

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Tuesday 25 February 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING, WESTERN SYDNEY

UNCORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

Dr Amanda Cohn

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine

The Hon. Mark Latham

The Hon. Rachel Merton

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Bob Nanva

The Hon. Damien Tudehope

PRESENT

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

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education for the additional round of inquiry into budget estimates 2024-25. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today, and those watching online. My name is Abigail Boyd. I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Deputy Premier Carr and accompanying officials to the hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Learning, and Western Sydney.

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

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

Ms DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES, Deputy Secretary, Public Schools, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

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

Mr JEREMY KURUCZ, Relieving Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr DANIEL FRENCH, Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Mr MARTIN GRAHAM, Deputy Secretary, Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms LISA HARRINGTON, Acting Deputy Secretary, School Infrastructure NSW, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

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

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

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

Ms SHARON GUDU, Executive Director, NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Regulatory Authority, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I declare my interest at the outset. Debbie Summerhayes and I are first cousins through her father and my mother, who are siblings.

The CHAIR: Thank you for the declaration.

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?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to indicate the work we undertook, if you like.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I don't need any comments from Mr Dizdar. With respect, I have limited time with the Minister. The Minister said this was at her direction.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's a big piece of work and we have been working on it for some time, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. What I'm concerned about is that I think you sat on this for a year and have not put things out around goals like enrolment, attendance and HSC completion, none of which required any change in data set, so that you could kick the results back post the 2027 election. Is that what you have done?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, that is not what we have done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you be having interim targets for 2026 for schools to meet?

Ms PRUE CAR: Look, I'm sorry. I actually really wanted to begin this estimates hearing working with all of you in the spirit of giving the information over to the Committee and therefore the public. But, I'm sorry, I'm not going to be lectured to by you, Ms Mitchell, on targets about enrolment and attendance.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, I just ask—

Ms PRUE CAR: When you were Minister, enrolments fell through the floor.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I asked a very specific question. Will you put interim targets in place for all schools by 2026?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have put very ambitious system-level targets on all schools—all 2,200 schools in New South Wales—and we are working through every single one of those schools on their school excellence plans.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's great; it's not what I asked. Are you going to put interim targets in by 2026?

The CHAIR: Order!

Ms PRUE CAR: We are aiming towards the achievement of those very ambitious targets—targets that have never been this ambitious before—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's just not true.

Ms PRUE CAR: —and that's what we're working towards.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that a no for interim targets for 2026?

Ms PRUE CAR: We just announced the targets yesterday.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For 2027, which is two years away. Is there any plan to look at it midway through, 12 months in, and see how schools are tracking and publicly release that data?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, you very well know that every school excellence plan is done every 12 months, and every school will have a different plan every 12 months.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In 2026, will you be able to stand up and say to parents, "These are our targets for 2027, but we're on track. This is where we're headed"? Will you publicly report on that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will be very transparent with the parents of New South Wales, the teachers of New South Wales and the students of New South Wales about where we're at with our ambitious targets, which we announced yesterday.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will you do that next year through the annual report?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will be providing the people of New South Wales, and the teachers and the students and the families of New South Wales, with transparent updates on where we are at with our system-level targets and our school-level targets.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great. We look forward to that. What methodology did you use to set those targets?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar about—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Don't you know?

Ms PRUE CAR: —how, operationally, we did that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Were you not briefed on how they were set, as the Minister responsible?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: Chair, it is in order for a Minister to refer a question to a public servant, in line with long-standing convention in this place, to elucidate an answer. That is what the Minister is seeking to do, but is not being given the opportunity to do.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To the point of order: I appreciate that. My question wasn't directed to Mr Dizdar; it was about how much the Minister was involved and knew about the methodology that had been set. It's actually her responsibility, and that's why I would like her to answer the question.

The CHAIR: We have been through this before. I think it is good to deal with this point of order early. It is within the member's rights to redirect and to use the Minister's time appropriately. If that's what she chooses to do, that's within her powers. However, it is also within the rights of the Minister to refer a question to one of the officials with her, but that question could then be answered in the afternoon, if that is what the member wishes. Let's continue on that basis.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, were you briefed on the methodologies that have been used to set these targets?

Ms PRUE CAR: Before I answer that question, I want to go to what Madam Chair just said. I am trying to do this in the interests of giving the Committee the correct information because, as Minister, it is my responsibility to task the department with coming up with the targets that this Government wants to set for our public school system. I rely on experts in the department to advise me on how we should be setting those targets—education experts. In fact, for the first time in a long time, our education department is run by educators. As a result of that, yes, of course I was briefed, but I rely on the department—the Government relies on the department to go through the detail of setting the methodology of how we will conduct those targets and how we will report against those targets in the annual report and other areas. But that is why I wanted to defer to Mr Dizdar on how we actually came up with these very specific, ambitious targets about NAPLAN.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just to be clear, there was no direction from you, as Minister, in terms of what you wanted to achieve or what the priority areas should be. You left that to the department to do.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, my direction to the department was very clear about what I wanted to achieve, and it was this, Ms Mitchell—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which is what?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm answering it. I know you're trying to get something—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I'm just trying to get a straight answer.

Ms PRUE CAR: —for your social media or whatever it is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I'm not. I'm not interested that.

Ms PRUE CAR: But I'm actually answering it. My direction to the department was that we have to have targets that are applicable to every child in New South Wales because every parent enrolls their child in a public school wanting that child to grow. Previously the targets were only about the top two bands. We want to make sure—and my direction was clear to the department. It's my role, as Minister, on behalf of all the teachers and students of New South Wales, to say that we want a system that is focused on ensuring that every child can grow.

It doesn't matter if you're gifted, if you're high potential or if you're below age and stage; you have the opportunity to grow in the New South Wales public school system, and we need to be—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for the motherhood statement, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's very offensive, Ms Mitchell. They're not motherhood statements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is nothing that specific in there.

Ms PRUE CAR: In fact, I would think the teachers of New South Wales would find that quite offensive.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let's talk about the parents of New South Wales. Was it your decision to get rid of the Tell Them From Me survey?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are committed to working with our parent communities across New South Wales. We have many ways that we consult with communities across New South Wales—and parents, because parents are crucial in what we do in terms of delivering public school education to 800,000 students across New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is the Tell Them From Me survey still happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar will have that information on the Tell Them From Me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, is the Tell Them From Me survey still happening? If not, who decided to get rid of it and why?

Ms PRUE CAR: You very well know, Ms Mitchell, that the department provides advice to me, as Minister, about how best we can consult—in this case, your question goes to the root of consulting with parents who have their children enrolled in public school systems. That was the advice from the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it was to not proceed with Tell Them From Me. That is gone. Can you confirm that? It is a pretty straight answer.

Ms PRUE CAR: We consult with parents on a range of issues in a range of ways. The department advises me, as Minister, in terms of the best ways to do that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a very direct question. Tell Them From Me has been a survey open to public school parents for some time. Is that still available? My understanding is that it's gone. You can read the note Mr Dizdar is passing you, if you need to. Is that still a survey that is available for parents to access?

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not a hard question. I think the answer is no. Just say no; that's fine. Be honest with the Committee.

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you know, when I'm pausing a little bit to try to answer your question, I understand you are trying get a smart alec response in during that period. But what I'm trying to say to you is that the department advised that we could actually do our own survey.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, so there is no more Tell Them From Me. You are now going to do your own one. Is that the answer?

Ms PRUE CAR: There's a survey.

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. Speaking of the right information, I have a question for Mr Ruming. When you appeared before the Committee in October 2023, I was asking some questions in relation to teacher vacancy data. You indicated to me—and I do have copies here if people need it—that every fortnight you get a report collating that statewide data. Was that correct, when you told the Committee that in 2023?

SHAUN RUMING: We do collect that data, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's every fortnight.

SHAUN RUMING: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, when you were here in December, you might recall I was asking you about teacher vacancy rates, and we were in term 4. You said you didn't have an updated figure with you and you only had the beginning of term 3—I think that was what you had been using publicly. You took that on notice. If Mr Ruming is saying you get updated data every two weeks, why, on notice, did you not provide any more up-to-date data for the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: I didn't have the data in front of me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you took it on notice, and you didn't provide it.

MURAT DIZDAR: I indicated that at estimates. There's a formal principle in the system—there's enrolment data and vacancy data every single day. To give Government a valid comparison, we give them a start of term for term 1, term 2, term 3 and term 4, so there's a valid comparison point. But that data oscillates every single day. It varies on enrolment and vacancy every day. I didn't have it in front of me for the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why did you not provide it then on notice? You took it on notice. Mr Ruming told us, as a Committee, that every two weeks you can get an overall figure on vacancies. I asked for that on notice when we were here in December. The only data you provided was from the term before.

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to look at it, because we answered something like, as an organisation, close to 200 questions on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's part of the Committee's role.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can't remember it, but if you want to hand it across, I'm happy to look at it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You didn't provide it when it was asked for. I also asked a question on notice earlier this year asking for the vacancy rates in term 3 last year, term 4 last year and term 1 this year. On notice, I was only provided with term 3 and term 1. Why was I not given term 4 when I asked for it?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to put the data on record, if you like. Day one, term 1 in 2023—in the system we had 2,174 vacancies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking for term—

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me get it on record.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have got that because you have provided that before.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go term by term. I have got it in front of me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I want is term 4 last year. That's what I asked for on notice to the Minister and to you. None of you are providing it. I'd like term 4 last year.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me give you term 4, Ms Mitchell. Day one, term 4 in 2023, there were 2,306 vacancies. In 2024—same point—day one, term 4, we'd improved from 2,306 vacancies to 1,774 vacancies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask why it wasn't provided when the Committee asked for it?

MURAT DIZDAR: I didn't have it with me, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you took it on notice, is my point. Do you not look at the questions asked on notice? You might get 200, but why wouldn't you provide the information that the Committee has asked for?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're a big portfolio. We take lots of questions on notice, and also supplementary questions. I do make it my business to look at it. I have asked if you want to show, because I can't recall it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Mr Ruming, when those questions came in on notice did you provide that data for term 4 that I asked for to the secretary or the Minister's office?

SHAUN RUMING: I can't recall the specifics because, whenever we get questions from the Committee, we answer them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right, but in this case it wasn't answered. Mr Dizdar, you have just said you get a lot of answers and there's a lot of things so, if you take anything on notice today, can we be guaranteed we will get the answer back?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd encourage—

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

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I think that Ms Mitchell is straying beyond courtesy by suggesting that Mr Dizdar would do anything other than what he has already explained. He does, every time he receives multiple questions, and I ask she remain within the resolution to treat witnesses with courtesy.

The CHAIR: I just remind the member of that.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you.

Ms PRUE CAR: But I would say this: This Government is doing more on teacher vacancies than any other government in New South Wales history.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We'll see about that.

Ms PRUE CAR: We will be as transparent as possible with anyone that asks about that because it is the priority of the Premier and myself.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because you can move people around, not because you have put new people in the class.

The CHAIR: Minister, on 11 February, the Productivity Commission released its report on government services in relation to, among other things, early childhood education and care. The figures for New South Wales are pretty shocking. What is your response to what I see as an escalating crisis when it comes to early childhood education and care, particularly in New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: Thank you, Ms Boyd. I'm getting that you're asking about the number of breaches. Is that the question in terms of the regulator?

The CHAIR: That's one of the things.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to be honest with you and the Committee: This does greatly concern me. Any person looking at the situation, and the increasing number of breaches in early childhood education and care, identified in New South Wales—of which there are more in New South Wales than in other jurisdictions. That could be due to a ramp up of action in New South Wales. Regardless, it is extremely concerning. I can't think of a more important thing for Government than keeping the smallest people in our care safe. That is something that was identified in that report, as you referenced.

I do believe, as a result of that, that we do need an independent assessment. I'm actually going to request that the department engage in an independent assessment of what is happening here. We're going to ask the former deputy ombudsman, Mr Chris Wheeler, to do this. I have a great deal of respect for Chris. I expect that to be an independent assessment of why this is happening, and what has happened as a result of these breaches, because that's ground zero in terms of what we are responsible for. But going to that issue of increasing number of breaches, especially in comparison to other jurisdictions around the country, we do need to respond. That's a response I'm happy to share with the Committee today.

The CHAIR: So, back in mid-2023, when we had the shocking revelations, I think there were 1,600 and something incidents of sexual abuse within Queensland and New South Wales early childcare and education centres that resulted in Operation Tenterfield. What was your response in terms of regulation after that occurred?

Ms PRUE CAR: Obviously, there was quite a range of responses in regard to Tenterfield by both the New South Wales and the Queensland Governments at the time. It actually necessitated the child safety review that was undertaken, as you know. That was a Commonwealth review. As a result of that, we are still working through some of those issues, I have to say. But the early childhood Ministers and education Ministers around the country have had many fruitful conversations and discussions about things that have come from the child safety review, like the questions of mobile phones because, in that particular case, that was one of the very serious concerns.

So yes, obviously we acted straightaway in the centres that were in New South Wales. I might be corrected, but I think I remember that the vast majority of the offending was in Queensland but, yes, it necessitated the child safety review. We have been part of that. But I don't want the Committee to think I'm doing anything other than saying none of this is acceptable. We have to make sure that we independently assess this, so we're doing everything possible.

The CHAIR: One of the issues that was raised in that case, which I'm unaware of any direct action being taken so far, is in relation to the regulatory response. We have seen, just in the last week, we had another case of a worker at Only About Children in Seaforth who has been prosecuted for multiple counts of sexually touching children. Apparently, the parents are complaining, saying there was no action taken by the regulator. What happened there? Why is the regulator still not getting involved in these cases?

Ms PRUE CAR: On that particular matter, I just have to be really clear: I don't want to jeopardise any criminal proceedings because some of these offences we're talking about are the worst type of offending against children that are humanly possible. I do not want to jeopardise any police or criminal investigations, anything that's before the court. But that is the sort of thing that does necessitate an independent assessment.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: It may very well be that is not acceptable.

The CHAIR: No, and that's just one case. There have been so many.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. I don't disagree with you. It's not acceptable.

The CHAIR: That's right. That's why back in November, I requested those papers from the regulator that Labor opposed, when I put up that call for papers. To be honest, I have had nothing but trouble in relation to trying to get that information. Currently you and the department are in breach of that standing order because those documents have not been delivered. I have really struggled to get any form of transparency out of the department or the regulator. It really concerns me that it appears—and I want you to correct me—that, as Minister, you haven't been directly intervening and ensuring that the regulator is brought up to standard.

Ms PRUE CAR: I would dispute that's the case. I'm here saying to you and the Committee, Ms Boyd, that because of these serious concerns—and I'm not downplaying any of this—I am personally instructing the department to engage an independent assessment of what is happening with the regulator.

The CHAIR: But you're doing that now—

Ms PRUE CAR: With the SO 52, I understand the department advice about some of the legal requirements and that a lot of these issues were before the court, and I hope that there are more documents coming in the weeks and months to follow. I do understand why you're doing this and that you want to bring these issues out into the light because they are the worst types of things that can happen in society.

The CHAIR: Yes. Those documents are full of these reports of sexual assault.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm personally saying to you as Minister that I understand what you are trying to do here. I totally understand that. The advice to me from the department about the complexities of the legal requirements in terms of releasing those documents—

The CHAIR: Are you aware, though, that those arguments are bogus and that we now have an independent arbiter who has looked at those documents? Those legal arguments are not accepted.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have been advised that the arbiter is looking at them.

The CHAIR: No, has looked.

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm saying to you, Ms Boyd, is what I can personally do, in my power as Minister, is to instruct someone to conduct an independent assessment, which is what I have done.

The CHAIR: Will you also instruct the department to stop unlawfully withholding these documents and release them to the public?

Ms PRUE CAR: Please leave that with me, because I want us to be as transparent as possible at all times.

The CHAIR: That's what I want as well.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: It has been since November. I have had a handful of documents. I have had to fight every step of the way. I have been called to multiple meetings where there are nine or more people from the department on the other side of this, with lawyers telling me things that simply aren't true, and I still don't have the documents. I have looked at the privileged documents and they are horrifying.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: That is just from one service, as I understand it, out of 6,000.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: My point of order is that the line of questioning appears to be related to matters that are still currently before the arbiter. There is a process underway within the Legislative Council's procedures. That process should be respected. It appears that you're criticising that process or seeking the Minister to provide an answer when the process has not been finalised.

The CHAIR: Most definitely not. To the point of order, I'm very, very conscious of that and I'm very, very carefully sticking within the rules. I'm not disclosing anything that is in those documents, and I am not referring to any details in those documents. Thank you. You are correct to raise it, but there is no point of order. I am not doing that.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Boyd, I totally acknowledge that you're being very respectful in this. There are very sensitive matters included, as you said, which you haven't disclosed, in full respect to you. My advice is that the arbiter has not handed down a decision. Of course, if the arbiter hands down a decision, the department will be obliged to comply with that decision. That's the end of the story.

The CHAIR: But with delay. If you were to see the arbiter's report, would you then release the documents straightaway or would you make us go through the process of going through Parliament again to get a vote and do all of those things?

Ms PRUE CAR: The arbiter, I believe, has not reached a decision. We need to comply with the arbiter's decision. But please understand that what I'm saying to you, as Minister, is that I want to be as transparent as possible. I am asking the department to conduct an independent assessment. None of this stuff that you are saying that you have seen in privilege is acceptable in any way. I am agreeing with you on that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you, Minister and officials, for your attendance today. Minister, two years in office is probably too early to hold you directly responsible for NAPLAN and PISA results and other academic performance. But there is this worrying decline in the government schools' share of enrolments in New South Wales. There has been a decline in the first two years that you have been in the ministry. Yesterday, using internal education department documents, the Herald published a forecast showing further decline over the next two years. For each of the four years of this Government there will be a decline in the enrolment share for government schools versus non-government schools in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, which makes it incredible. How do you explain this?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Latham, you're right: The decline is something that really concerns us. I have made no secret of the fact that it is a huge priority of the Government to arrest this decline. You will appreciate this, because you know these areas well, as I do, but I think a lot of this honestly is down to—obviously, the merged and cancelled classes, the teacher vacancies and all the stuff we inherited don't exactly attract people to public schools, when they know that there's not going to be a teacher in front of their class every day. That's something we're working hard to fix.

In the growing north-west and south-west of Sydney, where there were no schools where tens of thousands of people are living, you can't enrol a child in a school that doesn't exist. If you look at the difference between non-government enrolments and public school enrolments—if you're looking at a number of a few thousand, say—if I do a back-of-the-envelope calculation of enrolments that may be at new high schools, say, that we have just opened at Melonba, Marsden Park and Gledswood Hills—finally, where the previous Government said there wasn't even a need for a high school—that's a couple of thousand just there. I don't want to see that decline over the next two years. I don't want there to be a decline over the first four-year term of this Government, but I'm actually quite hopeful that if we continue building schools where people live, that will be the first step to arresting the decline in enrolments, because the schools didn't exist where people were moving into. They just weren't there.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There are plenty of schools in south-west Sydney.

Ms PRUE CAR: But not in Gledswood Hills and Gregory Hills, in north-west Sydney, in Jordan Springs and Marsden Park; we're only building them now.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's a short drive to get to many schools. From Gregory Hills straight on to Blairmount is a five-minute drive. But the question is why would parents much prefer lower fee Anglican and Catholic schools in these districts—and they have had their delays in getting them open as well—instead of your schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would argue, Mr Latham, the delays have been nothing compared to the delays we inherited from the previous Government in terms of building schools in high-growth areas. I'm not disagreeing with you that there has been a decline in public school enrolments. We're doing everything possible to arrest this. What we're working at hard—in fact, we couldn't be working harder—is making sure that every single class has a teacher in front of it, to start with. We are making sure we invest in building and upgrading the schools where people live and making sure that we're setting ambitious targets for literacy and numeracy and all the things parents are looking for, because we want to arrest that decline.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I put this to you: I think parents paying their taxes take it for granted there will be teachers at the school and new schools will open in growth areas. But haven't we got a bigger problem, for instance, in a lack of confidence in teacher quality, in the values in the schools and in behavioural standards? The feedback I get from parents going to the non-government sector is that those are really big factors, as well as transparency about school performance. How do you address those areas?

Ms PRUE CAR: In terms of behaviour, I agree with you that parents are concerned about behaviour. It's something I get a lot. It's a very big challenge for all of our teachers and leaders in our schools. In fact, that is why we changed the behaviour and suspension policy upon coming into government. We actually made it easier for principals and deputy principals, who often have the responsibility within schools for behavioural and discipline policies, to act swiftly and use things like suspensions, if it's necessary, to keep settled environments, settled classrooms and to deal with persistent misbehaviour so that kids can learn and teachers can feel confident that it's a safe workplace, a safe classroom and a safe playground. But I would take you up on your previous premise, with respect, Mr Latham. I think that when it comes to building schools in new areas, a lot of parents don't take it for granted, in fact. If you go to an area like, for instance, the suburb in which I live, Jordan Springs, there still isn't a high school. We're building one now. I can tell you now, that will make a big difference to enrolments in public schools in that area.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In all the growth areas, there are many more government schools than non-government because of the size of the budgets.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not true.

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: What's a social emotional learning structure with the Thrive Programme?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice because I'll tell you what we're focused on as a government, and this is what the education experts advised for years and years, and finally now they have a government that's actually listening to the experts—a novel idea. We're focused on rolling out explicit teaching.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, they have got a lot of pedagogies.

Ms PRUE CAR: But, I tell you, we could not be more committed to explicit teaching, specific professional development. We are supporting school by school by school. A lot of it happens anyway, and we're making sure that this is the department's expectation, which was never done before. It was like a choose your own adventure, which was part of the problem. I think we can agree on that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, but how do we get from an expectation to reality?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have to roll it out.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you say, Minister, to a parent worried about the quality of teaching methods at the government school, thinking about, even in a cost-of-living crisis, going to a non-government school, "No, I can guarantee to you today that explicit instruction is the pedagogy that's used in government school classrooms."

