed within that financial year, payments might not flow to subsequent years. But now that the strategic investment plan has been agreed by Government, the fund board is designing programs of work at scale, which would help reduce the underspends that we have in each of those financial years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I might have missed it—when was the strategic investment plan approved?

MARK BARRAKET: I'd need to take on notice the exact date, but it was delivered to Government in June of last year. I'll have to take on notice the date that it was approved.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I should know, but I don't remember—approved by the Minister?

MARK BARRAKET: It would be by the Deputy Premier and the Treasurer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide on notice—I'm happy for you to take it on notice—when it was approved by both of those Ministers?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not putting words in your mouth, but you anticipate, now the plan has had agreement, that more money will start to flow out through that fund after you have done the test and trials?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes.

ANSWER

The Strategic Investment Plan was approved by the NSW Government on 11 October 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For the 100 preschools commitment, what is the status? I know that one has opened in Liverpool, but where are the others up to? I think there were seven preschools that were set to start construction this year. Is there an update on those?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Ms Harrington to go to the—there are ones that have gone to tender, and where we're up to.

LISA HARRINGTON: We're just about to award—we're just in the final tender evaluation stage. We have grouped them in geographic bundles to basically try to maximise the benefits of standardisation—have a contractor who can get a bit of scale and do a certain number. We put all those out at the end of last year. We're just about to award those. Once we appoint the contractors, then we'll obviously have a better understanding of timeline. The seven that you mentioned are at the schools where we have identified there is surplus space. Those ones will be—again, we can come back on notice with the actual time frame. They're the ones that will be the first to open.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With the ones that you have gone out to tender for—and I appreciate that you have got a process—is that for the remaining 90-odd? How many are you out for tender for at the moment?

LISA HARRINGTON: That's right. I think it's 85. There are some that are part of the major works project, so that's being delivered as part of the major works project. And then the remainder, we're going out separately and they're part of the geographic bundles.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry to belabour the point. The roughly 85—the geographic bundles—are they all going to be announced at the same time or are they going to be announced in stages as well, in terms of the geographic bundles?

LISA HARRINGTON: Announced—we should be able to provide that to you on notice in terms of the geographic bundles. It's basically just grouping by geography.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think I'm right in saying all the groups have gone out to tender.

LISA HARRINGTON: We're just about to award.

ANSWER

Construction of the preschools at schools identified as having surplus space is expected to commence in 2025. The design and construction contracts will be announced as the respective contracts are awarded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: While I have got you, Ms Harrington, let's keep on infrastructure. The Southern Cross distance ed site—I have had requests for information from a sort of community college that operates up there, North Coast Pathway. They're an initiative of the North Coast Community College. They also provide some opportunities. They have recently been accredited to do some year 9 and 10 literacy and numeracy for maybe disaffected students, or those for whom the normal school setting isn't working. They're after access to have a bit more space to expand, and they're interested in terms of what is happening with the Southern Cross distance education site. Are there any plans or any opportunities on that site for an external provider?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can have a look at that. I don't have any information on that, but happy to have a look at it.

MURAT DIZDAR: Do you mean by way of a community use agreement?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's exactly what they're after.

MURAT DIZDAR: Because our school there is important to us—that's going to continue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. It's quite a large footprint, though. My understanding is that that particular school of distance ed has been scaled back a little bit—that is the community conversation up there. I think we asked about that at estimates last time, or before.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we have had an audit and a review there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The community conversation is that if there's some spare space at that site, they're now doing some provision for potentially disengaged year 9 and 10 students as well, but they need more room. I appreciate that I'm only asking about this now. What I might do is just tell them to get directly in touch.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can we put them in contact with Ms Harrington?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you are happy to do that, that would be great. We can take that offline.

ANSWER

For inquiries about joint use arrangements and shared use licences of school facilities, the community group can contact the Department of Education by email at asset.activations@det.nsw.edu.au.