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You can. Well, what went wrong at Elderslie?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, I mean, at Elderslie—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Because you didn't know what the Berry Street Education Model is. It's a student self-regulation—you know, dreadful student-led learning—trauma-informed practice and positive psychology. I don't know what the Thrive Programme is, but quality teaching rounds at Newcastle university are certainly not explicit instruction, and this Committee's established that in the past. So are you sure you can give that guarantee? What's gone wrong at the schools where it's not happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, I'm not sure what's happening at Elderslie, and I'm not sure whether the trauma-informed practice can't coexist with explicit teaching in terms of literacy and numeracy and other knowledge in the classroom. But, moving away from that, we are rolling it out. We are putting resources straight into helping schools adopt explicit teaching, or even further their explicit teaching practice. For the first time ever, actually, the department is—what's the word for it?—actually supporting the pedagogy expectation. I accept your point that this has to be a reality, but we're actually in the process of doing that. This is a big change for the department. It's a welcome change for teachers, in my experience, because the evidence for years and years has been that explicit teaching is the way to go. Finally now, the government department is saying, "That's what we're going to support you to do. That's the expectation, the pedagogy, in the classroom."

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But what do principals do on a daily basis to make sure that's happening in the classroom and then report that back to the department?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think you'll find—and I trust the professionalism and expertise of our teachers across 2,200 schools—it's happening.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just wondered if it had been something that had been raised with you because it's certainly been raised with us. But if you could take that on notice, that would be great. Minister, are you going to reverse the decision that you have made about Freshwater campus, turning it into a year 7 to 12 school from 2027?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I have said to this Committee many times, the Government's election commitment to make sure that every student in New South Wales has access to co-educational schooling meant that in every area where students were only in a catchment for a boys or a girls school we consulted with our community about how we would then provide that election commitment, how we would provide co-educational comprehensive secondary education. In the northern beaches, that consultation came back very clearly that prospective parents wanted co-educational offering and that would be to turn the Freshwater—very successful Freshwater campus—into 7 to 12. As a result of a lot of feedback from that community, however, about the current 11 and 12 enrolments having not signed up for that change, I think Ms Summerhayes was at the school on Friday afternoon and informed the community and the leadership and some of the student representatives and parent representatives that that decision will be delayed one year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: After they all walked out on Friday morning. All the students walked out. Have you been to the school and met with any of the students or parents?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm admitting to you, Ms Mitchell, after the feedback came.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have met with many people in regard to Freshwater—representatives of the community, the principal, the parents. I'm saying that feedback came, and we responded to that feedback.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you have delayed it by a year. I have also had feedback from a number of parents who are very concerned. And you have just said yourself, the very successful Freshwater campus—because it is. The applications far outweigh the enrolments year on year. You get large percentages of children coming, my understanding is, from non-government schools into Freshie.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So why are you changing a senior campus model that's so successful?

Ms PRUE CAR: Look, in consultation with the community, including the Liberal member for Manly, who's been quite supportive of this change, including the Independent member for Wakehurst, who's been supportive of this change, we have reached the decision that to provide co-educational provision will be to gradually change Freshwater into 7 to 12. That will now be delayed for a further year so we can ensure that those students that are currently enrolled at Freshwater in years 11 and 12, who didn't sign up for that—and I have to say this has all been communicated with the Opposition member for Manly, who is supportive of this change—will graduate from Freshwater, and won't be subject to this change.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate your position about the co-educational options, but I'm not arguing that. Why would you not change boundaries for Forest High and Cromer High to overlap so that you don't have to dismantle the very successful senior campus model at Freshwater? Why is that not an option?

Ms PRUE CAR: We undertook consultation with the community about what to do at northern beaches.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But people are still really unhappy, Minister. Surely you're getting the emails and phone calls like I am.

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, that's why we have responded. I have said we have had feedback.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you have delayed it a year. You haven't actually changed anything. Why would you not look at changing the boundaries for Forest High and Cromer High? Can you just advise why?

Ms PRUE CAR: I mean, the consultation with the community very clearly said that prospective parents wanted their young children in 7, 8—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but you could get that by changing boundaries of existing schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: Hang on. I'm in the middle of my answer, I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell. The prospective parents, as in primary school age parents, they want their children to go—the consultation very clearly said that they want their children to go to 7, 8, 9 and 10 at a very successful school. We want to extend the success of Freshwater—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But surely you appreciate—

Ms PRUE CAR: —and we have listened to the feedback.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: All right. Well, the feedback is also that parents continue to be concerned about what's happening. Just last year the department did an article about why everyone wants to be at Freshie, why it's one of the best attended schools in the State, and talking about that element of being a senior campus. Mr Dizdar, you did a live stream not from Freshie but another senior college, Wyndham College—years 11 and 12—where you said, "In my opinion, we should have more senior campuses in New South Wales, not less." Why are you not listening to the parents and the community of Freshwater, who want that senior college to remain? Will you listen to them at all or is it a done deal?

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How do you not know the answer to that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm taking it on notice so I give you the correct information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a ballpark, a rough idea? Has that not been part of your consultation?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a pretty big issue. How could you not have any idea how much money—

The CHAIR: Order! We have a point of order.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The point of order is that the question has been taken on notice, and that's the end of it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does Ms Summerhayes or Mr Dizdar know how much capital money you'll put into that campus in the next year to get it ready for more students in 2027?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're putting together a project reference group, which will have school community representation. We're going to kick that off this term. I indicated that on Friday when I was out at the school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a budget for it, though, at this point?

MURAT DIZDAR: Then we'll determine and work with the school around its needs, put forward a planning procurement process and work out how much funds are needed for the project.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There's no budget allocation set aside at this point for an upgrade?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a Government commitment that has been given to undertake capital works at that site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But for how much money?

MURAT DIZDAR: We don't know because we have got to go in there, work with the school community around what facilities are needed. We're going to start that work this term.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to that this afternoon. I'll hand over to my colleague.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, you have made comments in the media that you have asked the department to ensure that independent and faith-based schools are supported. What is being done to support independent and faith-based schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: With what, Ms Merton?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of reports about the parent and school community nervous amid a heightened antisemitic environment.

Ms PRUE CAR: This is something that, from the outset, I have to say, as education Minister, has been of top concern to me for all of our students in all of our sectors. We have offered support to non-government, faith-based schools that feel that they are really, at the moment, at the front line of helping their families through what is an unprecedented turn of events.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, just to direct you, what has been done in terms of that offer of support?

Ms PRUE CAR: I know Mr Dizdar, as secretary of the department, has spoken very often to non-government, faith-based schools. In particular, there are a number of Jewish schools that we have offered support to. That's actually a matter of course when any school is going through a difficult time. At the moment, there's a set of communities that feel like their students really need some extra support.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, have you spoken—

Ms PRUE CAR: I know those conversations are happening but that level of support that's been accepted from the department is maybe something that Mr Dizdar will know. I know that that offer has been made.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sure, I appreciate that. Minister, have you spoken directly to any of the students or teachers concerned?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have spoken to many teachers. I have spoken to principals. I have spoken to students. I have spoken to parents of schools in non-government areas in the Jewish community. I have spoken regularly to the Jewish Board of Deputies.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Okay, I'm happy to take that up with Mr Dizdar this afternoon, if that's okay just in terms of what's in place.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, given the current environment of repeated and concerning reports related to antisemitic behaviour, does civics and citizenship education have a greater role to play in our schools in building social cohesion?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, it most definitely does. In fact, in the rollout of the new curriculum presently, being undertaken from 2027, for the first time civics and citizenship will be mandatory, not optional. In addition, not only will civics and citizenship be mandatory, the teaching of the holocaust will be mandatory.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I refer to an earlier question in February relating to Teachers for Palestine. You may recall at the time—I think I tabled these documents—that there were political instructions circulated to the teachers calling for political action in the schools during school hours. It included wearing the keffiyeh and Palestine badges and taking action within the schools. Minister, what action was taken relating to this behaviour and the demonstration under the teacher code of conduct relating to that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Political instruction from whom, Ms Merton?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: No, what action was taken by the department?

Ms PRUE CAR: You said there was political instruction.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm talking about the flyer and the call to action by Teachers for Palestine. The materials were tabled. I repeatedly raised similar examples like this. My question, Minister, is what action was taken relating to this behaviour and demonstration under the teacher code of conduct?

Ms PRUE CAR: None of that activity was endorsed by the department. I think my answers to those questions, which I think were identical to the questions you asked last time, were that the individual teachers may be doing their own thing as individuals, but they're not department-sanctioned events. They're not endorsed. Anything that a teacher does in school time is dealt with by the code of conduct. I have made that extremely clear and I'll use this opportunity again to say it. My expectation is that schools are apolitical places. That goes for every issue. Most especially in a set of circumstances in which the world finds itself in a heightened state of conflict, our schools must be places where children from everywhere feel safe, and staff and students feel safe. The secretary has made that very clear and the deputy secretary, Public Schools, has made that very clear time and time again that there is a code of conduct for a reason. We will not back down from that. I'm just—

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Parents are also asking, in the event of a breach of the code, what action is taken?

Ms PRUE CAR: It depends on what that breach is, Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there a suspension? What is the course of action followed?

Ms PRUE CAR: But the course of action followed depends on the breach, doesn't it?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But I'm just saying, in terms of my example here—

Ms PRUE CAR: What example?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —and material that has been tabled about Teachers for Palestine's call for action in school during school hours, and material that I have tabled previously about propaganda on school blackboards, parents are continuing to ask, "Does the code of conduct stand for anything?"

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, it absolutely does.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Does it?

Ms PRUE CAR: It absolutely does. If you are going to give me exact examples, I will ask the department to update the Committee on what was done in accordance with the code of conduct, because none of that is acceptable.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I draw your attention to one other issue. Teachers for Palestine has made its upcoming actions publicly available and detailed a number of rallies taking place at different times, dates and schools. I note the call to action for teachers to protest and strike. When it falls on a school day during school hours, are the teachers attending those strikes and rallies in a paid capacity?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. I make really clear again that Teachers for Palestine is not an endorsed group of the Department of Education; it's a group of teachers who have that particular view, but they are not to participate in political action while they are being paid to be teachers in New South Wales public schools. I couldn't be clearer on that. I think we're agreeing with each other and you're trying to make out like I'm not, but we are agreeing with each other.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Parents are asking, when teachers are absent—

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

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But Minister, they're absent from the classroom and they're striking and protesting. I have got a list here of all the dates and venues. I appreciate that Teachers for Palestine is an independent political movement, but parents are asking, given teachers are striking, protesting and absent from the classroom, is the teacher being paid that day? Is the New South Wales taxpayer paying the teacher?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, the teacher cannot do that on duty.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

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

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm actually being really clear about the answer.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: The question is being asked at such a level of generality that the Minister can't reasonably be expected to answer the question in accordance with the procedural fairness resolution.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm happy to table the list of protests available and the dates and the times. These strikes and protests are during school hours—

The CHAIR: Sorry, that's a comment. If the Minister requires further information, she should feel free to request that from the questioner.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's your answer?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: Ms Gudu, I go back to the early childhood education and care sector. We were talking before about the Seaforth centre and the complaints that have been made there. In the court documents, it's alleged that there were multiple complaints made to management over the years. Were those complaints made to the regulator?

SHARON GUDU: Ms Boyd, it's not appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of that matter because of the legal matters that are underway at the moment as well as the regulatory activities that are underway. However, what I can assure the Committee is that we receive a number of allegations throughout the year. Services are obligated to notify us of serious incidents that occur. Parents do contact us as well. We investigate every single one of those. We do our initial risk assessment within a day of 99 per cent of those matters. We have a very thorough and rigorous approach to our follow-up on all matters that are raised.

The CHAIR: That centre is still listed as meeting the national quality standards. If I'm a parent looking for a centre to put my children in the care of, the only information I have is that that centre is meeting the national quality standards. At what point do we change the rating when something like this has happened? This is before the courts.

SHARON GUDU: It's an excellent question. I might just expand a little bit on the assessment and rating process, if that's okay. All services are assessed and rated against seven quality areas under the National Quality

Framework. We have got targets in place to do that on a regular basis. Our officers undertake a very thorough assessment at a point in time.

The CHAIR: Can I just shortcut you, sorry, because we don't have much time. At what point do you proactively respond to breaches and complaints and update that rating?

SHARON GUDU: When we receive complaints, and as part of our proactive monitoring and compliance, we can at any time determine on the basis of that information that we reassess a service. When, as in the example of Seaforth, we are undertaking an active investigation, we need to wait for that investigation and our regulatory activities to be complete before we do then go on to a reassessment.

The CHAIR: Let's then go to a more concrete example that's not currently before the courts. As part of the public documents that were released in response to my SO 52, there was some aggregated data related to a service called Kids Academy Early Learning Spring Farm. They have currently got 104 approved places for children. This is a document that lists thousands, actually thousands—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: If the member is going to refer to a document, perhaps the document should be tabled.

The CHAIR: This is the document that the department prepared.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, but the witness still has to have an opportunity to know which document you're referring to and be able to respond to the document.

The CHAIR: I don't uphold the point of order. I don't think that is actually a point of order. I understand that the regulator—and we can ask the witness. Do you know what I'm referring to?

SHARON GUDU: I'm familiar with the matter that you're referring to. However, I would also say that there are regulatory matters underfoot in relation to that matter and it's not appropriate for me to comment on the specifics.

The CHAIR: Can I just quickly ask you because I have limited time before I go back—in an example where you have thousands of breaches within a four-year period, yet that provider is still listed as meeting the standards, again, at what point do you go in and change that so that parents accurately know the risk of the provider they're leaving their children with?

SHARON GUDU: As I mentioned before, in relation to compliance matters, complaints, incidents and so forth, we work intensively with services. We undertake a range of regulatory actions, and when our investigations are complete and we determine the actions that we will take, we are then able to reassess.

The CHAIR: I might come back to you in the afternoon. Minister, this has been a good example, I think, of what I have been hearing about and witnessing. This is a service—as you know, because your department provided me with this aggregated data—with over 1,580 cases of inappropriate discipline being used on children within a four-year period. Inappropriate discipline—so we're talking about wrists being pulled and hair being pulled and kids being dragged along floors. That's just the minor stuff. And yet this is still a service that, if a parent looked on the site, they would see as meeting standards and would think is an appropriate place to send their child. Do you think that is an appropriate regulatory response?

Ms PRUE CAR: I personally do not think that is appropriate. We have to independently assess what is happening here. But I would make the point that our regulator is also working within the national quality framework. I'm not using complexity as an excuse—don't get me wrong. But it is a very, very complex set of circumstances that we're working with in early childhood. But what should not be complex is the fact that, as a parent, you should know that that is the case.

The CHAIR: You should know.

Ms PRUE CAR: You should know.

The CHAIR: One of the objectives of the national law is "to improve public knowledge and access to information about the quality of education and care", but because of the security around these places, people leave their kids at the gates. They don't know what's going on inside those places.

Ms PRUE CAR: You are not going to find me not agreeing with you on that.

The CHAIR: So why is it that New South Wales still provides less transparency over breaches and undertakings and everything else than any other State?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have got to do better in that.

The CHAIR: Will you undertake to look at the amount of data and the amount of information being provided a bit more urgently than a review, and ask for at least the same standards as in Queensland and Victoria?

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, Ms Boyd, that will definitely be part of the independent assessment. That will be my instruction to the department because we need to be transparent. Parents need to know that they're enrolling their child—and in some cases, and many of us have been there, we're talking about babies.

The CHAIR: Exactly, and we have this lack of transparency. But also, we have a sector that is, I think, around 90 per cent privatised. Many of these centres are backed up by private equity whose mandate is to get as much profit out of it and to squeeze costs wherever possible. The risks involved in this area are huge, aren't they?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, because you're dealing with the smallest of children. The risks when it comes to any service, whether it's government or community provided or not-for-profit or for-profit—the risks of any service that has duty of care over children are very high and we need to provide that transparency to the community.

The CHAIR: I welcome the idea of a review. I'm very concerned that it has only been announced today ahead of this session in budget estimates, on the back of almost four months of what I see as a real reluctance from the department to release information. On the day that I was requested to meet with your staff and department staff, and also staff from the departments of police and DCJ, on 21 November, I was unable to attend because I was in the Chamber. But my staff member attended and was asked a lot of questions about what we already knew and what we were trying to get out of the SO 52. On that day, you were meeting with a representative of the CEOs of these large childcare services. Were they talking to you about the SO 52?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. I assume that is the case because of my diary disclosures, Ms Boyd, and I am going to assume that the meeting that you attended with representatives of police and Communities and Justice was probably in relation to—I stand to be corrected, but it was probably in relation to the volume of what was requested and how we could ensure that you got what you were after. I take your point about me announcing this here today, but I would actually suggest it is an example of the Committee doing its work and democracy. I'm now on record everywhere saying I'm instructing the department to do this review. I accept what you're saying about it only being announced today, but we're announcing it now, and I will be instructing the department to do it.

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.

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. Going back to explicit instruction, does it apply also to phonics? Phonics should be taught in literacy rather than whole word.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What is your implementation method? Rather than saying you're expecting it to happen, what is actually happening in the school? Someone is observing the classroom practice and can tick off that, yes, it's according to the Minister's wishes.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. It's not so much my personal wishes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's everyone's—who's smart.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's the wish of the department, because that's what education experts have been saying for ages, and now, finally, there is a Minister who actually listens to education experts. But we are rolling that expectation out to be a reality, supporting it school by school. Every director is working with every principal to ensure it happens. Can I take you up on a very fair question you asked before about Elderslie, with respect to if it has been implemented? I think you will find that, in the annual report for 2024, it will be clear that's what they use. In the annual reports, it will be clear, for 2024, that every school is expected to be rolling out explicit teaching. We have a phonics check in year 1. Phonics is the accepted way that the department now expects the early years of literacy to be taught. In fact, I was at Burwood Public School yesterday in a year 1/2 class seeing it being taught, and the kids were actually talking about phonemes, sounding them out and using their arms. It was brilliant.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I went to the most recent Elderslie report published in April last year. That is all I can do—off their website.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's true for 2023 but, in 2024, they're doing it now, and it will be in the 2024 annual report.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I will keep an eye out for that. In New South Wales government school classrooms, how many times is a teacher observed by an expert providing feedback, whether that be the principal or someone else, to give an assurance that explicit instruction and phonics are being taught?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would argue our teachers in our classrooms are the experts, and they work with their colleagues collaboratively, particularly beginning teachers and early career teachers. There's lots of teaching collaboration that occurs. There's working with stage assistant principals. That happens every day.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many times are they observed per annum? The Auditor-General, in the last term of Parliament, reported that the department has no central oversight of schools' implementation of

the Performance and Development Framework, and this is where teachers were to be observed to make sure their classroom practice was best practice.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And, obviously, if it wasn't, corrective action would be taken. The Auditor-General back then reported that, basically, it just never happens and, where it does, the teacher gets to nominate their own observer and, if they don't like the report, they can bin it. How has that changed?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think you will find that teachers do welcome the chance to keep their practice up to date and expert and to collaborate with their peers. I stand to be corrected on this by Mr Dizdar, but I think the lesson observation does have to happen twice a year.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. Mr Latham, principals and executive have got full access to every classroom in the school; that's always been the way. But every teacher has to have two lesson observations a year as part of their Performance and Development Framework.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the performance measure to make sure that that's happening?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a documented performance development framework for every staff member, so those observations are documented there. As a former principal in the system, even in my principalship—even when Ms Summerhayes and Mr Barraket were principals, as principals we walked in and out of classrooms regularly. We did classroom walk-throughs; the executive does that. We have got an assistant principal curriculum instruction role that does that. Outside of the formal observations that are twice a year, there would be ongoing observation that's undertaken. It varies from a beginning teacher to a temp teacher to a highly expert, experienced teacher.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But in the Performance and Development Framework, is it still the rule that you get to nominate your own observer and, if you don't like what they report, you can just discard it?

MURAT DIZDAR: Where we're really shifting the attention now with those walk-throughs and observations really relates to some of the findings of the PC report back in 2020 that we needed to drive the evidence base. So we're driving that with explicit teaching. Last year was the first time this organisation has ever come out with a statement of pedagogy. I'm not sure if you have seen that statement. It's been unpacked on the ground, and it was the first time the system has also dictated an entire school development day, where 95,000 teachers across the system undertook training in explicit teaching. It was the first time ever.

It hurts me to say that when I graduated from teacher education, and when Ms Summerhayes did so, it wasn't the case that we were trained in explicit teaching. So we have got catch-up to do here with the workforce. We commenced that in term 2. I'm proud that we also partnered with AERO, the Australian Education Research Organisation, around our statement. We're now just unpacking the elements, via video footage, of good classroom practice, because the profession wants to not only read the evidence base that's digestible; they want to see what it looks like.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does every principal then have to certify to the department that they guarantee explicit instruction and phonics are being taught in their classrooms?

MURAT DIZDAR: Every principal had to—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's good to walk through and to have this other framework, but what do you know about it?

MURAT DIZDAR: I acknowledge that they're first steps. We are going to stay on the concerted path. Every principal has got to assure us that they're undertaking explicit teaching practice across their school. Is there room for other pedagogies? I think this is really important. There is, but the basis of what you have seen at Marsden Road and what we have seen together when we visited Cabramatta and Canley Vale have got to be across the board. That's what we're driving, and that's what we're going to continue to drive. It does work, it doesn't discriminate between ability levels, and we have got to train the workforce. We're at work on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just back to phonics quickly—you mentioned the phonics check which actually began, you will acknowledge, prior to you starting in government.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is a unity ticket on phonics. Are you going to be setting targets for schools to have improvements for that phonics check as part of your 16 targets?

Ms PRUE CAR: For the year 1 phonics check, we have made it very clear that we want to be doing better and see more of our year 1 students, for that diagnostic check, to be doing better. But there are particular literacy targets in terms of NAPLAN for those school success measures at a system level, as well as in the school excellence plans. But we really want to see our students in year 1 doing better in that check-in assessment than they have been in the past. I think we have been very clear about that. We'll continue to publish those results and be very clear about the expectation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but is one of your new targets—and I appreciate what you're saying about NAPLAN, but that starts in year 3. Previously there was not only the check but also a target for schools to have for improvement in that check, year on year. Is one of your 16 targets specifically related to phonics and an improvement in that check?

Ms PRUE CAR: We will be working with schools on their school excellence plans to ensure that they improve in their phonics year 1 assessment as well as all other system measures.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it's not one of your statewide ones like NAPLAN and HSC. Phonics isn't counted in those targets.

Ms PRUE CAR: Our system-wide targets are very clear in literacy and numeracy—very ambitious in literacy and numeracy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: From year 3.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, that's true, but I think everyone would agree that the building blocks to get to that first assessment of literacy in NAPLAN at year 3—that phonics work that happens in early years is crucial to that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which is probably why you might set a target for year 1 too. When you were in Bellingen, why did you invite the Coffs Harbour City councillor Tony Judge to join you at that school visit?

Ms PRUE CAR: When I was in Bellingen, I went to a school with Councillor Tony Judge. Yes, okay. I think I invited Tony Judge as a local community representative who is very concerned about the delivery of school infrastructure in that community, and I was very—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You do realise Bellingen isn't in Coffs Harbour shire, though. He doesn't represent that area, but you invited him and you didn't invite the local member. Why did you invite a Labor councillor from a neighbouring community to a school visit?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Hopefully, he was an explicit instruction expert.

Ms PRUE CAR: I really didn't have this on my bingo card today, but anyway—I think that Councillor Judge has expressed an interest in ensuring that there is the fair, equitable and speedy delivery of education infrastructure on the North Coast. I actually did a range of school visits on that trip, including announcing that, once and for all, the big mega-school at Murwillumbah was demerged.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you invite Labor councillors from neighbouring LGAs but not the local member.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

Ms PRUE CAR: Of all the things I thought I would be asked today, I didn't think this would be the big issue for the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a pretty genuine question. The community was a bit confused by it.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, it's very political.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I will go back on that point about principals needing to guarantee they're teaching phonics and explicit instruction. When they come back to the department, how many have said, "No, you have got it wrong, I know my local school, I have been to some conference and we saw the fad education method and we're implementing that." How many have done that, and when they say that, what do you do about them?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar to answer this because my expectation is that doesn't happen.

MURAT DIZDAR: Pleasingly, we haven't had that reaction. We have had a bit of sense of relief that the system is prepared to back in the evidence base, and say this the pedagogy that needs to occur right across the system. We have had honest appraisal, and Ms Summerhayes might be able to add to it. The greatest challenge in education—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You must have had some pushback. You must have.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, not really. We have had great honesty by virtue of this. The greatest challenge in education is not necessarily across schools, it's across classrooms. How do you get the consistency of expert practice in classrooms? Principals have been honest with us around the challenge there, that it might occur in pockets in a school and they want to strengthen that. Some sites have said to us, to Ms Summerhayes and me, "We have been on this track before you jumped on this track, and we're grateful you're backing it in." Others have said, "We need help, and we need you to come in and help us grow this." So it's been good honesty rather than pushback.

We have had to eyeball some operations where it might be project-based learning or inquiry-based learning, to say, "Have you got the basics and fundamentals right around explicit instruction first? Can you assure us of that before you drive this pedagogy?" We have been operating since 1848, and we have not come out with a statement of pedagogy in this system until April 2024. That's on our watch. The system has breathed a sigh of relief. AERO is working with us on the videos that we're going to unleash, and we're going to stay on this path, Mr Latham, for a concerted time period and not deviate, because we stared down people who don't believe in this path with the evidence base. The ground respects that, and now the ground needs to respond. In fact, you might want to know this. I have been turning up to the meeting of deans of education and have given them the statement that we have provided, and have indicated to them that as the largest employer of teachers in this State, this is what we will be looking for. I have been brutally honest with them that we're not assured that teacher graduates are coming through with this expertise.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, they're not.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm very pleased that most are responding. It's got to be a concerted path. We're going to stick with it. I'm just as restless as you are. You called it out in 2020 around the evidence base, and you're right. We have got to get sharp around diagnosis that it's occurring in every classroom.

The CHAIR: Before we go to tea, just checking if the Government has any questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We just want to get some clarity. Minister, can you confirm that a staff member from the member for Oxley's electorate was at the Bellingen visit, and that he advised you that the member was on a study tour in Queensland at the time?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, that is true. Thank you for the reminder. Actually, yes, the member was on a study tour in Queensland when we were at Bellingen. That's right, yes. And the senior electorate officer was there and told us that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You weren't invited. They just came.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think she videoed the whole thing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not that you invited them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I think it's Government question time.

The CHAIR: Order! Thank you. That brings us to tea time.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will recommence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Deputy Premier, would you agree, as a general proposition, that delay in delivering projects causes an escalation in the costs of delivering those projects?

Ms PRUE CAR: As a general proposition, yes, of course.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: If there were projects that you had committed to deliver some time ago and they still hadn't been delivered, there would be an escalation in the delivery of those costs?

Ms PRUE CAR: You're speaking in generalities. I get that you're getting to somewhere. I would urge you to get there, so I can answer the question accurately.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: As a proposition, if you made a commitment to a project two years ago, and you still hadn't delivered it today, would you agree that the cost of that project would, in general terms, have increased?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, it would, like my community lived through the delay in delivery of Marsden Park, where we just opened the high school at Melonba.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Thank you for that. I'm sure you are aware of an indoor sports precinct—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. In Werrington?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: —which you were proposing to deliver.

Ms PRUE CAR: Claremont Meadows?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: In Claremont Meadows.

Ms PRUE CAR: In my electorate? Yes.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: That was committed to some two years ago. Where is it up to?

Ms PRUE CAR: I thought you might ask me about this because the Liberal councillors on Penrith council did warn the mayor that I was going to get asked about this.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: You're prepared, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: That commitment, under the previous Government's iteration of WestInvest, was the previous Government's commitment, made by the previous member for Penrith and the Liberal candidate for Londonderry, for a basketball stadium at Claremont Meadows in my electorate of Londonderry. I'm working with the Treasurer currently to make sure that that land is available so that it gets delivered on.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: In terms of working with the Treasurer to transfer the land, it's Crown land, is it not?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: So it's not the Treasurer who would be delivering the land. It would be the Minister who is responsible for Crown lands.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm working with all Ministers, including the Treasurer. I'm fairly sure that we were speaking to the Treasurer and the Treasurer's office only recently about this.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: When was the last time you spoke to Minister Kamper about this issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going into a rolling discussion of everything I am doing to deliver for the community that I represent in the Parliament, but I am well aware of this issue and I am onto it.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Tell the people of Penrith: When can they expect to get this sports precinct?

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you mean the people of Londonderry, Mr Tudehope?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: And Londonderry. It's your electorate so you should have some concept of it.

Ms PRUE CAR: I represent Londonderry, not Penrith. I can tell the people of Londonderry that I'm following that up as their local member, as Minister for Western Sydney and as Deputy Premier.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Minister, you're the Minister for Western Sydney.

Ms PRUE CAR: Indeed.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: These are things within your capacity to ensure the delivery of.

Ms PRUE CAR: And I'm answering.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: What is the impediment to delivering this sports centre?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What is the point of order?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Under the procedural fairness resolution, paragraph 19, the Minister is entitled to take a question on notice and she has done exactly that on approximately two or three occasions. I ask the member to move on.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the point of order: The Minister has also said she won't provide the answer because she doesn't want someone on Penrith council to talk about it. That's not how estimates should be conducted. The Minister has to provide information that's useful in the public interest, no matter who talks about it.

Ms PRUE CAR: That is true. I take Mr Latham's point. It was in jest, and I probably shouldn't have said that. That was just a comment off the cuff that I take back. I will take it on notice because it directly relates to the delivery of this project that was committed to by the previous Government.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: That shouldn't be a reason for not delivering it, should it, Deputy Premier?

Ms PRUE CAR: Did I say that?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: It's a good project, is it not?

Ms PRUE CAR: Did I say that?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: You were implying that.

Ms PRUE CAR: I didn't imply that. That was a statement of fact.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: When was the last time you had a discussion with the mayor about this?

Ms PRUE CAR: On the weekend.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Did he put to you that this was a big commitment for Penrith City Council?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Minister, this was lobbied for by the community and this is something that was very easy to work with the Crown lands Minister on to deliver the site to the council for the purpose of getting this project started, two years later.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Is there a question?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have never heard you talk about this issue once before.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Two years later, not one step has been taken by you to deliver this project.

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Tudehope suddenly has a burning interest in Claremont Meadows.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: It hasn't been taken by you to deliver this project, has it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have answered all your questions on this, Mr Tudehope.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: You talked about the delivery of infrastructure. Can I take you to Mulgoa Road. You will be aware that funding was originally reduced for Mulgoa Road by the Commonwealth Government?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Then, subsequently, some funding was reinstated. I think \$115 million was recommitted by the Federal Government to the Mulgoa Road project.

Ms PRUE CAR: What stage of the project are you talking about, Mr Tudehope?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: For the total project, I think the original estimate was—

Ms PRUE CAR: There are four stages of this project.

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—

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: If it assists—

Ms PRUE CAR: Hang on. I'm just answering this question. The Commonwealth Government did foreshadow the reduction in funding. The New South Wales Government advocated for the reinstatement of that funding. I am well aware that this road is one of the most under-pressure roads in Western Sydney. In fact, I have been driving on Mulgoa Road for most of my life.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: I thank you for that and thank you for your commitment to Mulgoa Road. If it would assist you, in relation to the funding, the *Federation Funding Agreement Schedule of Land Transport Infrastructure Projects* for the 2024-25 budget discloses the Federal Government's commitment to that project as \$115 million. Do you accept that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I assume that you are pointing to fact.

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 to a document that I don't have in front of me.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Well, I'm happy to give you a copy of the document, if that would assist you.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: And I will shortly. Do you sit on the ERC, by the way, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: So you wouldn't have expected any decrease in the funding by the New South Wales Government for that project, would you, given what you have just told us?

Ms PRUE CAR: What decrease are you referring to, Mr Tudehope?

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Well, would you be surprised—

Ms PRUE CAR: I know you're setting up something here, so we should get to it.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Well, you're on the ERC. I anticipate that Mulgoa Road would be a priority project for you.

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Tudehope, you well know, because of Cabinet in confidence, I'm not going to sit here and go through what happens on ERC. But, as Deputy Premier and being on ERC, I assure the Committee that the members of the ERC are well accustomed to me talking about issues of importance to the people of Western Sydney on ERC—trust me.

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.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! I'll take the point of order.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: I'm loath to interrupt the Hon. Damien Tudehope's line of questioning, but it does go to relevance. I do wonder whether these questions are better directed to the roads Minister during the budget estimates for roads rather than this particular estimates.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: The Minister is the Minister for Western Sydney.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She's the Minister for Western Sydney.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: I accept that, but given the granularity of the detail—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She's the Deputy Premier. She's on the ERC. She should know.

The Hon. BOB NANVA: —I think these would be more relevant to the roads estimates.

The CHAIR: I will rule on the point of order. The Deputy Premier is capable of answering that she's unable to answer it, if it's not within her portfolio. But I'll allow the questioning.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: But if I put this to you, Minister—

Ms PRUE CAR: Please do.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: So the \$115 million, as disclosed by the current funding model for Mulgoa Road, is a reduction—

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you know there's a budget coming up, too?

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: So you don't know how much money was reduced, but you think it might be in the budget. Is that what you're saying?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. I'm just saying—

The Hon. BOB NANVA: Point of order: It's neither courteous to the witness under the procedural fairness resolution, making that sort of assertion, and it's not what the Minister said. I would also just reiterate the previous point of order that the Minister has taken this on notice, as she's entitled to do, under the procedural fairness resolution.

The CHAIR: In relation to the point of order, it's also within the member's discretion to repeat questions and waste time. It is completely up to him. Go ahead.

Ms PRUE CAR: I can repeat the answer. That's the issue here. If he keeps repeating the same question, I have to repeat the same answer.

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.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Why would you take \$115 million out of the project?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have really taken it on notice. I don't know how many ways I can say this.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: But I'm putting to you, Minister—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: —being a member of the ERC and being a member intimately aware of this project—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I am.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: —this is something which you should know in respect of whether there has been reduced funding.

Ms PRUE CAR: And, with respect to this Committee, I don't think it's appropriate for me to go into every discussion that happens at the Expenditure Review Committee.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Will you tell the people of Penrith that?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: She just has. She's told everyone.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm happy to tell the people of Penrith, Londonderry and Badgerys Creek, being the three electorates that are impacted by the Mulgoa Road upgrade, that this Government is committed to that.

The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Ms PRUE CAR: Thank you, Mr Tudehope.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could pick up the issue in terms of the recognition of the decline in enrolments in public schools, and we established here the priority parents are giving to values in education.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just draw your attention to legal issue bulletin 55, which relates to students and transgender issues. Minister, in the case of a transgender student, are the parents of the concerned student informed of a new gender identification by that student, which is recorded at that school? Are parents involved in these decisions and discussions relevant to children and transgender issues?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think, in regard to the question you ask, about whether a student at a public school may have told the teacher that they might have a change in the way they're identifying their gender, I have to make a point that, if and when that occurs, teachers and principals and school staff, of course they work with parents. To suggest that they don't is a bit ridiculous. Of course they're working with parents.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I guess, just in terms of reassurance—

Ms PRUE CAR: Can I also just make this point: We're talking about students here who are often quite vulnerable. We're talking about young people. I really want to be careful of what I say because we have a duty of care for these young people, and we take that very seriously, as a place where everyone belongs in their local public school, and can feel safe to be themselves.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, just to reaffirm, parents and families of concerned students about which there are discussions about a change of gender identification or pronoun—which is registered and recorded within the school—are a part of that discussion in light of the duty of care that the school has to the child.

Ms PRUE CAR: I am sure that teachers, principals, school counsellors and everyone works with parents. In terms of the way this works in schools, I might ask Mr Dizdar to comment because these are very—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm happy to go this afternoon on that. I appreciate the time on this.

Ms PRUE CAR: I want to be able to provide—I'm talking in generalities in terms of what I believe happens.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I have got three seconds left. If I could just—

The CHAIR: The Hon. Mark Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On my list of suggestions for improving the government school enrolment share, what's happening with failing schools? One of the feedback you get from parents is "We know the school's not going very well. Nothing's ever done to fix it." Is the tailored support program still operating? Is there zero tolerance of failing schools measured by academic outcomes? What are the interventions we have got in place to fix those schools that are really struggling, because there's obviously a significant number of them?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Latham, I'm not sure what you would classify as a failing school. There are some schools in our system—we have largest number of schools, I think, in any system in the Southern Hemisphere—that do struggle with a range of complexities within their particular community and environment. Every school, though, is expected to have a school excellence plan, which will be available from the end of term one, which is a mere few weeks away. But the department, via the directors on the ground and via the principals, work with those schools to achieve the targets that will be set in the school excellence plans. Saying that—I'm going to be honest with you—the challenges and the targets in a selective school are going to be different to an SSP, which are going to be different to a rural and regional school, which are going to be different to a sports high school. We have to work with every principal on their plan for their particular setting, as they say in education.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We expect that, of course. I asked you, Minister, question on notice No. 3168 about school results in the electorate of Barwon, which I visited. Obviously there are schools there that don't have a single student going through to sit the HSC exam, let alone graduate university. They have got abysmal NAPLAN results. I wanted some transparency about that. You didn't provide any detailed answer; you just referred me off to regional statistics that tell me nothing about those failing schools. Don't we have to get serious about the level of disadvantage? What are the interventions in place to have zero tolerance of these results and to fix these schools up?

Ms PRUE CAR: We do have to get serious about disadvantage. The public school system could not be more serious about tackling disadvantage. Saying that, there are some schools—and I know the ones you're referring to—that have significant challenges. I'm not going to say that is acceptable. We need to do better for those kids in that community so they have a chance. A lot of these schools, like the ones you referenced, Mr Latham, are in rural and remote New South Wales. I think previous approaches really failed these children by not working with what was happening on the ground to ensure that we were doing everything possible to attack some really seriously generationally difficult and traumatic problems. But I accept there are some massive challenges here—generational challenges. We do need to do better.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, we hear that rhetoric all the time but, at some point, the rubber has got to hit the road here and the Minister has actually got to say, "Look, here are key indicators pointing to a failing school. We have zero tolerance of this." It goes to the point of cruelty in our society to leave kids in schools that are just not getting the results for them. Those schools need new leadership. Pay those leaders extra money—the very best people. Have we got that policy in place—the very best school leaders are rewarded and paid to go into the struggling schools so they can get results? It's not just rural and remote; you can go to public housing estates.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's true.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you also see schools that turn it around quickly with new leadership that drives a whole new approach and intervention that gets those struggling kids out of the cycle of disadvantage and gives them a better chance in life.

Ms PRUE CAR: Leadership matters 100 per cent in the schools. In fact, I'm sitting between two people who have done that exact thing in public high schools.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Great, put them out at Walgett.

Ms PRUE CAR: There's a reason that they're running the department—for that reason. But, yes, I would say we need to do many things, including—and I know there are some people around the Committee table that think I'm like a broken record on this. I'll tell you what makes a difference in some of these areas: making sure there are enough teachers in those schools. The vacancies in some of these hard-to-staff locations are down. I know they're not just rural and remote but in some areas of rural and remote New South Wales, the vacancies are down 40, 50, 60 per cent. That does make a difference because merged and cancelled classes in some of the rural, remote and hard-to-staff locations, wherever they are, means attendance completely disappears. If kids are going to school and there's never a teacher, they just don't turn up. Attendance in these areas is a real challenge for us.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What are you doing to fix it, Minister? You're strong on rhetoric and these are speeches, that if I heard them for the first time, I'd be bedazzled by them but I have heard them a hundred times—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not trying to bedazzle you.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Because that is what we want. It's all about accountability. That's why we're here.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm definitely happy to bring you back examples where it's worked really well and has been impactful, and where we have still got work to do—where it hasn't been as impactful. I am happy to share those.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay, I appreciate that. Minister, also on my list is accessibility. I notice, in the Teachers Federation material about the new award, there's a one-hour cap on total meeting time before or after school and it institutionalises the right-to-disconnect provisions. Doesn't this put government schools at a disadvantage because the parents going to non-government schools will say, "Look, I pay my fees," and you do get pretty good access almost around the clock with issues that get raised with teachers and schools. But under these provisions of the Teachers Federation, it's a lot harder to get in contact now with your government school teacher.

Ms PRUE CAR: I know that might be your opinion, Mr Latham, but I disagree with that. I think that these things that we secured in the award with the teachers of New South Wales will not decrease the amount of access that parents have to their classroom teachers. Classroom teachers are well used to interacting, and want to interact, with the parents of the children in their class. That's an everyday part of their work. In fact, the measures that you point to were around workload and we know that workload was a huge reason why teachers were leaving the profession in droves. I think we probably can all agree with that. Teachers are accessible to parents. That's part of what they do every day. In fact, the contract between a parent and a classroom teacher, and then a principal or deputy principal, is vital to that student's ability to be able to succeed in class.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So why have you gone along with the right-to-disconnect provisions written in award now?

Ms PRUE CAR: It's just merely so that parents can contact—I understand this; parents are working, of course. You might not have heard or got it out of your child that there's an issue until you're putting them to bed at 8:30 at night and you want to email the teacher about something. I think it's fair to say that you will get a response in a reasonable time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But if that's the case, why have we got right-to-disconnect provisions so that the teacher can say, "No, I have disconnected"?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think that's so that the teacher can get back to the parent at a reasonable time. If you get an email at 11 o'clock at night, you don't necessarily want a response at 11:15 at night. Our expectation is always that parents and teachers are working together. To be honest, I see it every day and that's what happens.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, can you give us an example of a publicly announced policy of yours that the NSW Teachers Federation has disagreed with?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think I remember an occasion where we were negotiating the award and I seemed to have been locked out of public schools, but before that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, publicly announced policy.

Ms PRUE CAR: That they have disagreed with? I'm sure there's one out there.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There's one out there. It's like *The X-Files*: It's out there.

Ms PRUE CAR: Why don't we put that challenge to them?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Put the challenge to them?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, to disagree with something.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We'll invite them in for the afternoon session and see how we go. But at the moment you can't think of one?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sure there are things that they—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I think this is one of the issues too, because if you have got your average parent out there in the south-west and north-west growth suburbs—aspirational, middle class, common sense—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm sorry, Mr Latham—yes, I live in those suburbs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There is a big disconnect between their values and those of the Teachers Federation. I think this is one of the big issues you're going to have to confront.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think the values of a world-class public education are values that people in my electorate in north-western Sydney, who have migrated from around the world and want their children to receive the very best public education—I think they are the values of those teachers in the classroom.

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.

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.

The CHAIR: In relation to the IEU's application for bargaining, have there been any additional funds allocated or worked on for community preschools to pay for a pay increase?

Ms PRUE CAR: In regards to that multi-employer bargaining that's occurring presently, of course, this relates to community preschools so the Government's not party to that case nor do I believe we have been asked to join in any way. But obviously pay is a massive consideration for early childhood educators and most certainly pertinent to the workforce shortage.

The CHAIR: In terms of ensuring that local councils can expand their options of long day care, particularly in the so-called childcare deserts, what additional funds are the Government allocating or considering allocating to local councils?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Barraket will have detailed information on what we're doing there, but we are actually undertaking quite a lot of testing and trialling in terms of flexible initiatives for all ranges of provision in the sector—what is working in childcare deserts, as they are known. We are absolutely open to looking at ways that we can support local councils to provide long day care. Often they're highly subsidised, so are a very good option for families.

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.

MURAT DIZDAR: Those, I should add, that were cancelled, we're able to point them—you referenced TAFE with their early childhood offering. We're able to point them to where, if they wanted to get the appropriate qualification, they could.