Further information on shared use arrangements is available on the School Infrastructure website: <https://www.schoolinfrastructure.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/we-support-communities/shared-use.html>.

QUESTION 57 PAGE NO 72

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For Bungendore High School, there was a \$71 million budget allocation for the old site. Is there a new budget or a revised budget for the build on the new site?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes, there is. Obviously, we needed to acquire a new site. We are utilising the site that was going to house the new high school while we're building the school on Birchfield Drive, I think it is. At this point, yes, we are spending more than the allocated budget originally. I don't have the final figures for those. We can take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you take that on notice?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes. The site that we have acquired is a larger site and it will enable a full-size playing field rather than having to share the oval. So there is an expense there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have—and I'm happy for you to provide it on notice—what the cost was for the land for the new site? How much was spent on the land?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can take that on notice.

ANSWER

The NSW Labor Government is delivering the permanent Bungendore High School after years of delays and uncertainty under the previous Liberal Nationals Government.

While the details of the Department of Education's commercial transactions are commercial in confidence, information will continue to be provided transparently through the budget process.

QUESTION 58 PAGE NO 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What are the works going to be at Kelso?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that has a \$750,000 budget and that's it? There's no more money for that group of schools?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice, but I believe that's the allocation.

ANSWER

The NSW Government is making a multimillion-dollar investment to deliver upgrades at Denison College Kelso High and Bathurst High Campus and at Carcoar Public School.

Information is available on the School Infrastructure website.

QUESTION 59 PAGE NO 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For Lithgow High School, I think there is \$6 million that has been announced. Do you know what that is going to be used for?

LISA HARRINGTON: I might have to come back to you on notice on that one. I'm not familiar with that one.

ANSWER

Lithgow High School will be upgraded as part of the Government's \$50 million commitment to enhance high potential and gifted education opportunities in public schools across the state.

Information about the project is available on School Infrastructure's website.

QUESTION 60 PAGE NO 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a nice segue. I know that surplus sites are declared by the secretary from time to time. Are you able to provide, on notice, for the last financial year—as much as you have got—how many sites were listed as surplus and where they have been located?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can take that on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: We can do that, because we do that in our annual report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could just provide it, that would be great.

ANSWER

Information about disposed and surplus sites are published in the Department of Education's annual reports available at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/annual-reports>.

QUESTION 61 PAGE NO 73&74

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have the year 1 phonics check results come out for 2024?

MURAT DIZDAR: They have, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When were they published?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it was yesterday or this morning.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What did the overall result show? In 2023 it was 59 per cent success.

MURAT DIZDAR: First of all, I want to emphasise to the Committee that they're a diagnostic instrument. Its maximum use is for that child and that teacher. But we do look at the system result. I think we're at 60 or 61 per cent. I'll go to Mr Kurucz, who can help us there.

JEREMY KURUCZ: I can take you through that, Mr Latham. In 2024, 60 per cent of students achieved at or above the expected level of achievement. That was a change from 59 per cent in 2023.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's edging up. That's good. Why did it come out in February? I thought the Government had a commitment to get it out before the end of each calendar year?

JEREMY KURUCZ: It was released yesterday.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why the delay? The previous year it was released in the calendar year.

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll have to take that on notice in relation to the specific release timing.

ANSWER

Given the volume of other publications from the Department of Education towards the end of 2024, system-wide results for the Year 1 phonics check were released in February 2025.

QUESTION 62 PAGE NO 77

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The Auditor-General's report about the Performance and Development Framework that we mentioned earlier on stated:

The Department does not monitor whether teachers have a Performance and Development Plan ... receive feedback from lesson observations or formal feedback on their performance.

Has that changed at all?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We have made some inroads after that Auditor-General's report, which is around—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does that mean you can tell me exactly what classroom observation there is in these performance and development plans in every school?

MURAT DIZDAR: One thing that we tightened up on is, one, ensuring that everyone had a performance and development plan because the data indicated that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It was rare.