The CHAIR: Another thing we spoke about last year was in relation to claims from a number of schools that, after the Local Schools, Local Decisions funds were re-centralised, they were having difficulties with funding some of the projects that they had already planned. I'm still hearing, for example, that air conditioning was going to be installed at places that now can't have that sort of installation. What has been done to plug those gaps?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think, in fairness—and both very fair issues to raise—they're probably two separate concerns. In regard to projects that schools may have had approved within the system, that they had been saving funds for, we are working on a case-by-case basis to make sure that happens. If there are any examples, we have been really clear that we take that up with the department and with assets under Schools Infrastructure for previously approved projects to occur. In regard to air conditioning, we're in this situation where because—look, the previous Government did not fund round two of Cooler Classrooms. We are working through on a case-by-case basis to make sure that air conditioning is delivered. It is a health and safety issue for our students and our staff. If there are examples of schools that have been waiting for their air conditioning to be installed, please give them to me and we will take that up.

The CHAIR: Okay, will do.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I want to go back to some western New South Wales questions, following on from Mr Latham. You talked about concerns about what is happening in some of those schools. Have you visited any of those communities? Have you been to Walgett or Bourke?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have done lots of school visits. I think I'm probably up to near 400 schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did any of those include schools in Walgett or Bourke?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have not been to Walgett or Bourke. I have spoken to many representatives of the communities of those areas on a number of occasions. I have been to Menindee. There have been lots of rural and regional visits that I have done.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You also said, in response to Mr Latham, that you thought some of the previous strategies in place in those schools weren't working. They're all Connected Communities schools. Have you disbanded the Connected Communities initiative?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. In fact, we extended it for another decade. What I was referring to was that the Auditor-General said the rural and regional approach in education was not working.

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. Have you been to Ivanhoe ever before, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you aware of the distances families have to travel out there to get their kids to and from school?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am aware. I don't pretend to experience this, but I am aware of the very particular challenges and complexities for parents living in remote locations that those of us that live in Sydney never have to confront.

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. 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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The parents are very concerned about it. 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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, you didn't even know where they were, so maybe you need to have a look at that.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Come on, what a stunt.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not a stunt for people who live in that area. Labor can be dismissive of regional communities, but we won't.

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Mitchell, I'm just going to call this for what it is. We provide staffing entitlement based on student enrolments, which is exactly the same system that you presided over.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You have got multiple schools fundraising.

Ms PRUE CAR: You can rewrite history all you like, but that is the truth of it. I will take it on notice for those particular schools and we will come back to the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. I want to take you now to what's happening in Broken Hill at Willyama. Why there has been no demolition of the existing school?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are committed to rebuilding Willyama High School; we have made that very clear. We are working with icare as the insurer. The Premier himself said to the community at Broken Hill that we will be rebuilding that. In fact, in the response to us announcing straightaway that we would rebuild this school, the comparison was made many times by the community to me that it was a directly opposite reaction to the one you had to the mould infestation at Wee Waa, where you waited years before giving the community some sort of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's not true. I'm asking about Willyama.

Ms PRUE CAR: That is the truth. The community members themselves—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not. Is there a new high school at Wee Waa?

Ms PRUE CAR: How long did it take you to act on Wee Waa?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a new high school at Wee Waa?

Ms PRUE CAR: Wasn't your question about Willyama?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am asking you now, though, because you're using a comparison, is there a new high school at Wee Waa?

Ms PRUE CAR: Did you commit to rebuild Wee Waa?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, we did—

Ms PRUE CAR: After how long?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —and we rebuilt Wee Waa.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, and we're building Willyama. Ms Mitchell, I'm happy to take you on your record any day.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine, but you also just said you were talking to icare about it and were maybe explaining that as the reason why not much has happened. What I want to know is—

Ms PRUE CAR: No, the building is insured via icare, so we're talking to icare.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But are you insured for the full amount? Will you get the full amount for a rebuild? What sort of discussions have you had with icare about that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think the community of Broken Hill, having spent quite a bit of time there with the community and its local member in response to this very unfortunate set of circumstances they faced more than 12 months ago—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I agree that it's unfortunate.

Ms PRUE CAR: They want to know that we're rebuilding the high school, and we are.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you have got, literally a couple of weeks ago, members of the school community—great reporting by ABC out in Broken Hill—fed up because nothing's happening, and you are saying, "We're in discussions with icare and we're working. There's money for it." There's no budget allocation. Nothing has happened that anyone in the community can see, in real terms, for over 12 months. You're telling me you're in discussions about where the money is coming from, I think, from what you have said. What's the budget allocation for that rebuild? How much have you got to allocate to that?

Ms PRUE CAR: It will be funded. I'm not going to go into the discussions we're having.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How much—if you know it's going to be funded and you have given that commitment? It's nowhere in the budget papers. You're still talking to the insurer, and you can't give me a clear answer on those discussions. How much money do you estimate you will need to spend to rebuild a brand-new high school out in Broken Hill?

Ms PRUE CAR: The money for the rebuild of Willyama High School will be allocated, and it will be spent on the new rebuilt Willyama High School.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you don't have a budget allocation, as we are here today.

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know how much clearer I can be on this.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a budget allocation for that rebuild, as we sit here today?

Ms PRUE CAR: It will be funded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right. That's your answer?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. I'm not trying to trick you. That is my answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're not giving any certainty to anyone in relation to that particular issue.

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know about whipping up fear in a community like Broken Hill and whether that's a responsible thing to do.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not whipping up fear. This isn't me; this is coming from the community through the local media saying, "It's been a year." So, as we sit here, you can't tell me when demolition will start.

Ms PRUE CAR: I can't believe the hide of you, after what happened at Wee Waa.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can't tell me when the rebuild will be built. You can't tell me if you have got a budget allocation. So if anybody wants to whip up fear—

Ms PRUE CAR: Honestly, I cannot believe the hide of you, after Wee Waa.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In relation to catchment changes in Bella Vista and Kellyville public schools, obviously, community members there are very unhappy about some of those changes. Will you meet with families in that area and talk about the decision that you have made and the impact it's having on those families?

Ms PRUE CAR: You well know that, as Minister, I'm not intimately involved every time the department changes a catchment area in terms of lines on a map. I think it would be a strange set of circumstances if the Minister responsible were involved in the changing of lines on a map every time a catchment changes. Kellyville is an area well known to me in the north-west of Sydney. It's subject to a massive amount of growth. It has been growing for a serious period of time. The department will, from time to time, change catchment areas to respond to population demand. If parents would like to discuss that with me, of course, my door is always open.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great, because I believe requests have been in to your office, and that hasn't been taken up. I will let the member for Kellyville know you have agreed to meet with some parents. I am sure he will appreciate that.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think we tallied up that there have been more than 1,300 meetings so far, so a lot of people do get through.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's great. You should meet with parents when they want to meet with you.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, and I just agreed that I would.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Wonderful. I wanted to ask you about the new school in Box Hill, which is a temporary school. When will you start to build on the permanent school site out there?

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me talk about Box Hill. I'm happy to talk about Box Hill all day. In fact, because the previous Government, in which you were Minister, did not ever plan at all to build any schools in Box Hill while the non-government sector moved very quickly to build a great big school at the Gables, while people moved into Box Hill, the quickest thing we could do, with the demand that was there, was to build a temporary school. I have to say, I was there in the first week, I think, on day two. They have had a record number of enrolments. The DA was approved on 17 December, and it was actually up and running on day one of term 1.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As a temporary school. That's great. I want to know, when will the permanent build start?

Ms PRUE CAR: You cannot be serious, coming in here and asking me about Box Hill when you didn't build a school, temporary or otherwise.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a pretty specific question. I would like to know when the permanent build will start and when it will be completed. I'm happy if you need to take it on notice. Can you tell me?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will ask Ms Harrington to give the detail, because we are focused on delivering Box Hill. In fact, there are a number of projects in Box Hill. But it's something, if I can say, that is very personal for me and very close to me, because your Government—I'm sorry, Ms Mitchell—left us with this disaster in Box Hill. In fact, your local member for that area said she couldn't even explain why.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you were out there for the opening of the temporary school, surely people were asking you when the new school was going to be built and opened. Can't you just tell me now what the timeline is?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm asking Ms Harrington to give you the detail.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm asking Ms Harrington to give you the detail.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will come back to Ms Harrington this afternoon because I have got plenty of time with her. In relation to the new high school in Medowie, there are concerns from the local community, particularly around the heavy traffic in that area, with lots of trucks going past where the school is and there not seeming to be a lot of consultation around how that will work. Do you have any concerns about safety in relation to accessing that new school, based on the site you have chosen?

Ms PRUE CAR: Is this the school that you said wasn't required?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking you about Medowie high school.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's it, Medowie. That was the school you said wasn't required.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: These are concerns coming from parents about safety issues. There have been some major incidents on roads nearby. There doesn't seem to be much in terms of the planning around school access for students. Are you concerned about that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every piece of feedback in terms of the construction of new schools is of concern to me. We will work with the local community, the PRG and the local member, who has fought since before being elected to Parliament to get this done. I will remind the Committee again that this is the school—that you're asking about—that you said was never required. It's funny how things work out, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking you questions about the delivery of it on behalf of families in that area.

Ms PRUE CAR: Who really wanted it, as it turns out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The families have legitimate concerns. I'm asking you about safety access to the site that you have chosen. You can be dismissive, but the mums and dads who watch this won't appreciate that. If there are specific concerns which have been raised with me around issues with traffic, access and safety, and they get put to you, will you respond with a proper answer for those families?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not being dismissive. We're building the school that you were never planning to build them, and we will respond to their concerns.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If there is a safety issue at that school—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I'm saying I will respond to their concerns.

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.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Construction of the new high school in Googong. Is there any planned date for the start of that construction?

Ms PRUE CAR: The community of Googong in Monaro has been fighting for school infrastructure for a long time—very similar type of community in terms of a new release area on the outskirts of Canberra, of course,

near Queanbeyan. In terms of the latest information about where we're up to with Googong high school, I would have to, for the benefit of the Committee, ask Ms Harrington for the details.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the one minute 15 seconds that I have left, I just wanted to ask about the new HSC syllabuses for music and drama. Obviously, you would be aware of quite a bit of concern around that. Some of the documents that we got back through our call for papers indicate that a lot of the teachers involved in the advisory group had some concerns about the trajectory that those syllabus implementations, or their creation, were taking. Have you asked NESAs to slow down that process, or have another look at it, given the significant concern raised by, particularly, teachers who have been part of that rollout?

Ms PRUE CAR: There has been a lot of feedback about the changes as we roll out a new curriculum. You're right in asking about this. It's out for consultation. That's part of the process. We will take that into consideration. NESAs will certainly take that into consideration. I'm sure that Mr Martin from NESAs can detail in greater detail for the Committee what's happening there, but that's out for consultation at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have you asked NESAs, in light of those concerns, to slow down, have a look at it, extend time—anything? Or are you just letting the process—

Ms PRUE CAR: I have impressed upon NESAs at every available opportunity—I have asked them to properly consult. When teachers feed back, that is important to me, as Minister, and that's taken into consideration.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. We might come back to that, Mr Martin, this afternoon.

The CHAIR: Last year, I raised the issue about voluntary school contributions. I know that the department did send out some sort of a memo, email or whatever to the schools, but, in the latest annual report, it's actually increased the amount that parents are paying to schools. Why is that?

Ms PRUE CAR: You're not going to get a disagreement from me on voluntary school contributions. Mr Dizdar, as secretary of the department, could not have been clearer with schools that public education is free. I'm going to be really honest and firm about this. Schools that send out things that look like invoices, that is not acceptable. We have made that very clear. I know that Mr Dizdar has been dealing with this for some time. I couldn't be clearer in terms of my expectation as Minister, because it comes to me a fair bit as well. But Mr Dizdar will have some detail on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I have communicated with the principalship, both in writing and in a live stream with Ms Summerhayes. In fact, I did an ABC radio interview before the kick-off of the school year, where I gave my personal departmental email address on air for families to write to me, so I could go back and rectify, if the school was not communicating around it being voluntary. My own children are part of this system. My own two boys are in a government primary school, then a high school with my daughter. I watch it. I observe it. I can tell you, Chair, that voluntary contributions have dropped in the system since 2017. But it still concerns me that some sites are not complying with the policy, using the words "fees" and "reminder schedules". There are no fees in our system. It's voluntary. I really respect parents that want to contribute—which is great. It gives additional funding to the public school. I'm one of those families. But it must be voluntary, and I have been very firm around that.

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: Thank you. Minister, I know—we have talked about this—you did inherit a system that was not particularly well resourced.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

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.

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: Could I just add, it is our operational mantra to drive the natural turf that we're talking about. But if there's particular examples that have been brought to you that you're concerned about, I really welcome those. The other thing I'd say, for those watching, is we have the best asset services officer ratio. I wish I had it back when I was a principal. It's one asset services officer on the ground for 10 schools. I just ask our school leaders and school community that they can raise it with the asset services officer as well if there is a concern at that site so we can look at how to prioritise that for that site. Because what we do with that asset services officer is look at what the local needs are on that site. Sometimes it's the bathrooms that they want rectified, or it could be the front entry, or it could be specific specialist learning spaces, or it could be—like in your example—that they're looking for shade. So I just encourage them to use that avenue, but if you have got specific examples too that I should chase—

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm happy to send you a list.

MURAT DIZDAR: Please do that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: You have all been very consistent in this term of government with expressing that preference for natural turf, but it's not consistent with what people are telling me is happening on the ground.

MURAT DIZDAR: Then let's go back and check those sites and make some improvement to those.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Wonderful. Thank you. I'm moving to a completely different topic. How much funding is provided at the moment, per school, for respectful relationships education?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice per school, but it's a priority of everything that we do. In fact, it will be embedded in the curriculum that we ensure that we are teaching our young people to be respectful in all their relationships, and in all their dealings with everyone in their lives.

Dr AMANDA COHN: In keeping with that commitment, what is being done to increase the capacity of schools and of teachers to effectively deliver that curriculum?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take that on notice in terms of curriculum changes or any specific PL that might be available for teachers to engage with.

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.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're trying to do the lifting for schools because, as you know, there's the sexual violence primary prevention strategy that cuts across 2024 to 2028. How we can call that out in the curriculum and the learning opportunities are really important. The other thing that I'm proud that we have revamped, compared to when Ms Summerhayes and I were principals, is that we run a mandatory—it used to be called Crossroads in year 11 and it's now Life Ready. It's a very critical juncture when our kids are going from year 10 to year 11, into their senior years. So we give great guidance, advice and resources at that juncture as well. But the Deputy Premier is spot on. How do you build that capacity over time and how do you call it out in the curriculum and in age-appropriate delivery?

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What link do you see between behavioural standards in a school and teacher administrative time?

Ms PRUE CAR: We need to resource schools to deal with behaviour for a range of reasons, because it creates settled classrooms and settled schools. Teacher admin was meaning that teachers were leaving, which meant there were more and more merged and cancelled classes, which was contributing to behavioural challenges.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Isn't the main admin time burden misbehaving students and the long line-up outside the principal's office for suspensions, discipline, filling out forms and playground incidents? Just as you have defined best practice in teaching with explicit instruction and phonics, shouldn't we define a best practice behavioural model for schools to follow?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Last term this Committee heard a lot of evidence that improving behavioural standards massively reduces admin time for teachers.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes. Amongst other things, that's true. A lot of misbehaving students does not help teacher admin. I agree with you 100 per cent on that. I think you'll find that we are really drilling down on the explicit teaching of not just literacy and numeracy and the basics that we expect but also behaviour. In fact, I seem to recall going to a school that Mr Dizdar was principal at, at Punchbowl, where they had a poster on the wall about what the expectations of behaviour were, and that's the explicit teaching of behaviour. A few weeks ago I was at Windsor High School. The principal was telling me exactly what she had done to bring up behaviour by explicitly teaching behaviour and the impact that had made on the kids as well as the staff. We're in agreement with that: Explicitly teaching behaviour is good.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why don't you make it a system-wide best practice? Obviously there are schools that have massive success on the behavioural front. We had Manisha Gazula here at the Committee, a wonderful principal at Marsden Road Public, who said, "I don't have a lot of admin burden because I haven't got a long line of students outside my office door waiting to be suspended and me having to fill out forms about them." She has explicit teaching of behaviour. It's known as a boot camp approach, where they really drill it into them. I know this might sound unconventional and not everyone's cup of tea, but if it gets results—and I have seen this at the Michaela school in London, upon which Marsden Road is modelled—why aren't we doing it everywhere?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't think it's unconventional, Mr Latham. I think you'll find that teachers right across New South Wales do have high expectations of behaviour in their classrooms, and they should. That's actually happening in a lot of our classrooms. But I take your point. We do need to ensure that we're explicitly very clear about behaviour in our classrooms, because settled classrooms are where students can learn.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes. You can't learn in an environment of chaos. That's obvious.

Ms PRUE CAR: An environment where we're trying to get more teachers—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's also a factor in bringing more parents into government schools, instead of the opposite.

Ms PRUE CAR: It is, 100 per cent.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Whatever happened to the behaviour tsar?

Ms PRUE CAR: Professor Donna Cross is doing a lot of work for us at the amount on cyberbullying. She's doing some cross-sectoral work with us via NESA to look at the issue of bullying across the sectors. That's her expertise. We amped up the behaviour policy, which made it easier for principals.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What does that mean? You amped up a behaviour policy? What's that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Basically, we made it easier, amongst other things—and this is simplifying it: We gave back the power of principals and deputy principals to act on persistent misbehaviour. It was too difficult for them to be able to act on that. I know that sometimes it's an unpopular thing to talk about, but sometimes schools do have to suspend students for persistent misbehaviour. We made it a little bit easier for that to happen.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But would you acknowledge, Minister, that there's still a wide variation in behavioural standards and performance in schools? You can visit some schools where you could hear a pin drop—total respect from students to adults—and at other schools, quite frankly, it's a bit of a jungle. How do we close that gap and ensure that every school has got strong behavioural standards, a good learning environment from that

stability, and a good reputation—you can send your kids there without the bullying and the problems, getting beaten up and kids coming home distressed. Haven't we got to define best practice behavioural standards, Mr Dizdar, and make those universal in our schools as much as we do pedagogy?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have to look at best practice.

MURAT DIZDAR: You know, I think you're spot-on. The ground is crying out for disciplined and orderly learning environments. The best way to get strong behaviour and strong engagement is to have outstanding classroom practice, so we have got to drive explicit teaching. If you have got classroom practice that struggles, you're going to get kids that are not going to be switched on. The evidence base is clear there. But you'll be pleased to know we have partnered with AERO on this as well, and they have got behaviour management modules that Mr Graham can talk to that we have been rolling out. It's not far-fetched that we also need to look at putting our colours on our mast around what should be a system approach around behaviour. But you might just listen to Mr Graham about what we're doing with AERO.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Graham, are we getting results? Theory and expectations are one thing but results can be very different. What are the results?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We certainly are. One thing teachers have been looking for is practical assistance. At the moment in every school we have a student behaviour code. Often schools will print that in the diary at the front so we have got consistent expectations, but teachers have been looking for practical guidance. We're very proud of professional learning we ran last year, which was across the State. We had thousands of staff come and be able to learn something, like, "How do you manage students who have ADHD?" "How do you manage students who have particular issues?" We worked with AERO—practical support, professional learning. They could take it back to the classroom immediately. That's the kind of stuff we're doubling down on. There's a small number of kids who get suspended. You might have a school where most of the kids are doing the right thing but there's a small group for whom there's a challenge.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Recidivists.

MARTIN GRAHAM: We get that data now in the department every day. When kids hit a certain threshold, you go, "Look, this kid's been suspended repeatedly." We don't wait for the school to reach out for support. We actually call the school and say, "Look, we're going to bring in a behaviour specialist to come and see what's going on. Maybe we need a referral to another agency. We might need a health referral." We're really trying to make it, as you said, consistent across the State.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, in terms of teachers teaching in front of classrooms, your new award is incredibly generous in the whole range of concessions and ways in which teachers can take leave and other entitlements to avoid being in the classroom, but one of them hit me really, really hard, I have got to say, with another birthday approaching. You have defined teachers over the age of 55 or those with disability as "self-care".

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know what that is.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why is someone over the age of 55 receiving these flexible work arrangements when they're less likely to have children at home and they're lumped in with those with a disability as self-care? Isn't this ageism? With people living longer, shouldn't we be encouraging teachers over the age of 55 to be sprightly? I know you're a spring chicken—

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't feel like it after this job for a couple of years.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —but for those of us who aren't and who are sprightly and active, and not have this ageism provision in the award? What are you doing there?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think I'll ask Mr Dizdar, but I would say some of these flexible work arrangements, which are probably what you're referring to, are probably something to do with the transition to retirement and trying to keep them longer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's self-care at age 55? What does that mean? It sounds like a nursing home—

MURAT DIZDAR: We carefully consider, Mr Latham—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —and not living.

MURAT DIZDAR: —the age demographics of our workforce. You find those that—you might have heard this terminology—were under the old super scheme, which is quite an attractive scheme, as I understand.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You abolished one of those.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're trying to keep more teachers in our classrooms. Rather than lose them at that juncture, which could be 55, 60 under that old super scheme, we'd rather support them if they're willing to go part time. From my angle, it's great to have the gun physics teacher for two days a week rather than no days a week, so this was workforce friendly around making sure that we could support them rather than lose them at that juncture.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But 55?

MURAT DIZDAR: Well, we have got people leaving us at the age of 55 and 60 who are in that old super scheme and who we wanted to try and keep.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay.

MURAT DIZDAR: Also, at that age we have found that some have family care arrangements where their parents are elderly. Again, rather than resign, can I support them in the workplace so I can get them continuing with me? In fact, Mr Latham, I had a teacher approach me in the holiday break. I did meet with them 40 years at Sydney Girls High School—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Chair, is that time?

The CHAIR: Order!

MURAT DIZDAR: —who wanted to benefit from these provisions and would have left otherwise.

Ms PRUE CAR: Without it, yes.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're on half a floor at 259 George Street.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a refurbishment underway?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me finish. No, there isn't. We were on five floors before that. We're on a half a floor now.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay, but there's not a refurbishment that's been approved to your office or office space in George Street?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, and I don't have a secretary office on that half a floor either. I don't have an office. I work at a workstation.

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 NESAs 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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Before you did media in relation to that, did you ask for a breakdown of the figures as to how many had been suspended specifically for bullying?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are very serious about bullying. I don't know what you're trying to catch me on. There are lots of media events—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Wouldn't you ask for the figures of how many kids had been bullied if you were going to do a drop to a paper about the number of bullies being suspended? You don't know the data.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have just taken on it notice.

The CHAIR: Minister, we were talking earlier about SRE in relation to caste being sort taught and enforced, but we have also heard about anti-science and anti-evolution teaching within those SRE classes. What role do you see for the department in making sure that the content of those classes is actually appropriate for a public school?

Ms PRUE CAR: Obviously our commitment to special religious education is so that parents can, as well as enrolling their child in a public school to receive a world-class public education, they can also have their children participate in some instruction that's relevant, hopefully, to their faith. We welcome all faiths within our public schools, and SRE is an important part of our ability to do that. Principals work with the SRE providers on a case-by-case basis. If there are examples of concern, then we would need to follow it up with that principal and that SRE provider.

The CHAIR: What we have here, obviously, is public resources being spent in public schools. Previously we have heard that the department said that what gets taught is not really the department's concern. Do you think there is a role when there is divisive content being taught in these classes?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think that if there is a concern from the community at that school, the principal would address that with the SRE provider and the parents.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, in the industrial negotiations that delivered the large and somewhat deserved pay increase, why didn't you seek productivity trade-offs to maximise the amount of time that teachers spend in the classroom instead of these 16 new provisions that take teachers away from actual teaching?

Ms PRUE CAR: Productivity is a fraught word in education, because what's productivity when it comes to education?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Teachers teaching.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think productivity is making sure that teachers are in classrooms teaching children so that we benefit from their expertise. That is clearly what we have done by getting more teachers in front of students. In addition to getting more teachers in and less teachers leaving, the truth is that we have—and this was a bit of a difficult decision in some quarters—also moved some executives to have more time on timetabled class. That was all part of the same move. It's a fraught word in education—I understand that—but, to me, that is the productivity gain that we got from that. To be honest, we're not declaring a lap of victory, but I think it is working. A reduction in teacher vacancies and less merged or cancelled classes means more productive schools. I hate to be so trite about it, but the whole productivity of society relies on education.

The CHAIR: Are there any Government questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No questions from the Government.

The CHAIR: That concludes our time with the Deputy Premier this morning. Thank you for attending this hearing. The Committee will now break for lunch. We'll return at 2.00 p.m. for further questions.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will recommence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wanted to quickly go back, Mr Dizdar, to the offices in George Street. For absolute clarity, you said that the department has half a floor there. Is there no plan to make that a whole floor at any time?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're examining the opportunity because the other half is free. We haven't signed a contract, but we're exploring it. We're on five floors in that building. We're on half a floor. There's other office accommodation I have let go of in my time. With workplace presence, we're just looking at what we might achieve on that other half of the floor.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So you are looking. Have you had a budget allocation yet for what that additional half-floor might cost?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the figures here, but we're in negotiations. We haven't signed a contract. We haven't got an agreement. If we were to achieve it, it would come out of the department's accommodation budget.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is no specific ask for any money for a fit-out for that office at this point in time?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a blank shell, that floor—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That half a floor.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. If we were to lease it and achieve an agreement, we'd have to fit out that half-floor.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to that at a future hearing and see whether that happened. I wanted to ask some questions about EduChat. I'm not quite sure who that is best directed to in the department.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to kick off and then Mr Graham can help out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Minister made reference before about using AI for certain tasks to help with teacher workload. She gave the example of a risk assessment for a school excursion. Can you confirm how often teachers are using ChatGPT or some sort of AI model to conduct a risk assessment? Is that a regular occurrence?

MURAT DIZDAR: We started with about 19 schools and then went to about 50 schools on demand. We piloted it with them—not ChatGPT, but EduChat. We grabbed ChatGPT and overlaid it with our own protection material with our IT experts. We also made sure that when our people linked to it, it linked straightaway to the New South Wales curriculum or New South Wales Department of Education policies and procedures rather than global search. We had tremendous feedback from staff in the schools, so we did have that available to all staff at the end of last year.

We're still working on the student piece, because the student piece is a variation of that. We have had great feedback from staff that have been using it for all sorts of things, like for lesson plans. It links to our lesson plans and our lesson materials. It is right that when you're organising excursions, you have got to come up with a risk assessment, which can be an administrative piece. It can help you, for example, with year 9 geography going to Taronga Zoo to look at ecosystems. It can give you a generic risk assessment which you can populate.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data on how many schools have used it for risk assessments specifically for excursions?

MARTIN GRAHAM: No, we don't have that. Our professional learning is very clear that you don't rely on what generative AI gives you, particularly for those things. It might call out the policies you need to apply, but we would absolutely expect that teachers would apply their professional experience and our policies to those risk assessments.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This morning, when asked by Mr Latham about ways that you had helped teacher workload, the Minister specifically said teachers can use that site to do a risk assessment for an excursion to the zoo.

MARTIN GRAHAM: It could call up the policies or do a first draft, but in our advice—including lesson planning and any other thing that teachers use it for—we're very clear that they should apply their own professional expertise to it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It wouldn't be a direct replacement? A teacher would still have to do some work on a risk assessment for an excursion. You can't just rely on EduChat.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's right. In drafting it, they can save themselves a lot of time in doing the drafting.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it is the drafting, but not the final—

MARTIN GRAHAM: The best example I had was a French teacher who said, "I need this passage in three different levels of French." They had to look at it as an expert and go, "Is it precise," and "will it do?"

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. It was more the risk assessment thing that caught my attention in relation to—and I appreciate it is a time saver. The Minister basically said that was an example that's being used. I would think you would need some sort of human oversight of a risk assessment for kids on excursions.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Absolutely.

MURAT DIZDAR: I guess it would give you a starting point. You would need to then make adjustments to it and look at it as a professional. One of the other functions that's been very powerful has been the translation function, given the diversity of school communities we serve. It's got a fantastic translation function.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is something that came up, to be honest, towards my time as Minister—the collaboration between other States and looking at dealing with issues around AI at a national level. Has there been any work with other States in relation to a shared solution in the AI space?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can speak to it, and Mr Kurucz might add to it. There was an education framework that was put out nationally. It was work done by education ministers in jurisdictions. We had great input into that. There's some work being undertaken nationally around those in the marketplace to test its veracity and efficacy so we can give guidance to schools and sectors out there. As you'd appreciate, there so much available right now that is free of charge that you can access, and our folk are looking for guidance to say what is good, what is not good and what's out there to avoid.

One particular concern has been around privacy. Teachers accessing that don't want to get caught up in trademark, plagiarism and privacy aspects. There is national work occurring there. We wanted to be ahead of the curve. South Australia have been ahead of the curve and have been using something similar. That's why we

developed our version of this—EduChat—irrespective of the Commonwealth. Mr Kurucz can add to that, but I think I got that right.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Thank you, Secretary. The only other aspect that I would add is that there is quite a lot of collaboration now between teaching and learning experts across the country coming together and sharing best practice about what's happening in their jurisdictions in relation to their own tools, and also, collaboration in relation to research in terms of where the best opportunities are in a school setting for the use of AI going forward. AERO is leading a piece of research on that point too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is probably for you, Secretary. Is there a department policy in relation to vaping on school sites—not for students, but for staff?

MURAT DIZDAR: We held a very successful vaping roundtable led by NSW Health. We partnered with—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking is there a policy for staff? There are rules about smoking on school sites and in department buildings. Is the same rule in place for vaping?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're presumably not allowed to be at school sites, in car parks or in department buildings, and that is consistent with smoking?

MURAT DIZDAR: That would be the case.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have some questions for Mr Ruming. Do you want to move up to the desk?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the front bench.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Coming back to some of the questions I asked the Minister this morning about teacher vacancy data, the Minister said that there are now more deputies and assistants back on more class time. Some had teaching hours previously and others didn't. How are you counting and tracking that in terms of teaching numbers and vacancies being filled?

SHAUN RUMING: Thank you for the question, Ms Mitchell. Vacancies, as the Minister alluded to this morning, are down. We track vacancies in terms of open positions, moving staff around the State as per the staffing agreement, and hiring into those vacancies. It is one of our indicators. Our vacancy rate at the moment—as of week one, term 1—was 2.07 per cent, which is down. It's a number that we focus on literally daily. I want to pay credit to the team in our recruitment area that has been very, very focused on this each and every day and each and every week. It's one of our indicators where we haven't claimed victory, but we are certainly seeing positive movement in terms of filling those vacancies. We also looked at the way that we actually do recruit. We made our recruitment processes faster and salary determinations quicker if they're coming from another sector. We're starting to see that flow through not just in vacancy numbers but also reduced resignations and reduced retirements. The numbers are heading in the right direction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate all of that. Specifically, though, I think the Minister was talking in the media last year about several hundred deputies and assistants who aren't on class at all but are now going back on class. How are you counting or matching that against vacant positions in schools? That's what I want to know.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I add to that and maybe help you? You'll remember that there are two types of executive. There's the staffing entitlement executive, which is based upon student numbers. Under award conditions, they have always had a teaching load. For a deputy in the school, it's 0.5, and for an AP and a head teacher it's more than that. That was always under the award. What Ms Summerhayes and I gave clarity to on the ground—it was a 14 August email to the workforce. We said, "from next year", which is now four weeks old—we're in week four of the term—"your ACIP executive". These are the above centrally identified executive. So rather than entitlement executive, which should have a load, this is where the school uses funds from the department to purchase additional executive. We gave a range for a DP and a range for an AP that we wanted them on class. We are now, Ms Mitchell, 3½ weeks into that. We will work with the DELs and look at the data in time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But my question for you—and I won't name the school because I need to protect the identity of the person who told me, but it's a large primary school of 600-odd children. Everyone this year, except for the principal, is now on class. They have not had any new teachers join, but the information provided to me is, on paper, they're saying "the vacancies in our school are down" because you have now got

deputies and assistants covering and sharing classes. So I'm trying to get to the validity of the data. I appreciate what you're saying, Mr Ruming, about the numbers being down—

SHAUN RUMING: Sorry, they're improving.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But the concern is that it's not actually new people joining. There are examples where existing staff members who were DPs and APs—maybe extra above, and I take your point about schools using funding to put additional executive positions on, but the concern is that there's not a lot of transparency around the actual datasets because there are not new teachers at that school; it's just a reallocation of existing staff to fill gaps. That's what I'm trying to understand: How are you counting DPs and APs who weren't on class who now are, by whatever method they were there? That's what I'd like to get to the bottom of. Can you provide clarity around how that works?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure I buy into that characterisation from that staff member. If there's a teaching vacancy in a school, that is a 1.0 teaching vacancy. It's different to an executive vacancy. Ever since Ms Summerhayes, Mr Barraket and I have been in the system, executives have always had a teaching load—always. What we found was, when they created additional positions schools called ACIP, some of that was off class, so we gave parameters for that to be on class.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But if you put them back on class, presumably they have gone back on class to fill a vacant position. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I also speak to the tremendous advantage of this regardless of vacancy, because you're talking about expert teachers—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not debating the policy. I'm trying to get to the bottom of the numbers. My concern is there's misinformation being peddled out there to the community that, "We have filled all these vacancies." If you have got a deputy who was maybe only teaching a day a week before and they're now teaching 2½ days—as per your remit to go back into the classroom—and you have got an AP who's doing the rest of that, they have obviously filled a vacant role. There's somewhere for them to be in there teaching. So my question is how are you counting that in your vacancy numbers.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't concur.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then how are you counting—that spot has been filled, presumably, because there is a teacher in front of that classroom now. Is that a vacancy that's gone down or not?

MURAT DIZDAR: The way we're counting it is that there were 2,174 teaching vacancies on day one, term 1 in 2023 and it's down to 1,294.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But is that reduction from DPs and APs going back on class and that being counted?

MURAT DIZDAR: What we're finding is when the DPs and the APs and the head teachers are back on a load like they are with the award, it goes back to your earlier point where you're having less reliance on casuals in the workforce because you have got more workforce inside the school to contribute.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm going to rephrase the question. When you talked about the vacancies going down by that number, are you saying that none of those vacancy reductions are the result of a deputy or an assistant principal being back on class?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm saying that deputies and head teachers and APs being back on class—good for the system, with expert teachers—is largely offsetting the need for casual teachers. It would make some contribution in the timetable.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm going to go to Mr Ruming, then.

MURAT DIZDAR: It would make some contribution.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is the point: We don't get the data that we ask for and we don't get the school-by-school breakdown. If you put deputies and APs back on class and NSBTS—and I will get to them in a minute—that is part of your reduction of overall vacancies that you're reporting is coming down, surely?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I'm reinforcing to the Committee is that the DPs and APs and head teachers were always meant to have a load.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but they have got an increased load, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: They don't have an increased load.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you just said that if they had to go back on, you have said to them they need to be back on more.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I didn't say that. Let me clarify for the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask Mr Ruming, do you count that? How do you count the DPs and APs back on class?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd value finishing off the question and providing clarity.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: It accords with how we should be treating our witnesses that Mr Dizdar gets the chance to finish the answer of the question he was asked.

The CHAIR: If you could just clarify that point, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, because I'd like Hansard to capture it accurately. I was saying that, on entitlement, DPs and head teachers and APs have always had a teaching load. Schools then create additional executive positions with their full funding, called ACIP. It started about five or six years ago. What we did is course-correct that and make sure they also had a teaching load in line with their colleagues on entitlements.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Ruming, how are you counting those gaps that those DPs and APs fill—if they're back on class more or they have got an increased teaching load, as some have told me that they now have—who weren't on class for as many days as they now are? How are you counting that in your datasets with vacancy? Surely they're filling a vacant spot or a role in that school to be on a class, so it must be an empty allocation. How is that being tracked in your data?

SHAUN RUMING: Maybe it would help the Committee to understand how a vacancy comes about. When a school—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With the greatest of respect—

SHAUN RUMING: It's really important to answer it in this context because our resignation rate is 271 teachers better off between '23 and '24.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That wasn't my question.

SHAUN RUMING: For every person who doesn't leave, it's one less vacancy that I need to fill, so we have had better retention.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand. I appreciate all of that.

SHAUN RUMING: Our workforce has grown by 1,000 people. Those 1,000 people have applied for jobs and have received jobs and have been placed into vacancies. The actual school operations on ACIP and teachers I think is probably best answered by Mr Dizdar, but when a school has a vacancy based on operational need, it goes to the recruitment team and they hire for that vacancy. They have been hiring faster and less people are leaving, therefore our vacancy rate is dropping. It's really simple.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With the greatest of respect, are you not counting DPs and APs who have got increased teaching load in filling some of those vacancies? That's what I'm trying to get to the bottom of.

MURAT DIZDAR: I was saying it would help contribute to some of it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How much? How much of the drop that you said you have got—

MURAT DIZDAR: Let us come back to the Committee. We have just kicked off. It's 3½ weeks in on the ACIP—

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.

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.

The CHAIR: In relation to making sure students have options for getting public transport to and from school, is that something that falls within the department's scope or within Transport's scope?

MURAT DIZDAR: Transport is the provider of that. We do work closely with our Transport colleagues. The Deputy Premier was talking about new schools that have opened and temporary schools and boundary changes that are the normal operation of the department. We do work closely with our Transport colleagues around that. I know of several representations I have had in my time as secretary where the community have said there is, for example, not enough bus runs on a school et cetera. We take up those matters with our Transport colleagues and try to solve them. But, at the end of the day, the provision is through Transport.

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.

The CHAIR: Are Opal cards for schoolkids part of your policy in Education or part of Transport?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's provided by Transport. I have just seen it work as a parent. My son has gone into year 7 and catches the train. He's in his third week. I can say the Opal card arrived from his school to him at the end of week one. Big move for him—first time on the trains.

The CHAIR: My daughter has also just started high school. She's unable to get a bus home, actually, because she lives within a half-hour walk. Apparently, it doesn't matter how steep the hills are or how heavy your bag is at the time; you can't get a school Opal card for that. Is that part of Education's policy, or part of Transport?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's Transport policy, but there are rules and procedures around it. We also do advocate—I will say this, in your daughter's case—around healthy lifestyles and movement, but I do respect it can be an arduous hill climb if it's the—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: With a schoolbag.

The CHAIR: It just seems like an arbitrary policy. You could be carrying your art project with you; you could be carrying all your sports gear.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have control over those rules. That comes to us from Transport.

The CHAIR: There's no policy input from Education into any of that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to make it clear that I really respect our Transport colleagues. They have been fantastic in solving a number of cases for us where we have needed extra runs on buses, or we have had difficulty in accessing particular sites et cetera. They do work very productively with us. I'm happy to take the specifics to them.

The CHAIR: I'm just curious about that particular policy.

MURAT DIZDAR: But it's not a policy I own; it's one that they own.

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.

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 expeditiously as possible. Let me get you the data on the number of teachers, I think you asked, and also psychological injury.

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: Icare 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.

The CHAIR: The Premier said that that high rate of psychological injury was driven by young people and alleged it was from spurious claims. Is that your experience, based on what you're seeing within the Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure that's been the briefing I have had. The primary workers comp injuries that we still have largely in our workforce are things like slips, trips, falls, superficial injuries and manual handling injuries. But psychosocial also is a new category that's been better defined and better explained to the workforce. On the one hand, you wouldn't be surprised that there's an increase because it was a category that really didn't exist but, by the same token, I think it goes to some of the things that the Deputy Premier was talking about in the morning. It goes to workload, it goes to making sure you can cordon off the primacy of the teacher to undertake teaching and learning, and it goes to Mr Latham's questioning around behaviour management and what we are doing in that space.

The CHAIR: Under-resourcing and historical teacher shortages, for instance.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, all of those. Where we have had 10,000 uncovered classes down to 5,000 has made a massive difference. Whilst 99 per cent of parents and carers are outstanding partners to work with, you can also have very complex cases where you have got to have inclosed lands Act or police involvement.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Secretary, just back on AI—and I have two matters. What use is being made of it in the classroom itself? I spoke a while back with an expert from Singapore who said they used it for streaming of students. The brightest in their cohort are using AI to do their own lesson plans and advance themselves, which seems a step ahead of where we're at. The second one is what are we doing in terms of policing technological plagiarism where they use AI to do essays and the like, which is obviously a growing and serious problem?

MURAT DIZDAR: First of all, Mr Latham, can I just say that I always want the primacy of the teacher in the classroom. Technology has to be a tool that we can embrace and use, but it cannot replace the primacy of the teacher. That's why the drive on explicit teaching—in all honesty, it is a more taxing delivery method because it says the teacher has got to take command of the classroom. On the plagiarism—and then I'll go to Mr Graham—one of the Australian standards of the teaching profession is that teachers must know their students well. If I hand in an essay that looks nothing like the ones I have been handing in, and I have been a 5/20 along the way and all of a sudden this is a cracking essay, the teacher sits up anyway and says, "Murat, come over here. Talk to me about this. You have gone from struggling—and I have been helping you—to a band 6 on this essay." I think teachers are our best detector, but it has been one of the things that we have wanted to factor in.

I said to you earlier, while we have rolled EduChat out to teachers, we haven't rolled it out to students holus-bolus because our tool refuses to give you the answer straight off the bat. I think that's a good thing. So if you type in our student tool, "Give me a cracking essay on *Othello*, a 20/20," it says things like—because I have

tried it myself—"Have you examined the key characters in X and Y?" It tries to guide you rather than give you an answer. Mr Graham, what are we seeing with the student tool?

MARTIN GRAHAM: In terms of what the teachers are doing with the tool, certainly one of the strongest features in the classroom has been for feedback. Teachers these days give so much feedback to students on essays, but it is insatiable. So they have that, and if you feed in the right rubrics and so on, it can do a reasonable job of providing more immediate feedback to students, with the teacher supervising it. We have not been encouraging uses such as, "Write me a lesson plan," because there is certainly the risk that it's not going to be as close to the New South Wales syllabus as we would like to see. The department provides structured advice on all the syllabus but, to create additional materials, it's certainly something that's incredibly useful and can be well adapted.

The second part is about assessment. Obviously, universities are grappling with it and teachers are grappling with it. We have seen teachers, and we provide advice—as Mr Dizdar said, they know their students. But they start to do a lot more, "Well, if you have something you have done at home, come in and do the viva voce." So you have to actually talk about it, show that you have done the work and understood it and not actually taken it back. Teachers are also experimenting—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have we got the software program that picks up plagiarism, for want of a better term?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There is plagiarism software, but it's also, famously, the AI trying to stay ahead of the software. So we find that, these days, teachers' knowledge of their students is now actually way better than the technology. Places like University of Sydney are now saying, "Okay, you can use AI in the classes, but you have to say where you're using it and show where you used it, and we will absolutely reserve space for assessment where you cannot use it." So that's going back to some of the more exam-style set-ups, which is what schools have also been adapting to.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many students have been caught cheating this way? When the main detection is that the teacher knows their level, maybe they can disguise it quite well and get a 10 or 15 per cent boost.

MARTIN GRAHAM: We don't have a centralised plagiarism tracker, but teachers are certainly aware of what's happening in the classroom, and their knowledge of the students is their best protection.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you could, thanks. What has the department done with schools on the back-to-work order?

MURAT DIZDAR: We put out a draft for consultation respecting the Premier's memorandum around workplace presence. I think it's a welcome move. I'm looking to deliver that this term and implement it next term.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is it your view that productivity is higher when people work together in a collegiate, cooperative and normal work environment rather than being at home?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's my view that there is enormous benefit to being in the workplace. The mentoring and the informal—I find it hard to do repeatedly on Teams, as we did through COVID and, in my brutal honesty, there have been times when I felt lonely in the office on a Friday or a Monday. So I welcome the workforce coming back in, and we will drive that sensibly and get a good balance here because I think the balance tilted the other way.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, spot on. What's happened with the Perrottet trial of flexible school hours? Did that ever come about? The former Premier was very keen on school starting at 6.00 a.m. or something, when parents start their day, and having flexible, elongated school hours. He promised a trial. Did that ever happen?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we conducted that pilot. I think it was a good pilot from the government of the day around what we could offer by way of OOSH and after-school provision.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Has the pilot informed any further changes or permanent arrangements?