MURAT DIZDAR: Well, no, it indicated that it wasn't universal across the board. We have got to achieve 100 per cent. Two is, since that Auditor-General's report, we have been doing sampling every year by taking randomly from schools their entire Performance and Development Framework structures and examining those and giving feedback, and giving feedback to the system.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How big is your sample?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take it on notice, but it's a sizable sample. I took advice from CESE around that as well. As you know, we're a large system of 2,200 sites and 95,000 teachers, so I took advice from them.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is there any evaluation by CESE or others about the uplift in teacher quality? The auditor reported research showing that "effective systems of teacher appraisal and feedback can increase teacher effectiveness by up to 30 per cent". That's a massive gain we're talking about. It makes sense in any line of work, but particularly teaching, to get an effective feedback loop. Constructive improvement can make a hell of a difference.

MURAT DIZDAR: You're right. That goes to your argument about collective efficacy as well, that some of the strongest feedback you can get is not from line management but at a peer level.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But is there an evaluation study on these improvements?

MURAT DIZDAR: We can come back on notice with what we have picked up from the sampling. Classroom career pathway, which I unpacked, is another mechanism that, in time, can help us tighten in this space.

ANSWER

In response to the Auditor General's recommendation the Department of Education conducted Performance Development Plan (PDP) sampling research. The department collected approximately 1,000 de-identified teacher and principal PDPs in 2020 and 2021. These PDPs were analysed to understand the implementation of the Performance and Development Framework in schools.

Findings from this sampling indicate that 21% of PDPs identified networking and collaboration as professional learning activities to support achievement of goals. Successful teacher collaboration can contribute to building collective teacher efficacy

in a school, which Hattie (2018) identifies as having the largest influence on student learning of any factor in his meta-analysis.

QUESTION 63 PAGE NO 78

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Martin, looking back, how many of the recommendations of the Geoff Masters 2020 curriculum review *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion* ended up being implemented? In particular, whatever happened to the proposal about untimed syllabuses?

PAUL MARTIN: I'd have to take on notice the specific number of recommendations from Masters that have been implemented or where they're up to at the moment. Untimed syllabuses was always a proposal that was noted, I think, in the original Government response. We did a little bit of exploration around the concept of untimed syllabuses. It was largely opposed by the three sectors and a number of people around the board, not because they thought it might not work but that the changes to an entire system—to not have students move through in grade and year levels—would be untenable even as an experiment. We spoke to Professor Masters at some point after his report came down. There was a suggestion about some trials, but even then I think that didn't work out. We went specifically down the path of simplifying and decluttering the syllabuses, and we have done 54 so far.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There was no trial at the Lindfield learning centre?

PAUL MARTIN: Not that I'm aware of. You'd have to ask the department, I think, but not that I'm aware of.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You know that hippy school at Lindfield? Weren't they going to trial the untimed syllabuses?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to give real credit to the school. They graduated their first year 12 last year with some tremendous outcomes. We have had a change of leadership there.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're driving explicit teaching there. But, real credit, they took those kids from—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But the untimed syllabuses, you haven't trialled them anywhere?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not our intention to have untimed syllabuses.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Martin, you were going to get back to me on notice with the implementation of the Masters recommendations.

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, which of the recommendations according to those that were—yes, absolutely.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Martin, I think you deserve recognition and congratulations from the Committee—maybe that's the kiss of death—in the work you're doing on curriculum reform and implementation, which is a massive task.

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you.

ANSWER

The NSW Government supported 17 recommendations of the 24 recommendations from the NSW Curriculum Review that was led by Professor Geoff Masters AO.

Of the 17 recommendations:

- 15 recommendations have already been implemented.
- Two recommendations are currently being addressed by the NSW Education Standards Authority.

QUESTION 64 PAGE NO 78

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The numeracy screening check that you mentioned, Mr Graham: Could you clarify how many schools are taking part in that trial?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We had a small number at the end of last year trialling some items. I think it was up to 50, but I'll have to come back to you with the exact number on that.