MURAT DIZDAR: It did. There were some positives around it. If you did have both before- and after-school activities that kids could engage in, it did lead to greater school connection and attendance. Ms Harrington's area works with school communities to deliver that. We have got a little way to go to push that even further but—particularly for working parents, around before-school and after-school not only care but also if we could run the homework centre and if we could run particular activities as opposed to just the OOSH provisions. So we're looking at that. It wasn't an empty trial that went nowhere. It had good information that came from it, and we have been building off that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What happened to the former head of infrastructure, Mr Manning? I read some form of controversy, but he had some good ideas about that instant, six-week classroom block construction that we saw just north of Newcastle. Those buildings were of a much higher standard than the old temporary ones that we had—the portables that were around. Is that instant school agenda still being followed, Ms Harrington?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Harrington might add to it. We have taken a lot of learnings. Mr Manning did good work in that space around prefab and bringing down the efficiency and timeline. I'll get Ms Harrington to add to that.

LISA HARRINGTON: We have used it for the schools we have rebuilt in the Northern Rivers after the floods, so we are seeing really reduced construction times. It's been fantastic actually. The first couple that we did in Empire Vale and Wardell, it was about seven months from site set-up to finalisation. It can take around 12 months or longer. Then these last ones that were doing at Blakebrook and Broadwater are around six months for the time frame from site establishment to finished construction, which is—

MURAT DIZDAR: That's the savings.

LISA HARRINGTON: That's right, yes. And as you say, it's much better than the demountable. It's a good structure. Also, we obviously save on the construction time and also save waste and noise and those sorts of things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Right, so that agenda is still progressing.

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Very good. Is there a finding against Mr Manning, or can he come back with the skills and innovations that he had?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm delighted that Ms Harrington is leading that area. She is doing an outstanding job. As the Chair knows, I answered this in previous hearings.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I wasn't here.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Manning and I had good, collegial discussions, and I determined that we wanted to head with new leadership in that area and I thanked him for his service.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay. Sounds like he's not the main character energy any more.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm delighted Ms Harrington is doing a top job in that area.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In replacing the Tell Them From Me survey, what is the department going to do? Are you going to commission a poll opinion agency, are you, to find out what parents are thinking?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I'm going to rely on the experts in CESE. They have got tremendous expertise. They came to me with—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: CESE's going to do the survey—the parent survey?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. They came to me with advice and said, "Murat, we have a lot of feedback from the ground. Tell Them From Me has been going a long time. There's a lot of survey fatigue around it. We can control our questions better." I took that advice, and I gave that to the Minister, indicated that was the operational decision we were making.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to quickly just do a few more things on staffing numbers, and then I'll hand over to my colleague. You provided in August a workforce profile briefing that just listed the number of permanent and temporary and, I think, casual teachers. We asked for an update for that when we were here in December, and the August figures were relied upon again, which is fine. I am just wondering if there are any updated workforce figures you can provide to the Committee.

SHAUN RUMING: Sure. The numbers I have, Ms Mitchell, for 2023-2024—and we're crunching 2024-2025 obviously, when we get to the end of that financial year—are permanent employees were 62,758. That

increased from 55,000-ish. Temporary were 19,603, which was a reduction from year to year based on the workforce initiative that we have updated the committee on. Our casual staff was 13,931, which was up from 2022 to 2023, giving a total of 96,292.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Excellent. Thank you. When do you think you'd have the 2024-2025? At the end of financial year when we're back here maybe in August.

SHAUN RUMING: It would be after that financial year closes off.

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.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm hoping the numbers are positive.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Great. Also, you mentioned those positions, teachers or APs or executive staff that are above entitlement. Do you keep a list of that somewhere for each school? How many have got additional teaching staff that they're engaging through their own budgets?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's above establishment on a couple of fronts. Like I said, staff on student numbers—if student numbers drop, you end up with nominated transfers. They're permanent employees. We move them within staffing areas. That's how we work on nominated transfers, and there are procedures for that.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Thank you. Just one more quickly before I hand over to my colleague. Is there still merit selection for principals appointing when there are vacant roles in their school, or all through nominated transfer now?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, there's still merit selection. It's part of the staffing procedures.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that alternate between merit selection and transfer with a vacancy within a school?

MURAT DIZDAR: There are steps there. There are firstly the nominated transfers. There's incentive transfers that come from hard-to-staff locations where people have done service. There are Aboriginal transfers that happen. So there's an order that we work through and if that all leads to not being filled, then we go to merit selection.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Has there been a change, though, in that process when it comes to—it is my understanding, and I'm happy to be corrected, that there used to be you would alternate in vacancies, so there'd be a local selection, a merit selection that the principal had that say, then it went to a transfer.

MURAT DIZDAR: There was a change.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That changed. That's what I'm trying to understand.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I will just pick up the point earlier that I raised with the Minister relating to school safety and nervousness with reported incidents of antisemitism relating to different communities. In 2024 there were several cases of antisemitism reported in the media at government schools. Given 2025 has just started, have antisemitic incidents remained in the school—reports of this?

MURAT DIZDAR: Upfront, I want to give real credit to our school communities and our leadership teams. Navigating a global conflict that impacts on the school gate—schools are not immune from what happens externally—has been phenomenal. One incident of antisemitism or racism or religious intolerance is one too many in my books, but it's really important how we act on that, how we take action, support the school community, and we have done that in every instance. I have been very clear in my communication with Ms Summerhayes to our workforce. Mr Draper, as Secretary of Premier's Department, has been clear. We established late last year a religious intolerance hotline.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm aware of that. I'm happy to get to that. If we could just focus on this first.

MURAT DIZDAR: I just want to give a number on record, the phone number.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Further to that, what type of discipline was undertaken?

MURAT DIZDAR: It can vary. I have had instances where there has been referral to police and the police have worked with the police liaison officer, the family and the individual. There have been suspensions that have had to be imposed so that we can gather around that young person, educate them and have support structures. There have been detentions; there have been formal apologies.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: If you want the—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If you want to take it on notice to give more detail, I would value that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't need to take it on notice because Ms Summerhayes and I have been working through it. We have had visits with the Jewish museum. We have done a live stream with the Jewish Board of Deputies where I have represented the department and spoken to the community about what we're doing. We have put enhanced security in some of our sites that have more Jewish students. We have taken a whole range of actions to best support our people inside the school gates.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in relation to the Religious Intolerance Helpline that you mentioned, do we have any details relevant to how many phone calls were received between August and December 2024, when the level of concern in school communities was high?

MURAT DIZDAR: It has been a small number to date, Ms Merton. I want to thank the Faith Affairs Council. They are working with me, as secretary, to make sure we can publicise this helpline, because it is available for community, students and staff. On one angle, you would look at that small number and say, like I said, that schools are doing really well in making sure they deal with it at the local level. But it's very early doors on that data. The truth is we'd have a better summation if we lived an entire school year—the 2025 school year. Mind you, from my position, I wish the global conflict would improve or wasn't there, so our communities could get on with it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What has been done in terms of promotion or advertising of the Religious Intolerance Helpline?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said, we have done it through the Faith Affairs Council; we have done it through the P&C federation. Ms Summerhayes, Mr Graham and I have done it on live streams to our workforce and in communications to our workforce.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I also note that schools have an anti-racism contact officer.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, does every school have an officer?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, and I thank those colleagues who undertake that function for us. They are teachers who then put their hands up to be trained by us. We give them a little bit of release for that training so they can support their school community by being the school community's anti-racism contact officer. We're the only jurisdiction in the country that has that role. I want to thank our staff who fulfil that role, because they are

the great glue in those school communities for community cohesiveness and harmony. I'm glad you called them out, Ms Merton, because they have played an important role where we have had incidents of religious intolerance, in working through with the leadership, the school community and the individual concerned.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, could I move on to the Mardi Gras? Last year, I think my third question to you was relevant to the cost of the department's involvement with the 2024 Mardi Gras. It became known to me it was \$30,000. At that time, you informed me that a lot of the materials and resources relating to that cost would be re-used. Mr Dizdar, what plans are in place for the Department of Education's participation in the upcoming 2025 Mardi Gras?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll be the proud secretary for the third time in the organisation's history marching on Saturday at the Mardi Gras, as the key sponsor supporting our LGBTIQ+ staff network—our staff. These are our people. While ever I'm secretary, I'll embrace them. While ever I'm secretary, I'll put in a submission to Mardi Gras. It's up to Mardi Gras if they accept our submission. They have this year. I'm delighted, and I'll march from the front.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Given it's an estimates session today, could I ask the budget for this year's participation by the Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a similar budget. I thank our people, our volunteers, our staff. I joined them, with Ms Summerhayes and Mr Graham, at Chullora TAFE premises two Saturdays ago, outside of hours, producing and painting artefacts for our Mardi Gras. In a workforce of 140,000, in a budget of \$28 billion, I'm going to support our LGBTIQ+ staff network. I'm going embrace them. They deserve to be embraced. I look forward to marching with them on Saturday.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of re-using materials from Mardi Gras 2024 that you mentioned, can you elucidate on how that is being done?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was top work from our people that have produced it. I saw that firsthand at the factory. We're re-using most of it, and there's some produced by our people.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in terms of the cost of staff time in preparation for the march, are they volunteers working outside business hours? How does that work?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to commend them. I saw the 25 of them that I joined. I don't know that I had much artistic skill, but they embraced me when I went there. About 25 of them were working outside of their teaching hours on a Saturday. This is all done voluntarily outside of hours.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, if I could move to the New South Wales flag, public schools are funded principally through the New South Wales Government. What is the policy for flying the New South Wales State flag at public schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm very parochial, particularly when it comes to State of Origin, but we have to fly the Australian flag and our schools also fly the Indigenous flag.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there a policy as to the display of the State flag at New South Wales schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a policy around the national flag, and that's what we fly. But because I'm parochial—and I take on my counterparts at education Ministers' meetings and secretaries' meetings, particularly my Queensland counterparts—if one of my sites wants to fly the New South Wales flag, particularly around State of Origin, I encourage them to do so.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about the Wests Tigers? You're backing weak teams.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a sore point, but we're on the way up.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You're on the way up. You can't go any lower.

MURAT DIZDAR: I say to all our people, jump on the bandwagon.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, is the New South Wales State flag supplied to government schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: None of the flags are supplied to government schools. The Commonwealth flag is through our local Federal member of Parliament, and the same applies.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There is a reference—I think it's on Premier and Cabinet—relating to how the State flag is provided for schools by the Department of Education. There was a question on notice many years ago in the Parliament relevant to this. Is the State flag available to State schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, if any of our sites are unsure, they can approach Ms Summerhayes and me, and we can help them. Like I said very clearly on record, we fly the national flag. It comes from the local Federal member of Parliament. If any of my sites want to fly the State flag, they are welcome.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I look forward to reading that. Thank you.

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.

The CHAIR: There are thresholds for disclosure of that kind of thing. You'd think if it was disclosed, then it's significant.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

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 Rumung 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 Rumung, 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 per cent of the population identifies as having a disability, 6 per cent 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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On the flip side of disability employment, I want to raise one, perhaps for Mr Martin, about disability reporting. The disproportionate set of claims in HSC disability concessions from non-government schools is obviously—I mean, if it looks like a tort, it is one, in this instance. What's being done about that? There are people with genuine disabilities but also we have got the rise of so-called hidden disability, which is basically all of us. How are we bringing this under control and ensuring that the HSC process is genuine and people who haven't really got a disability aren't getting fake concessions?

PAUL MARTIN: We don't go into disability applications for the HSC with an assumption that those who are applying are attempting to report the system. We have a number of safeguards in place. The HSC is a written exam so the disability provisions relate to the capacity of a student to complete a written exam in a set time period. If they have a range of issues—it might be a physical disability or it might be something to do with rest breaks or water or sugar or a thousand different issues—that inhibit or affect their capacity to complete those exams in the given timetable, they provide us with evidence through their school and through, necessarily, medical advice or paediatric specialist advice et cetera that we require to make a decision about the adjustments that are required for them for the HSC. It is true: There have been increasing numbers of students applying. We don't think that's a terrible thing. We think that our rules are in place to make sure that the whole exam system is fair but we want students to be able to do the best they can.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But doesn't the evidence and the numbers suggest that non-government schools are getting more organised in making these applications and it's disproportionate?

PAUL MARTIN: I think that there is often media attention to the difference between government and non-government schools. That has shifted significantly over the last number of years. Our view is that perhaps our processes were more difficult for kids from government schools to comply with, rather than a suggestion that non-government school students are reporting the system. Most of our energy has been spent on attempting to make

sure that government school students can get access to either the specialists, the medical advice or the requirement of filling in our documentation so their numbers can be better represented because, at the moment, our concern is not about rorting; it's about making sure that students who need support are getting support.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you're confident that the systems are fair with your safeguards?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, I—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is anxiety a medical condition or disability? If you haven't got anxiety doing the HSC, you're not serious about it.

PAUL MARTIN: I think that there are normal levels of stress that every student faces when doing the HSC or running onto a sporting field or making a speech or sitting in front of estimates.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, that's right.

PAUL MARTIN: And then there is an appropriate response to that, with a student becoming resilient. I also think there are some students for whom that anxiety and that stress becomes a medical condition. It may be that—and I don't have any medical training—that might be more prevalent today than it has been 10 years ago or 15 years ago. We're not going to second-guess doctors. We're not going to question whether a medical professional has said a student is suffering from this form of anxiety. We're going to make sure that they have the best opportunity to do the exam. There are increasing numbers; the balance between government and non-government school applications is evening out. We're currently having a review of our processes to assist in all students and all sectors making sure they apply appropriately. We don't come into it with the idea that people are rorting the system because we trust the schools and the teachers and the medical professionals who are giving us their advice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Secretary, on something that is a definite rort, it's very alarming to see the rest of this fellow with the State Crime Command crime squad making a fraudulent sexual abuse claim—an organised one, a racket—in part for the Department of Education for you to pay them a huge amount of money in compensation. Has the department changed its detection or assessment mechanisms about sexual abuse claims in light of what was obviously an organised fraud?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm deeply concerned about this, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We all are.

MURAT DIZDAR: I do want to congratulate the New South Wales police for their work on this. I do want to congratulate our general counsel, who leads this work for us through icare, who—I have got to be very careful with what I say, Chair, because of the ongoing investigation.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Because the matter is before court.

MURAT DIZDAR: Our general counsel has been working with police and providing material over a period of time here. I just want to say this to any potential claimant out there: please refer because historical sexual assault is certainly not acceptable but please also know that police are examining this space. It does concern me that there may be corrupt conduct in terms of false claimants and what's been labelled as farm claiming.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Farming, yes—coaching people to know how to do this. Is there any evidence that it's happened in the past but not detected as well as general counsel did in this case?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think we had good mechanisms of reporting. We'll certainly continue to take advice from the police. I have got to commend them; they have been working with us, as well as the Department of Community Services giving us guidance as we go here. I'd love to be able to say more, Mr Latham; I'm not trying to be tricky around it, but I'm a bit obliged with what the proceedings are looking like that I can't divulge more.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Just on Rachel Merton's point about antisemitism, I read—it's in the *Daily Mail*, so it might not be 100 per cent accurate and itself be plagiarised—that at Bonalbo Central School, three students are suspended for Nazi salutes and goosestepping. Obviously this sounds terrible, and it may well have been terrible, but how is the department differentiating between student harassment of Jewish students and humour? Whether we like it or not, young people mock big events in history like 9/11 or the moon landing.

I have seen jokes about Napoleon, Jesus Christ, Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Was this attempted humour at the school or a genuine form of harassment? We should have zero tolerance of any 15- or 16-year-olds gearing up to be Neo-Nazis, but kids also make fun of these big events. It's mockery. It's not a bad thing to be laughing and mocking Hitler, if that's what they were doing, and making him a pathetic figure in history. How is the department differentiating between genuine antisemitic harassment and humour that adults might find over the top and hard to understand?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think that's a fair point that you raise, Mr Latham. That's why I wanted to say—and I think I did say to Ms Merton—that we have got to take into context the age, stage and development, or if a child is in a support class with disability, et cetera. Whether it was wilful or whether in total neglect, we have got to take action. Some of that can be educative as opposed to just disciplinary, particularly when the kid may not even realise what they have done and may be copying what they have picked up on social media or in broader media. Does it excuse the act? It doesn't. What is inexcusable is if we don't follow up and follow through. In my time as a teacher and principal, there'll be a range of things you need to do. It's very different if it's wilful—done knowingly—to whether it's total ignorance and needs education around it. The one common thing is it's unacceptable. We work with our students and our schools. We did that to good effect at Bonalbo.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you sure it's harassment rather than humour?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to protect the individuals.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Back in the day we'd be arresting John Cleese, Monty Python and all sorts of comedians.

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to protect the individuals, Mr Latham. Some of our students involved here required adjustments and have some learning adjustments that are known to us. Does it excuse the act? No, but it also then goes to how we support them and educate them and avoid them repeating the act.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In the case of humour, a former member of the Committee has asked me to ask you, Mr Secretary, what does "brat" mean? Are you "lit"? Do you "slay"? Do you "take the w"? Have you had a "brat summer" and—goodness gracious—are you the "GOAT" of your own stories?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to model constant learning.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Don't encourage him.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I am encouraging him, because I thought it was fantastic to see.

MURAT DIZDAR: I have gen Z at home, and they have told me to stick to my day job.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's sound advice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Slay!

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This might be for you, Ms Summerhayes, just in the two minutes I have got left. I was wondering if you could let me know the current enrolment numbers of Wollumbin High School up in Murwillumbah?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Yes, I can. Wollumbin is 208.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And Murwillumbah High?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: It is 388. Murwillumbah has had an excellent start to the new year in their new build.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have had some parents reach out who have got some concerns that most year 11 and year 12 lessons are only offered online. I wanted to get clarity around that. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great. I'm doing a little bit of speed dating. Mr Barraket, I'm going to quickly go to you on the Building Early Learning Places Program. I have had some services reach out who—I don't know if they were told they weren't eligible—weren't able to access that money. Can you provide any update in terms of the process around that particular program and the eligibility criteria?

MARK BARRAKET: The Building Early Learning Places Program is a test-and-trial program under the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund. To be eligible, services from undersupplied areas can apply. Those underserved areas were identified through the independent market monitoring report. The purpose of this was to test how not-for-profit services would respond to grants to increase their provision in the areas where we need child care the most.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For normal preschool capital works programs that have run over the years, what is the provision for a service? I'm happy to say, and I'm sure they don't mind me saying, that Evans Head Pre-School Association are looking for support. They have been flood impacted in previous years as well. What is available to a service like that that wants some capital support.

MARK BARRAKET: Currently we have the test and trial Building Early Learning Places Program. That is the current capital program that we have. That does not mean that we can't enable other programs in the future.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So there's not a standard—there used to be capital works grants that were ongoing. That's not there anymore.

MARK BARRAKET: Currently what we're doing is targeting the areas of undersupply, because they're the areas that really do need places. We're putting our resources there to see how the sector will respond to that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might come back to that.

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.

The CHAIR: That's very interesting—thank you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Secretary, you mentioned earlier on your discussions with the deans of education in the university system. What feedback and improvements have you got there, because it's obviously a major problem. You have got a pedagogy statement that's very good, but they're not necessarily teaching to it. As the biggest employer, would you ever say to them, "If you don't teach to this pedagogy statement, we can't accredit and take your university teaching graduates?"

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I have gone a number of times and I think it's good to have those opportunities. They are committed to having a stronger teacher pipeline as well. They have to also respond, Mr Latham, to the Federal Quality Initial Teacher Education Review, which says you have to mandate explicit teaching by—I'll look at Jeremy and not get the date wrong.

JEREMY KURUCZ: By 2027.

MURAT DIZDAR: By '27. I think this is a good position to be in. They're hearing from the largest employer in New South Wales. They have to get on board because by '27 they have to have it as part of the provision for undergraduate and masters teaching anyway. So I just encourage them to get on board early.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What was the feedback you had in the discussions? They're pretty stubborn.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think I have had some mixed feedback. I can detect that there have been some different philosophical approaches, but I have told them that I'm not going to shy away from the evidence base. I'm hoping they all come on board earlier than '27—earlier than the national requirement. I don't want another graduate to be in the position I was, where it's left to luck in where you land. I happened to land at Ashcroft High School for my first teaching appointment, where explicit teaching was being driven by an impeccable principal in John Norris. I didn't know what it stood for. I had to learn it there. I would have benefitted if I had it under my belt from the undergrad degree at Sydney uni and then walked in. That's what we ultimately want to achieve.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Good—more power to you.

The CHAIR: That takes us to afternoon tea. We'll have a 15-minute break.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back.

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.

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.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's about the awarding timelines, so they will be at different time junctures of the awarding. There's the one delivered and there's the seven that are excess capacity—that's the eight. There's the 85, so that brings it up to 93. I think the remaining seven are part of major capital upgrades.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: New builds, yes. In terms of the order of that geographic tender, are you starting in areas where there is high demand or just a random allocation?

LISA HARRINGTON: They all went out at the end of last year together, so it was the same time frame. We should be able to award in a similar time frame. Obviously, evaluation might slightly differ depending on each process, but it'll be in a matter of weeks.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you anticipate those tenders to be announced—in the next few weeks, did you say?

LISA HARRINGTON: It should be next month.

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. Going to some of other schools that I just asked about earlier like Box Hill permanent school, do you have any information on a start date for that construction and a completion date?

LISA HARRINGTON: For Terry Road, for the new primary school and new high school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes. I was really pleased to be at Box Hill temp school primary school for day one of term 1. It was really nice to see the kids flooding in the gate there. Some of the parents were asking about the completion date. It's day one, term 1 of 2028 for those schools. The construction start date, I don't have for you yet, but it will likely be next year. We need, obviously, to go out to tender. It's likely construction will start next year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're expecting kids in the door of the permanent facilities day one, term 1 of 2028?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Tallawong Public School—my understanding is that they have been on a temporary site at Riverstone as well. Is that still the case, or are they in their permanent school now? Where is that one up to?

LISA HARRINGTON: My advice is that we started construction there in December last year. The time frame of them getting into the permanent facility is April next year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So it's April 2026 for permanent at Tallawong. Willyama—is there any more information you can provide, Ms Harrington, in relation to that demolition and rebuild time frame?

LISA HARRINGTON: Just to reiterate that, obviously, the Government has made a commitment to the Broken Hill community to rebuild the school. We have a team working actively on the rebuild. The local AMU is working on the demolition. As the Deputy Premier said, we are, obviously, engaging with icare to make sure that we can access the coverage of that facility, but the demolition and the time frame for the demolition is not holding up the rebuild at all. We are planning to rebuild on a separate part of the site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, it's a large site, which I said.

LISA HARRINGTON: That's right. We are pressing ahead. The design—at the moment we're engaging with public schools to make sure that we can provide a facility that is suitable for the community. But, to reassure you that we are pressing ahead, there's no pause on that activity.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned icare as well and making sure you have the coverage. Will the rebuild be fully funded under insurance through icare?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're just finalising working through it with them and waiting for a final outcome.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How long have those discussions being going for, though?

MURAT DIZDAR: For myself as secretary and Ms Harrington, part way through last year—the second half of last year. We have provided all our material evidence, and we're waiting for a final outcome there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Have they given you an indication about what they would expect to provide in terms of funding coverage through icare?

MURAT DIZDAR: They wanted to have an assessment of the site and compare it to our assessment from our independent hygienist. We're in that process at the moment. I want to reiterate what Ms Harrington has said: It's been made very clear to us that we're to deliver on this Government commitment of a new build, and we're to

go to tender for demolition works, award that tender, get on with the demolition and get on with the rebuild. Obviously, if funding comes from icare, we will maximise that. Otherwise, we'll work out where the funding comes from with the Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, it was reported on the ABC that the Government is in talks with icare about how it can expedite the demolition of the school. That was reported by the local ABC a couple of weeks ago. That's still an ongoing discussion with icare, is it?

MURAT DIZDAR: We haven't had a final outcome there. We're working to a final outcome.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You're still committed to the new school being open day one, term 1 of 2027?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's the plan. We did a tremendous amount of work to have a temporary school. You'll remember Ultimo was a temporary school in your time, which was a fantastic achievement to then build the new Ultimo—a real credit to Lisa and the team. It's a phenomenal temporary.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have seen it, yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Great. But we obviously want to deliver the permanent structure, and that's what we're aiming for.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Medowie high school traffic concerns, again—I was kind of forewarning this when I raised it with the Minister this morning. Ms Harrington, from School Infrastructure's perspective, as I said, there are a number of parents who reached out to me with concerns about the traffic management, the crossing, and incidents in the area in the past with pretty major roads going through there. How are you going to manage that with that build and that site?

LISA HARRINGTON: I have checked with the team on that, and they have confirmed that we are engaging with council. There have been six meetings with council, two as part of the transport working group. Those issues are being worked through. Obviously, as part of our planning approval, whatever pathway that is, those issues are worked through, whether it be with council or whether it be with the department of planning to make sure that we do have all of the safety and transport considerations dealt with.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is this a project that might fall under that new planning panel where you don't need council approval?

LISA HARRINGTON: That's right, a REF.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I guess the concern, then, from the local community is that some of these are very hyper-localised traffic issues. How do you make sure that is captured if you are going through the different process?

LISA HARRINGTON: Even through the REF, where we, as a department, assess—it is not through School Infrastructure, it is through Mark Grant's team—we still have to adhere to the relevant planning legislation. There is no difference in standards or requirements that we have to meet.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There will still be an opportunity for local community concerns and local council.

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Which we have to address.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's just that there has been quite a bit of correspondence about that. The St Leonards education precinct—what's happening on that front?

LISA HARRINGTON: There are a couple of things happening there. From when the project was first announced—obviously, since then, with COVID we have seen a change in enrolment demand in terms of our projections. That's one thing that's probably reducing demand. On the other side, obviously, we have got the Crows Nest TOD coming, so we're looking really closely at the service need analysis for that area at the moment. We're also looking at the fact that, I think, almost every public school in the Chatswood-Willoughby area has had an upgrade in the past 10 years, so there's a lot of capacity in the existing schools. We're looking, at the moment, at the factors that are increasing demand with the activity around the TOD coming. Also, we haven't seen the numbers in St Leonards return to those pre-COVID levels, so we're just monitoring that to make sure. Obviously, we don't want to go ahead with any schools that might residualise the existing schools that we have got.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was, from the previous Government, a commitment for that precinct to basically be preschool to year 12. At the moment, the budget allocation, I think, is about the primary school only. Are you working on a high school for that St Leonards area, or are you just monitoring enrolments?

LISA HARRINGTON: We're monitoring at the moment. There's not any service need demand for a high school at this stage but, as I said, we're very conscious with that area that there's going to be a lot of change with the TOD coming on. It may be in the future but, at this particular point, there's no demand.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you looking at a primary school on that site?

LISA HARRINGTON: We are looking at that region in terms of primary and high school and existing schools. There's not an urgent need right now for us to press go on that primary school, but it is something that we—just because, from when it was announced, it is quite different in terms of enrolment. As I said, with the change with COVID, we haven't had those levels return to pre-COVID, so it's something we're monitoring at the moment.

MURAT DIZDAR: But we are still staying active by way of sites et cetera and exploring because, if the data swings like it did swing again, we want to be forearmed to go.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Particularly with the Crows Nest TOD that you mentioned, it just seems a bit weird that you'd stop. I know it is a slightly different area, although not that far geographically, but you also have Cammeraygal at capacity, and those kids are now going to Mosman. But you are saying there's enough space in existing schools around St Leonards and that you don't, at this stage, need a primary school or high school.

LISA HARRINGTON: That's exactly right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For the Chatswood metro dive site, there used to be a project page on the School Infrastructure website for a Chatswood new primary school on that site but, apparently, it's not there anymore. Is there any work being undertaken for a new primary school on that metro dive site?

LISA HARRINGTON: It's not something that we're pursuing at this stage. We do have capacity, obviously, at Chatswood primary school. As you know, there was a very big upgrade there. There is capacity at the moment in Chatswood primary school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Googong high school—is there a start date for construction?

LISA HARRINGTON: We went out to tender at the end of last year for Googong high school. Obviously, it's an election commitment, so day one, term 1 of 2027 is our deadline for that school. We are expecting construction to start later this year. There are some issues that we have got to resolve around offsite infrastructure, engaging with council and the developer just to make sure we can ensure that the school has all the enabling infrastructure services around it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you would expect construction to start at some point this year?

LISA HARRINGTON: This year, yes.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think there was \$750,000 allocated for the Bathurst Secondary School Community Group Renewal project. Is there any update on specific works that would be delivered across those campuses?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes. I understand that the toilet block at the Bathurst high school is being upgraded. It is about to be handed over. At the Kelso campus, we're about to go out to tender on the works there.

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.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What is the plan with the Jindabyne Central School site? I mean the old one, sorry, because I know that they have recently opened the new one.

LISA HARRINGTON: The secretary did declare that site surplus. Obviously, we opened the Jindabyne Education Campus. The process with government is when land is declared surplus, it runs through the Government property audit, through Property and Development NSW. We're engaging with Property and Development NSW. They'll assess, in terms of housing, whether it is led by Landcom or led by Homes NSW. It's going through that process at the moment.

MURAT DIZDAR: I know this is obvious to the Committee but that's because of the new primary and the new high school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. This is the old site. The new one has just been opened. I appreciate that.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's why we declared the old site—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any opportunity for community use for the school hall that was on the old site?

LISA HARRINGTON: We are looking at that. We have also had that requested through the community, so we are looking at that at the moment. We have community use agreements in other facilities, so it would definitely be something that we're open to.

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.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What consideration has been given to rechecking those who didn't successfully pass the check when they're in year 2? Wouldn't that tell you a lot about the school's teaching of literacy? If they have got a significant cohort who haven't got through the check successfully and you recheck them in year 2 and it's still a problem, that points to something where the department then needs to intervene. Why don't you recheck in year 2?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a good point. While I said it is a diagnostic instrument for the child and the teacher, we are giving the school result as well—that cohort. Then, with Ms Summerhayes and Mr Graham, we are monitoring, because if there's a low achievement level of competency, that would be an indicator to us about whether phonics teaching really is embedded in the early years. So we can go in with the intensive support you alluded to earlier.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But why don't you recheck those kids who didn't succeed in year 2 to see how they're going? I don't want to use the word "fail" because I know the nature of the test. But they didn't succeed a second time and, in large numbers, doesn't that really point to a failing of phonics literacy?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think that's a really good point. I wanted to first talk about the school level where the result for the year 1 cohort might not be strong enough or where we expect it to be. We can go in with Ms Summerhayes and Mr Graham and help them around phonics. But Mr Graham can also talk to our check-in assessments that then allow for the catch-up in year 2 et cetera. Do you want to talk to that, Mr Graham?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We actually have a phonics on demand system, which enables schools to use it exactly as you say, anywhere in those early years. In particular, a lot of schools use it in year 2, just like you're suggesting, to make sure that, if any children were falling behind, they catch up. Then we have the comprehensive check-in assessment. We now have them every year as well. We absolutely have follow-up phonics assessments.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why isn't the year 2 follow-up mandatory? There's a really tough school, and you haven't done very well in year 1. Okay, it's a tough school. Maybe there's a temptation to think, "If we don't look again, then maybe there's no problem."

MARTIN GRAHAM: Certainly the check-in assessments and the NAPLAN also pick that up. But we have an AP, C&I in every school. We are doing work around identifying schools where maybe their phonics results were low. We're actually going out to each of those networks, wherever they are in the State, and doing intensive work with those schools and networks, with really specific phonics instruction. We are not just saying, "You should do better." We're coming in with the packages and saying, "These are the materials you need to be delivering in the classroom."

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the problem you're finding—that phonics wasn't being taught or that it was being taught incorrectly?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Internationally, no-one is at 100 per cent, but we have certainly found that we are getting traction with phonics. But in some places, we have had more traction than others. It's that consistency of traction across the State.

MURAT DIZDAR: Real credit here, when the former Minister implemented this in 2020, we were 40 per cent competency across the system. So we have had a good lift. We're not where we need to be. You need those numbers to be higher as a system, but it gives us this good intervention point to go in and drive phonemic awareness and phonemic teaching. The other thing you might be really interested in, Mr Latham, is we are leading the country in the development of a numeracy check for year 1. There has only ever been a literacy check—a phonics check.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When does that come in?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham can talk to it. I hope I get the number right but I think there are about 20 or 50 schools where we're piloting our numeracy check.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In year 1?

MURAT DIZDAR: For year 1. So we can make sure that not only on reading and decoding but also on numbers our kids are ready to go. Do you want to talk to that, Mr Graham?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Schools are at the moment helping us trial items so that we have got a really strong assessment in the same way that we do for phonics. We'll be able to have that in a comprehensive way in schools by next year.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's right to roll out across the State?

MARTIN GRAHAM: When we have got a check built, then we'd look to do that across the State.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does any other State do that? We got the phonics check idea from South Australia.

MURAT DIZDAR: No. We're leading the country here. We're sharing that work. The intention is, once we nail it down with pilot sites, to take it across the system.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Very good. I'm glad to hear it. To the secretary, you mentioned earlier on in these questions of pedagogy that you thought perhaps the largest issue was consistency across a school. This is what John Hattie describes as collective teacher efficacy and a very high beneficial impact aspect of school management and practice. What's the department doing to try to ensure that's the case? The shorthand descriptor is it's much better for a student to have one seven-year experience in primary school than seven one-year, different experiences—with different, alternating teaching styles and them getting confused year on year.

MURAT DIZDAR: I just want to reinforce that the vast majority of the profession is doing great stuff delivering exclusive practice, and I don't want to lay blame at the profession at all. As I said earlier, they have come through the university gates like I did without that specific training, so we need to embed that. I know Ms Summerhayes would acknowledge that when we were principals the biggest challenge was to make sure you differentially support each classroom teacher to be expert teachers. But one of the other things we're very keen on working on and we have started working on, is a classroom career pathway. How do I take expert teachers, how do I take the best practitioners at Marsden Road and not turn them into principals because they don't want to be leaders? What they want to do is stay in the classroom but share their practice going to collective efficacy because that's got such a strong positive impact on outcomes. How can I use them in roles? What would I look at by way of role responsibility and remuneration for those expert teachers so I can have others learn from their craft?

Mr Latham, I know you know this, but Singapore has done this for a while and has the best classroom career pathway. We have commenced our work to deliver this big reform, hopefully, that can help have expert practitioners stay in the classroom. In-service teachers watch them, teachers who are struggling watch them and teachers that don't have explicit teaching down pat watch them in action; they can be released to a side-by-side mentor coach in practice in situ. That's what we're looking at trying to achieve.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's good. This Committee previously recommended something similar in the pay them more at principal level for that expertise and the flow-on benefits in the system. The Hon. Sarah Mitchell had the Best in Class Initiative. I think you have got rid of that, haven't you? Is this a replacement for the two things that I have just mentioned?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yeah. We did some good work under the former Government. It was called Rewarding Excellence.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Best in Class, wasn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That was separate.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we have done here is—after the massive salary uplift, after going from seventh in the country to first in the country, which has helped on a number of those workforce fronts—had a look at how we can embed them into existing roles and structures. This doesn't go just to remuneration. You have got to get the roles right around what you build. Of course, we have got HALTs—we haven't always maximised their capacity—highly accomplished and lead teachers. This is work we're doing. We're building off the former work and taking that onboard. We hope to have more to say on that front. This can help us, Mr Latham, with the rollout of consistency across classrooms.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Two things come out of that: One is that principals know that collective efficacy is a big benefit and this should be an objective. That certainly makes the collaboration between teachers easier, doesn't it, if they're working on the one pedagogical approach rather than heading off in different directions. The second thing is you mentioned Marsden Road. They have got a network around them—the schools that come there to learn and support that way, so networking can be effective, too, can't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: You're spot-on. I know you have gone to that network and visited, and so have I. I presented on a Saturday there as well. You are exactly right in what you say, but I'm just going to put this rider on it: As long as the collective efficacy and collaboration is around the right things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Of course, yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: And as long as those networks are also along the right things. Otherwise, we're potentially chasing the wrong things that are not going to have impact.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They have just got to follow your pedagogy statement.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's right. I think you have called it out well in this Committee hearing today around the consistency and how can you assure that you're growing that across the system.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The industrial award, secretary, is quite generous when you read all these different concessions and the like. In terms of maximising classroom teaching time, are we now getting down to the point where teachers take all these leave provisions and other entitlements that, in a calendar year, they might only be teaching one out of every four days in the calendar year. There are nine additional school development days. Pretty well everyone has got flexible working arrangements. There's leave for everything, including sorry business, so where was the productivity in the new industrial arrangements and the big pay rise? Wasn't this a one-off opportunity to say, "Look, big pay rise, well deserved, but let's maximise classroom teaching time and wind back some of these provisions that are obviously way over the top."?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, so let me talk to that, Mr Latham. First of all, school development days.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Nine.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. We added two more. We were at six and we went to eight. The Catholic sector deliver nine and the independent sector deliver 181 days of teaching; we deliver 200. I think just those facts across the sectors are important.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You deliver 200.

MURAT DIZDAR: We have 200.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But then if you subtract maximising your leave entitlements, it comes way down, doesn't it.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll go to the leave.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Two hundred is five days a week, 40 weeks in a year. No teacher is doing that.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's 10 weeks each term and that's our delivery. Why we achieved a three-year commitment for the extra school development days is that Mr Martin is rolling out 116 new syllabuses. As you know and appreciate, the syllabus is the walking most important document for a teacher, so we wanted to give them space and time around the syllabus rollout so they can get their lesson structure, scope and sequences right. We wanted to give them time around explicit teaching as well high potential gifted education. It wasn't *laissez faire*, do what you like. We're actually going to make sure they have time and space for that. I think that's a good thing. In fact, the Deputy Premier and I have had unsolicited feedback in written communication from teachers 35, 40 years—so has Ms Summerhayes—saying this is the most prepared they have walked into a school year, because they have had the collective efficacy, the time to collaborate, the time to plan. Do you want me to talk to the leave provisions?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Has there ever been a calculation that if teacher maximises every single leave entitlement, what's the minimum number of days they need to teach in a year? It's a lot lower than 200.

MURAT DIZDAR: There was no additional or new leave provisions I have provided that's not existing already in the public service. I think this is what I spoke to you about workforce retention, the age profile, transition to retirement, carer arrangements when we have get folk who get to 55, 60-plus, have elderly parents, or adolescents sitting the HSC et cetera. It was to balance that. Of course we have always had, particularly in the primary school gates, job share. Ms Summerhayes and I on year 1, particularly around mat leave, and also—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, but job share's not the best for the students, is it? There's a discontinuity, confusion.

MURAT DIZDAR: If you get it right, if you get a good combination, good expert teachers, they benefit from two teachers instead of one. My own children at Drummoyne Public School have had job share in their schooling experience, which has gone really well, but you have got to get the combination right. It goes to: Can I retain the workforce, rather than lose them, rather than they resign, rather than they retire? Can I use the existing provisions, because that's what I did? I didn't introduce new provisions. I used the existing provisions.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many of the development days are at the end of the year?

MURAT DIZDAR: Only one.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: One? It's down to one now.

MURAT DIZDAR: Because we put two up-front.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So there's only one available at the end of the year.

MURAT DIZDAR: You have got one in term four and we put two—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, right at the end of the year, the very last day of the school year.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. There used to be two. There's one. And that was in response to the workforce too.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's a small improvement.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If the Performance and Development Framework and plans are so important and laden with these sorts of gains in teacher effectiveness, why did the new award freeze them in the hands of the Teachers Federation? You can't change the arrangements now unless the federation agrees.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't agree with that characterisation. I answered this at another estimates.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You don't? Didn't you remove the right to vary or replace the Performance and Development Framework without federation consultation?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have any intention to make changes. I want to make sure I can solidify what I have got in place. I want to make sure I can give good feedback in classrooms. I don't agree with that characterisation.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How detached are we now from the national curriculum requirements in doing our own distinctly workable, effective New South Wales approach and ignoring a lot of the nonsense that's in the national document?

PAUL MARTIN: When the original agreement on the Australian Curriculum was signed up to by the States and Territories, there was a capacity or a caveat around what was to be delivered in each State and Territory. The phrase that was used was "adopt and adapt". We used that capacity to simplify what is in the Australian Curriculum. I suppose our decluttering makes our syllabuses more slender. They have less content.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's good.

PAUL MARTIN: More importantly, our framing is around content and knowledge as the bedrock upon which the syllabuses are based. We don't have prisms of capabilities or processes through which you see the content; disciplines are first and foremost. Skills and processes and capabilities only derive from those and within content. So I'd say we cover most of the discipline knowledge in the Australian syllabuses, but they're sequenced differently. They're sequenced appropriately and they're provide more of an opportunity for schools to lend themselves to what I call explicit teaching and more guidance for teachers.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Excellent, thank you.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know that the Centre for Independent Studies did an EOI for schools to be part of their early numeracy screening pilot. Is that the same thing?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes. We have been talking with the Centre for Independent Studies about what they're doing, but that's a separate process that they're doing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's separate to the one that you're doing?

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how many schools are taking part in the CIS?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have the numbers for the CIS. They're looking for volunteers for schools to do it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you're running your own pilot?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We are. Ours will be a stratified sample so we'll make sure we have big schools, small schools, rural, metro and so on, like we normally do when we're trying to get a valid instrument together.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When was that set up? I think when we had you here in December the pilot wasn't underway.

MARTIN GRAHAM: It was very late last year. We just started looking at some research into items. We didn't have an instrument that we were taking around schools. We were sitting down with teachers and trialling different items.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you now have an instrument you're taking into schools?

MARTIN GRAHAM: No, we have got a bigger set of items. We're trialling them and we'll be able to get a validated set. We work out which ones move together, so you only need one of them, which ones test different concepts and so on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Martin, I will now ask you some questions in relation to the music and drama syllabuses, which, again, I gave you notice of a little bit earlier with the Minister here. Where are you up to with that consultation?

PAUL MARTIN: If I can make a few preliminary remarks before I get to the specifics of the question, as I indicated a second ago, our syllabuses are all predicated on discipline, content and knowledge and the research that indicates that students learn by learning and knowledge builds on knowledge. That's a not-negotiable premise upon which all the syllabuses are based. Sometimes in some of our syllabus consultation processes, or even our technical advisory groups, there have been arguments about how that might work. That includes in English, where we insisted on phonics or grammar or particular types of teaching in senior secondary; and in maths, where we had Sweller coming in talking about some things against other views around big ideas. The sorts of arguments that occur within those teams that are putting syllabuses together—that contestation—is a normal part of syllabus development. It occurred in dance, drama and music.

Some of the significant opposition—and it has been significant opposition—has been in relation to issues of assessment. I addressed these at a committee hearing earlier last year, where there was strong hostility to the group performance being assessed by teachers rather than by NESA. That was characterised quite often in the media as if we were getting rid of group performance or performance in the creative and performing arts, which is simply not the case. We were simply assessing and asking questions of the community about which way that might go. I would maintain our responsibility not necessarily to defend everything we put forward but our right to put things forward so that you can have proper conversations. We extended the dance, drama and music consultation a little bit because the drama groups wanted us to do that. I think it was supposed to finish quite close to the end of December—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, and it was bad timing with all the end of year performances and things.