ANSWER

The Year 1 Number Screening Check is being trialled in phases. Phase 1 was conducted in Term 4, 2024, with 19 public schools involved. A larger Phase 2 trial is being conducted in Term 2, 2025.

QUESTION 65 PAGE NO 81

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any money to expand the flexible master of teaching courses for career changers? There was an \$8 million pre-election commitment to that. Is there any update on that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We have been investing heavily in Grow Your Own, where we're getting great results. I'll get Mr Ruming to give you any more info on the career changers. We have tipped our investment more on the Grow Your Own, because the demand is there. Schools want to take it up and we're getting top results. Mr Ruming might have career changers. If we don't, we'll definitely come back on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The spend on it is probably more what I'm interested in.

MURAT DIZDAR: If we don't have it, we'll take it on notice.

SHAUN RUMING: We'll take it on notice.

ANSWER

The Transition to Teaching Scholarship opened on 20 January 2025.

QUESTION 66 PAGE NO 82

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, if I could take you to Matthew Pearce Public School at Baulkham Hills—and this is specific to upgrades to that school in terms of new teaching buildings. Are you aware of delays to the upgrades as a consequence of industrial action by the ETU?

LISA HARRINGTON: We have had some impact to our projects. I'll have to double-check on Matthew Pearce, but we have had some impact to our projects because of the ETU action. We have been able to address that sometimes by getting a generator to make sure that we do not have any delays to the project schedule. But, yes, we have been monitoring that and trying to mitigate that risk.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, are you aware of a quote from a community neighbour of the school saying that the generator was incredibly noisy with burnt diesel fuel causing fumes, and the generator operated in this state for 24 hours a day and was the subject of a complaint to the EPA.

LISA HARRINGTON: I'd be interested in those details. Obviously, that's not the sort of experience that we want when we're building and upgrading our schools. I can absolutely look into those details to make sure that we address those concerns.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is this an isolated case?

LISA HARRINGTON: It's not widespread, but we have been monitoring it on a lot of our projects. But at the moment we're making sure that it doesn't delay our timeframes. Obviously if neighbours are having that experience, that's not what we want so I'm happy to look into it.

ANSWER

The Department of Education is not aware of any referral of this issue from the EPA. Any concerns from school communities about school builds or upgrades can be raised with the School Infrastructure information line on 1300 482 651 or by email at schoolinfrastructure@det.nsw.edu.au.

QUESTION 67 PAGE NO 84

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Speaking of the Deputy Premier and transparency—her promise therein—can I get an answer to my question 3168 about school results in the electorate of Barwon in detail, school by school, rather than the regional website that I was sent to? I'm trying the second time here through the budget estimates court of appeal to get my question answered.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me do that, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I appreciate that..

ANSWER

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) cannot publicly reveal school results under Section 18A of the *Education Act 1990 No 8*.

The ATAR is a rank and not a mark or score generated by the Universities Admission Centre (UAC). NESA do not hold the records of students' ATAR nor average ATAR at each school.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I appreciate that. What support are you giving to Alphacrucis and the development of their innovative teaching education programs, which I have witnessed? They seem to have the virtue of the practical approach—not as much theory, but a heavy emphasis on practice that is getting really good results. Shouldn't we be fostering that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Ruming to come and give us the detail, if he has got that. The things that I'm chasing, since you have been on the Committee—one, I have put a departmental employee into every faculty of education in New South Wales so that they don't have my experience at Sydney Uni, where they only meet the department at the end of the curve for a grad interview. I have embedded that resource in the faculty because I have got to get stronger at getting the pipeline to me before other sectors. We're chasing Grow Your Own, which is producing good results, and the transition to retirement to prevent exit. I don't have the Alphacrucis details in front of me. If Mr Ruming doesn't, we're happy to take it on notice. I'm not sure if he does.