PAUL MARTIN: It was, so we didn't reject any contributions or consultation post that point. But it has meant that the number of contributions needs to be assessed and gone through. I'm very confident that there will be an appropriate syllabus that is released. We'll have a second round of targeted consultation—not public consultation, but targeted consultation—in relation to those syllabuses because consultation has to conclude at some point. I might finish by saying that, given our success with phonics and grammar, civics and citizenship, maths, the Middle East crisis and genocide, and Aboriginal content and notions of colonisation, the issues raised by drama, dance and music can be accommodated reasonably enough given our processes and our capacity to do that well already. I understand their concerns, but I would reassure them we'll get to the end of this with a good syllabus.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We had some feedback or data that came through the call for papers. I'm sure you have seen it, but particularly in the Department of Education "have your say" stats, there was barely any positive. There were 78 survey responses for music, for example, and only 1 per cent of those responses were positive. The data is very overwhelming around people having concerns. To clarify, you will do a second round of targeted consultation, but there isn't the intention to open another "have your say" period more broadly? It's only targeted.

PAUL MARTIN: At this stage, no. There is no intention to go through another "have your say" period across the State. We were subject to—and it's reasonable enough; groups do this in the circumstances—campaigns around content. Many of the consultation documents echo similar positions. Quite a few of them say that, rather than specifics in the syllabuses or any assessments, we should just start again. There are those sorts of issues that came through. There is concern around the assessment practices, but we have a responsibility to make sure that there's rigour and content in music and drama. Those subjects, which get compared to other HSC subjects, need to be able to compete on equal terms. Having said that, when that level of consternation occurs, you have to respond to it appropriately and you have to have a good look at what we have done. We will do that, and we will do it as quickly as possible.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you anticipate the next version of those syllabuses to be released? Will that be the final one, if you're doing targeted consultation?

PAUL MARTIN: We will put together drafts based on the feedback we have got. We will probably maintain some of our positions, given what I said about the underpinning of all the syllabuses. We will accommodate all those arguments that are of quality and would improve the syllabuses in drama and the experiences of students. We will then talk to the independents; the Catholics; the department; the drama, music and arts associations; and the Secondary Principals' Council et cetera. That is what I mean by targeted consultation. At the end of that process we will have a final syllabus.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have one more on this. One of the other things that came through in the documents that we got through the call for papers was some concern coming from members of the teacher advisory groups that they hadn't actually seen some of the material prior to the consultation meetings. They were being asked to provide advice on something that had not been provided to them. Was that raised with you or any of your colleagues at NESAs, and what did you do about that?

PAUL MARTIN: There were issues in relation to that. I think that mostly related to assessment materials. The content of the syllabuses are put together by NESAs teams, consultation and the Technical Advisory Group. Assessment that follows from that content is a technical piece of advice and a technical set of arguments that comes from within NESAs. That's the case with all of the syllabuses, because ultimately they have to be assessed in the HSC. There are standard-setting processes—who is best to assess what, where and why. It is the case that the Technical Advisory Group did not see the assessment material, but that has also been the case in many of the other syllabus development processes. Perhaps we should have a higher level of consultation around assessment, but it is a technical exercise and the HSC standard setting is very specific and requires internal advice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: This is probably to you, but maybe also to Mr Dizdar or Ms Summerhayes. For homeschooled students—and I understand this has been raised before, I think with NESAs—regarding co-enrolment for either hospital schools or the School of Languages, I believe that there are some parents who are taking the homeschool option but would like to look at doing co-enrolment. I understand the wording of the Act around whether either a government school or a non-government school will be eligible for homeschooling—is there any work being done or any capacity to look at co-enrolment for students who want to be homeschooled part of the time and then also attend a mainstream setting the rest of the time? Other States do that, I believe, and I wondered what is happening with that in New South Wales, if anything.

PAUL MARTIN: I think we can say that, over a number of years, these issues have been raised by homeschoolers: access to distance education and part-time enrolments et cetera. We're in constant conversation with the department around the best way to support families who are homeschooling students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, is there anything you can add to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: No. I am aware that some jurisdictions have the stance that you have got. It varies. We work with Mr Martin around homeschooling. At the end of the day, what I have learnt in my career is there's a variety of reasons and rationales about accessing homeschooling. It is quite a dispersed network of access, and how we can best support that is always a constant debate and discussion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's been brought to my attention by a few families who have wanted to look at a co-enrolment. The School of Languages was an example that was raised, and hospital schools—

if there is access for that even, potentially, for siblings who might need to attend a hospital school but then homeschool. It was raised with me again recently. There are no current plans afoot to make changes to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: As you know, our School of Languages is distance-ed delivery. Hospital schools have been doing a tremendous job. We have just brought them under Ms Summerhayes' leadership in a new unit we're creating, called Unique Settings, so that we can leverage better outcomes and better support for them. I know you know this space well. It varies from a one-day stay to a long-term stay. There might be an argument on the long-term stay around what peers and siblings look like, particularly with geography if you have got a family that moves from the regions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Picking up on the languages thing, there was one family that raised this with me directly. The student was enrolled as homeschooled, and I think they wanted to study Russian. They obviously didn't have the provision within the homeschool. The parent wasn't able to do that. But there wasn't an ability to then register through distance-ed to do Russian through community languages. It may be a minor example, but it is a specific example of where that provision is not available to a student. How can that be looked at or changed? Is there an opportunity for that to be looked at? I guess that's my question.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's a fair example you raise. At the moment, the provision is full-time. You have got to either be full-time in one of our locations—whether that's Catholic, independent or with us in government—or you have got to make a decision around full-time homeschooling. It's not currently on our work radar, but it is something that we're across.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll ask one more and then hand over to Rachel. There was the announcement today for the Early Career Academy. Is the \$20 million for that all coming from the Innovative Teacher Training Fund?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, that's where we're drawing those funds from.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So there will be no provision through that Innovative Teacher Training Fund to look at teaching models like those that were developed by Alphacrucis? That won't be part of the new academy?

MURAT DIZDAR: This goes to our scholarships. This goes to our support structures. This goes to our release for beginning teachers. We have got work to undertake around mentoring. We intend to use that fund for that. This is not the fund for Alphacrucis or the engagement of other providers around workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The budget submission that the Government put in when in opposition said that it would be looking like teacher models developed by Alphacrucis, but this is all for public schools—that \$20 million Early Career Academy that was announced today?

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Secretary, if I could just pick up an issue from earlier that I was raising about the State flag and the provision for the New South Wales flag. I draw your attention to the New South Wales Premier and Cabinet guidelines in terms of provision of free State flags. Listed under schools, it says that public schools apply through the Department of Education. Is that system in place?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. I welcome anyone to reach out to us. I want the Australian flag to be flown in our schools with their flagpoles. I want to get that right. But if they want the State flag, they're more than welcome to approach us.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the guidelines directing schools to apply for a free State flag through the Department of Education, do you have records to indicate how many flags have been supplied to schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Maybe you can help me out, Ms Merton. I do know the 200 policies that exist. There were 400. I'm grateful there are now 200 and we have improved them. Do you want to give me what you're referring to? Can I have a read of it?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's a public information. It's just a guideline through the New South Wales Premier and Cabinet.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me have a look at it. If that's what it says, then I take your word for it. Any of our people should apply if they want the New South Wales flag.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I thought you were going to say what does the flag look like.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I have had it draped across my shoulders for all three games that New South Wales has played.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In reference to free State flags—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You are under oath, Mr Dizdar. We might check the footage for that.

MURAT DIZDAR: My son Aydin can vouch for it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, I think question this might for you in terms of school infrastructure. I refer to the 2023 Labor election promise of a new school for Leppington and Denham Court as part of \$3.6 billion for Western Sydney schools. As of November 2024, I am informed that the Government was still planning to start the statutory planning process relevant to this announcement. Is the school on track to be completed by 2027?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes, it is. We are finalising the design at this point and also finalising the acquisition of the site—but absolutely. It's an election commitment, so our deadline is 2027, day one, term 1.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is this Leppington?

LISA HARRINGTON: Leppington and Denham Court—a new high school.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Next to the train station at Leppington?

LISA HARRINGTON: I have to double-check but yes, I believe so.

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.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, if I could draw your attention to Castle Hill, I'm sure you're familiar with representations from Mr Mark Hodges, the member for Castle Hill, in terms of housing density and the expectation of 9,500 new dwellings coming into the area and how the community are going to meet the demand for new schools.

LISA HARRINGTON: We agree that that area is seeing a lot of growth. It's an area that we're looking at really closely. We're really pleased to finish the upgrade of Castle Hill Public School and have the demountables being removed from that school site. We are seeing a lot of growth. The thing we need to do is make sure that, when we acquire land, it is the best value for money for the taxpayer. We're doing that work at the moment:

understanding when the demand is coming on, and the utilisation of existing schools, because there have been a lot of upgrades and new investment in that region. But I agree with you: It is an area that needs more. Our challenge at the moment is making sure that the land we acquire is the best value for money. So, we're going through that process at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Finally, relevant to the earlier reference I made to legal issue bulletin 55 relating to transgender students and safety provisions, is legal issue bulletin 55 currently under review, Mr Secretary?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's due term 1 this year. We're underway three weeks, so we'll land that in term 1. We're in the final stage of consultation. I look forward to giving good guidance to our schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Secretary, I raised earlier today, and if I could just gather your opinion on, families wanting to be involved in decisions relevant to transgender children at the school. Where do you sit on that? Do you recognise a duty of care to the students that families need to be part of the conversation and the discussion relating to gender identity or changes within the school environment?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not my opinion that counts here; it's how I work and support those students. Mr Graham can give you some detail within a very complex space. By far and wide, we work with families but there can be particular circumstances, such as mandatory reporters and under child protection, where we have got to take a child-centred approach. Mr Graham, do you want to refer to this?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Some of the legislation we'd have to comply with, to give you an idea of the complexities, are the Health Records and Information Privacy Act, the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Anti-Discrimination Act. The overall legal obligation that we have is to take reasonable steps to protect and support all students from foreseeable risk of harm. Often that's a case-by-case basis, so we have a lot of support staff, whether that's from legal or our welfare arm, to come in and assist schools through these complex matters.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The students are minors in terms of these discussions and decisions that are taking place within the school environment.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's right. That's taken into account in those Acts and operates differently depending on the age of the child and the family circumstance and their individual circumstances.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Following up on the risk of harm, there's a growing international movement for the protection of women and girls in sport. What's the policy in our high schools where surely girls should only play sport against girls and boys can play against boys, and you haven't got the risk factor of harm coming from a 16-year-old biological boy knocking over girls in contact sports like basketball and soccer and the like. Isn't that just a commonsense approach?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think we have got a good balance here, Mr Latham. What we do in the primary context is all about participation.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mixed and all that—sure. But what about in high schools, where obviously adolescence and muscle growth in boys is a huge factor.

MURAT DIZDAR: One of the good things about public education is the pathways systems that we have. If you get to the pathways levels, we follow the State and national sporting guidelines. We rely on them. If they don't allow for the mix of gender or cross-gender to be part of that, then we observe that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Right, so what does that mean in practice?

MURAT DIZDAR: If you get to our CHS levels, State levels or State carnivals, which is very different to a school carnival, we follow the national and State guidelines that are set by the appropriate sporting bodies.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about the risk of the physical harm of a 16-year-old biological boy—

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm appreciative of that. When I was coming through, there were even, in rugby league—a sport that I really like—weight categories et cetera, not only age. You can have boys under 10s and you can have an 80-kilo boy with a boy with my son's frame at 30 kilos. We take into account participation—the safety. But if you're going down our representative streams, then we follow the national and State guidelines.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have there been any physical harm incidents that cause problems?

MURAT DIZDAR: I haven't anything come to it in my attention in my time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Schools handle this case by case.

MURAT DIZDAR: Schools at the local level, when we get to our State levels and beyond—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The national rules kick in.

MURAT DIZDAR: —I haven't had it come to my attention.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Back on the high school at Leppington, why isn't it selective given the issue that we have addressed for good part of the day about parents going to non-government schools. The Hurlstone catchment—Hurlstone is the only 100 per cent selective school in south-west Sydney with a very, very wide catchment, expanding right through past Fairfield and East Hills and the like. If they can't get into Hurlstone, very often they'll take their kids to non-government schools. Don't we need a back-up selective as initially envisaged at Leppington?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think fair call, Mr Latham. It's just purely on the demand. We need more comprehensive provision in that growing corridor. It won't be the only school in need there going into the future. It's purely on what we need to be able to cater for the demand.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Who made the decision to not go down the path? We went out there with Mr Manning and looked at the site next to the railway station. It was always envisaged as selective. I think Gladys Berejiklian promised a new selective school in south-west Sydney in 2019. You might have been a bit slow, Sarah, in getting it shovel-ready.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No comment.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Nonetheless, it was still planned. Who abandoned it?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was department advice to the Deputy Premier.

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. 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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's fantastic, Murat. I have got to say, back in the day, you and I were probably on a different page and I was writing you off as a system leader. But today you have been a breath of fresh air, and I congratulate you. I wish more senior public servants would agree with me as often as you have today. It has been fantastic.

MURAT DIZDAR: I thought there were points of agreement, even back then, but maybe we have been able to articulate it better.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There were green shoots of agreement. I'm a hard marker. Today I say well done. It sounds like most things are headed in the right direction.

MURAT DIZDAR: Thank you. I'm saying just stick with us. Public ed—we're about rebuilding it and getting it stronger. I'm determined to do that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Excellent. It has been refreshing to hear the feedback and answers today. Finally, one that again the Committee had a look at. Ms Harrington, the Castle Hill High School rebuild—has that got rid of all the asbestos? Have you done the full remediation there? We had a big problem on our hands there before the Committee not so long ago. SafeWork NSW is dreadfully slow and, as the Minister has now said, a toothless tiger. Has the department taken it on to provide an asbestos-free learning environment?

LISA HARRINGTON: We follow hygienist advice in terms of all of our schools, including Castle Hill High School. There is a lot of attention that we have given, obviously, to that school because of the history and what the school has experienced. I can't say that we have removed all asbestos, but what I can say is we have followed the hygienist advice to make sure that that school is very safe to teach and learn in. As you know, there's—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What does that mean? You have removed or dealt with the unsafe asbestos, have you?

LISA HARRINGTON: What it means is that we have followed independent hygienist advice to make sure that the asbestos that is there in the buildings, as it is in a lot of other buildings, is remediated, removed, capped and dealt with to make sure that it is safe for people to be there.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are the teachers and the school community satisfied now that it's a safe environment? Because, back in the day, they weren't.

LISA HARRINGTON: My colleague Cathy Brennan has been working really closely with the school and the staff to make sure that they are. We're working really closely with them to make sure that any concerns are dealt with. Obviously, our asset management team is working very closely with that school as well.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Latham, we have taken the learnings from that site as well, across the system, around mandatory training for principals and school leaders around asbestos management. Again, I don't think the principal should be an expert in asbestos and how to handle it. There are things that we have taken from Castle Hill across the system.

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.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And how many comply with the pedagogy statement—that would be useful as well—and then what you do about it if they don't comply.

PAUL MARTIN: Any findings we have from our randoms go back to the Catholic sector, to the independent school itself, or to the government sector for them to internally deal with the issues raised by NESA.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But in the government sector, the department is still doing the inspections.

PAUL MARTIN: They're doing their own—they make sure that all their schools comply as part of their normal processes, and they have ways of doing that. But we do random inspections with NESA inspectors as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Right, as a double-check.

The CHAIR: Did you want to continue? You can continue, if you like.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I think I'm just about done.

The CHAIR: Okay, I'm sure Sarah will fill in.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I have had a good crack at it for one humble little Independent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's all right, we have got more coming on notice, I'm sorry to inform you. 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?

JEREMY KURUCZ: We have only looked at it in relation to this process at the moment and we have recommended these nine projects. I'm not aware of any further consideration of additional research at that time, but we have an ongoing SERAP process where universities can obviously apply to do research in partnership with the department and with schools. So universities are, of course, invited to apply through that process too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that specific screen addiction fund is a one-off from what you're operating with.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, that's correct.

MURAT DIZDAR: That was a \$2.5 million commitment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. I was just wondering—given that you had more demand than money, I would imagine, if you had 29 applications—whether that might be something, but 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.

MURAT DIZDAR: Is it plausible, is it feasible? As you'd appreciate, NAPLAN results are not an outcome of one influencer. In fact, the evidence says that the biggest influencer is the quality, capacity and expertise of the teacher. To draw assumptions of a mobile phone ban leading to NAPLAN improvement, we'd need to test the rigour of that because a lot goes into what a NAPLAN results look like.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Minister says quite often in the House and publicly that the mobile phone ban is going to have an improvement of student outcomes. I am wondering if there's any data to back that up. That's what I'm curious to know.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's come back to you through the work CESE are undertaking.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add anything, Ms Summerhayes?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Are we talking academic outcomes or other outcomes, like engagement, that lead to academic outcomes? When we speak at schools, it's on all sorts of different levels about how it's improved school culture, cohesion and kids' engagement in class. It varies. That's why CESE is looking at how best to measure around what outcomes to what purpose.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide on notice a time frame—I think you might have said that already—for that work that CESE is doing, that would be good.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Can I ask about media reports concerning Sheikh Wesam, who allegedly breached the New South Wales education department's social media policy and code of ethics? There were comments made relating to the two nurses threatening harm to Israeli patients at Bankstown hospital. Mr Secretary, does the individual concerned remain employed by the NSW Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: The Deputy Premier was very clear this morning, the Premier's Department has been very clear with a circular across the sector with the Public Service Commissioner, and I have been very clear in my role: All of our people have to stay apolitical in the execution of their duties. We met with the individual on a couple of occasions, with their representatives. They are not in—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Secretary, this is an estimates session, and I'm asking whether the individual concerned remains on the payroll?

MURAT DIZDAR: The individual concerned is not working at the school at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But in terms of the payroll, is the taxpayer still paying the individual concerned?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're working with the individual concerned and their representatives.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are you aware of the alleged breach of the social media policy and that the material still appears in the public domain?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're the ones that have put the allegations to the individual.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: This is an exploration of an individual case that is the subject of an investigation. I think it is inappropriate for this to be canvassed any further in an open hearing. If the Hon. Rachel Merton wants to continue this line of questioning, I will move for the session to move in camera.

The CHAIR: Do you want to push?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I prefaced the comment by saying that it's an estimates session and it was around the employment. Does the concerned individual remain employed by the Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me repeat for the third time: I take my estimates responsibilities very seriously. We're working with the individual and their representatives. I don't want to jeopardise what that means for the individual. They have got representation, and we're working with the representatives and the individual. They are not in the school at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The question was relevant to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: I'm going to press the point.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can't go in camera in an estimates hearing.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If you persist, I'll raise the paragraph 13 of the procedural fairness resolution, which relates to serious damage around the reputation of a third party.

The CHAIR: I think Ms Merton was finished.

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.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do I have two more minutes, Chair?

The CHAIR: I want to ask one and if there is something at the end of that—sorry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's your time.

The CHAIR: Something that I saw when it came out earlier this month, on the 22 January, was an administrative arrangements order which transferred the non-government schools regulatory unit from the Department of Education to NESAs. Can you explain what that was about?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's section 83C, which is the regulation ensuring that an independent or a Catholic school is not operating for profit. That function was moved from the department to my colleague Paul Martin in NESAs. It was a Government decision.

The CHAIR: Were there any reasons for it, though?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Greater independence.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it was a welcome move from all sectors. It followed a review that was undertaken by an eminent educator, Tom Alegounarias. The Government accepted his recommendation. I welcome the movement, like my sector-head colleagues have. It puts it at arm's length from the department. There was always the complexity of the department investigating what that looked like for an independent authority. Mr Martin welcomed that function. We handed across. I think it's a good outcome.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I was very keen to see what that was about.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to ask about the admin reduction for teachers and, again, the specifics around the methodology for how you are tracking how much time has been saved. I appreciate the Minister gave some general examples earlier. I noticed that the people matters survey says that stress and burnout levels are still pretty high amongst staff. There hasn't been a significant change there. How you are tracking that time saved and where you are up to in terms of that commitment?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm glad you referenced the People Matter Employee Survey because, for the first time in the last four years, we had improvement from schools only, in 11 domains. In the last four years we had no improvement but we went up in 11 areas, which is a great result for schools. I do acknowledge that stress and burnout are still—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Still high.

MURAT DIZDAR: too high, but we have improved. What we're not doing this time around is going on the ground and counting and replaying the minutes. We got a lot of scepticism when we went out there and said, "We saved you two minutes. We saved you three minutes." We're trying to do discernible action. It goes to the mandatory training, which is now one hour instead of 20 or so hours a year, once you have met all your competencies. It goes to the extra school development days. It goes to things like the limitation on meetings so that we can focus on the classroom. We do have to prove back to Government, though, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, there was an election commitment around hours saved.

MURAT DIZDAR: Five hours. I'll go to my colleague Mr French who can tell you the methodology we're adopting.

DANIEL FRENCH: Thanks for the question. As the secretary has outlined, there are a number of workload reduction initiatives that we have put in place. The work that we're doing now, after we have just completed the audit, is to work through the extent to which those particular initiatives are having a felt difference. For instance, the school admin reduction program is a good example of that. We have just rolled out, this year and into next year, for over 700 schools, additional SASS staff, and we're looking at the way that they're able to perform administration tasks that teachers might have otherwise performed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you going to hit the five hours, though, that was the pre-election commitment?

DANIEL FRENCH: Yes, we're confident that we have got the right things in place to be able to deliver on that commitment. One of the things that we want to make sure we do is, in measuring these initiatives, looking at realised time savings, not just estimates. We're working with our CESE colleagues at a way of validating that across the system, not just those particular schools where an initiative might have been put in place.

The CHAIR: It's now time for Government questions. Does the Government have any questions?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There are no questions from the Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You could have let me keep going, D'Adam. I bet you have got some you'd like to ask.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for your attendance today. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in relation to any supplementary questions and questions taken on notice. That concludes our hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.