SHAUN RUMING: I thought I did, Mr Latham, but I don't. We'll come back to you on notice. I know we had a smaller uptake than we were hoping for in terms of participation. We're reviewing that at the moment, but we can come back on notice in terms of—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I saw their program up there—I forget the suburb of Newcastle. That integration of theory and practice seemed to get the best teaching outcome and the students really appreciated it. The worst thing that happens at university level is being given theory headed down the wrong path, like inquiry-based learning, project-based learning and the like, and then not having any practical experience in the classroom to know that there's a better way: explicit instruction. Is this what we're after now? I have heard Jason Clare talk about this—a closer integration of theory and practice in teacher training.

MURAT DIZDAR: Also, paid practicums have been a topic from the Federal Government. I think we share more of your school of thought, that it's really the embedding in a school—it's really the practical experience and learning. And we have got to get better at saying early on, "You actually will not make a great teacher. It would be better if you chose another profession right now."

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Don't you find that, if they have done a prac?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's what I'm saying.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You can see it in front of your eyes.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're driving the same mentality around getting more practical experience. There's a place for the theory, but I think when you're inside that classroom, I don't know that you're relying on the theory; you have got to have that practical experience. We'll come back on notice with where we're at with Alphacrucis.

SHAUN RUMING: We have eight participants in the program so far.

ANSWER

The Government recently announced the establishment of the Early Career Academy for Teachers. A key focus of this program is providing early classroom experience through professional experience and in-classroom opportunities, alongside holistic professional learning support.

The Alphacrucis hub model originated in 2018 with an independent sector hub in the Hunter region. The 2-year funding provided by the NSW Government supported the St Philip's hub to continue and 2 new hubs to be established. Each of the 3 school sectors was funded to develop a hub and deliver ITE training using the hub model.

The Department of Education established the Riverina hub, and the Catholic Education Office Wilcannia-Forbes established a Wilcannia-Forbes hub. The Riverina Teaching Hub includes both an ITE Stream, with participants supported to undertake an undergraduate teaching degree, and a VET stream, with participants supported to undertake VET studies while completing a school-based traineeship and HSC. TAFE West was engaged to deliver fee-free qualifications following AUC's withdrawal from the VET stream.

The Riverina Teaching Hub saw 11 places filled during the 2-year pilot. The department is committed to supporting these participants and will continue to deliver localised support until all participants graduate.

The independent evaluation being undertaken by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation is in its final stages and has identified some implementation challenges associated with the 2 new hubs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It was a big problem. My final one to Mr Martin—how many government schools do you now inspect from NESAs for registration certification purposes? And when you do that, are you taking into account all the pedagogy issues that we have raised here? Explicit instruction and phonics are not optional; they have got to be taught, otherwise, perhaps, the school has its registration in doubt.

PAUL MARTIN: NESAs doesn't directly inspect government schools or Catholic schools. We allow the systems to inspect their own schools to comply with NESAs's regulatory processes. We worked with the department as that process occurred. They go and have inspections to make sure that they meet all their regulatory requirements. But we do have random inspections across the three sectors.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You pick them, don't you?

PAUL MARTIN: I'd have to get on notice how many randoms we have done of the government sector. We make sure we see syllabus documents, scoping sequence and assessment materials, and then we provide a report back through the secretary around what is happening in his schools. But I can get you on notice exactly how many government schools we inspected in the last 12 months.

ANSWER

In 2024, 20 government schools were inspected as part of the Random Inspection Program. No compliance concerns were identified throughout these inspections.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Screen Use and Addiction Research Fund, which I notice was again helpfully updated yesterday—uncanny timing with some of these brand announcements and data coming out. Who can I direct those questions to for specifics?

MURAT DIZDAR: Jeremy and I can help.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many applications have you received under that fund? Obviously, you have announced the successful ones, but what was the interest like?

JEREMY KURUCZ: We received 29 applications.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the time frame of delivery for the different projects—and I appreciate those different categories. Obviously, some of the bigger ones are going to universities, and several hundred thousand dollars for a number of them. What is the time frame for that research and when do you expect that to be provided back to the department?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll have to take that on notice just because each of those projects now is going through the ethics and SERAP process, and so there might be different timings for different types of projects. I'll take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As part of application process, was there criteria around you wanting it to be completed by a certain time? I note that one of them—and it's not a reflection—is a 10-year longitudinal study at ANU. I am wondering when we will start to see some of the data that's coming from this.

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll have to take that on notice in relation to the specific application criteria. I do know, as you reflected on, that there are different time frames based on the different types of research being undertaken.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was a commitment from the Government. Obviously, if it was an election commitment, like most of your others, you'd want to deliver it in this term of government. So I'm curious as to when that will be available for some sort of analysis. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think, also, the mix here is really important. There might be some that come to us in a more handy and timely manner, but when I was looking at it to sign off on, I welcomed a longitudinal look as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I just wondered if, in this term of government, there will be any kind of data that will come from that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think there are ones that land within a year, and two and three, alongside the 10.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide that on notice, that would be great. Given that you had more applications than funding available, are there any future rounds of funding for that grant program?

ANSWER

All projects will be completed by December 2026. The Australian National University project involves analysing 10 years of data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) survey. It should not be interpreted as the research taking 10 years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: ... I guess that's a matter for government. In December Ms Mihailuk asked about the mobile issue in schools. Obviously you have used, I'll say, anecdotal evidence from principals coming to you and saying there's improvement. But is there any plan to do a more rigorous assessment process? There was a report you would have seen on the BBC about mixed reviews from overseas and in different jurisdictions where this has also been put in place. Is there any kind of quality data gathering being done by CESE or anyone else in terms of the mobile phone ban?

MURAT DIZDAR: We did get hard data out of 2024 principals' survey.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But beyond a principal's feedback, is there anything being done that's more explicit in terms of some kind of review?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Kurucz to touch on it, but last year we got two hard data points. One was the principals' survey, and 95 per cent of school principals responded positively to the ban. That was a survey administered by CESE to 2,200 principals. The other one was a customer sentiment survey—delivered by Customer Service, not us—and 72 per cent of parents thought the ban had a positive impact on learning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We talked about those in December. My question is that the Deputy Premier quite often says, when asked about some of their achievements, that the mobile phone ban will improve student outcomes. Are you doing any kind of quality analysis of whether there's a direct correlation between a mobile phone ban and improvement in student outcomes? Overseas jurisdictions have fairly mixed reporting in relation to that. Are you going to do that here in New South Wales? I'm happy if Mr Kurucz takes that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Kurucz to jump in, and Ms Summerhayes can as well. But everywhere I go, I'm not getting mixed feedback.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, but I mean actual hard data that has a correlation between a phone ban and improved student outcomes.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, our CESE team is looking into it. There are obviously challenges with different data types and whether it's a formal evaluation, in a sense, or not, but our CESE team is certainly looking into that at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When will there be more information around any work that CESE will do in relation to that?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll take that on notice. I know they're actively looking at it at the moment in terms of what the opportunities might be for us to do formal evaluation and the policy implementation.

ANSWER

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation is currently collecting and analysing data on stakeholder perceptions about the mobile phone ban.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have another very specific one for you, Ms Harrington, and I'm happy if you take it on notice. We had some feedback from some families at Temora High School about issues with the air conditioning there not working. Apparently the original units were removed but they haven't been replaced. Are you able to provide—and, again, I'm happy for it to be on notice, because I know it's quite a specific question—any updates on what's happening with the air con at Temora High School?

LISA HARRINGTON: We can take that on notice.

ANSWER

New air conditioning units will be installed at Temora High School over the coming months. In the meantime, the school's existing units have been serviced and are operational.