

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH
INQUIRY INTO CLEAN INDOOR AIR
Post Hearing Responses – Questions taken on notice
11 June 2026

QUESTION 1, PAGE 3

The CHAIR: ... You talked about some of the medium-term actions currently being reviewed. I'm specifically interested in the recommendation around acceleration of mechanical-filtered ventilation installation and what stage of consideration that's up to.

LISA HARRINGTON: Sure. Dean can talk to that in more detail. What we're doing now, as the report has indicated—there was some short-term exceedences in some schools, so our priority right now is just to understand that better. Mechanical ventilation has been implemented in other instances, particularly where it doesn't make sense for teachers to open the windows—so in very, very cold climates, aircraft noise, that sort of thing. It is something that we already do, case by case, when it makes sense. Our priority right now is to understand and do the extra testing.

We are doing 15 classrooms in those schools that only had one classroom before. If mechanical ventilation is the right thing there, we will implement it. As I said, we already did put mechanical ventilation in. I can check the number for you, but there were quite a few schools we assessed during COVID, and there were some instances where mechanical ventilation made sense. We have done that and we'll continue to do that case by case with these particular schools. In 2026 all AMUs are having a look at ventilation off the back of this report, understanding what current measures are in place, whether they're effective or not, and what additional action we need to take.

ANSWER

More than 25% of NSW public schools have mechanical ventilation.

QUESTION 2, PAGE 4

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you work with Health to develop protocols in terms of how often HVAC and mechanical ventilation systems in schools should be cleaned?

LISA HARRINGTON: Whether it's health or other guidelines—National Construction Code—we follow the appropriate guidelines. We don't set them; we follow them. Our Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines, which is how we build our new schools and upgrade schools, follows and reflects the relevant guidelines.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The question went to maintenance of existing systems.

LISA HARRINGTON: I can ask Dean to talk about the maintenance.

DEAN SLATTERY: I can probably answer that, Deputy Chair. We do what we term proactive servicing of all air-conditioning systems on an annual basis, and that includes HVAC or split systems. Once a year they are cleaned, inspected and, if filter cartridges require replacement, they are replaced.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What's the basis for thinking that annual inspection and cleaning is sufficient?

DEAN SLATTERY: It was developed at the start of this contract based off the original guidance. That was three years ago. I can inspect and see if that requires further development.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Sorry, guidance from whom?

DEAN SLATTERY: It would have come from the Department of Health at the time. I wasn't the author of the contract, but the previous ED who did manage this contract was seeking guidance on appropriate timings, whether it be air-conditioning servicing or back flow prevention, TMVs—whatever the statutory requirement was, we were following.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm just reflecting on what we've seen in hospitals with respect to HVAC recently. Is there a procedure for reviewing these standards at certain intervals?

DEAN SLATTERY: We're currently in the end of life of this contract, so we are going through a new process of a new contract to come out and we're reviewing all those standards as we speak. There's a working group on that now.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: This is a contract for cleaning and servicing?

DEAN SLATTERY: For maintenance.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It isn't a part of the regular school maintenance that the filters are cleaned and checked once a month?

DEAN SLATTERY: They are checked once a year.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: They are checked once a year by an external provider?

DEAN SLATTERY: By an external party. We engage an external service provider.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of the total budget for HVAC, what sort of percentage does that maintenance contract represent?

DEAN SLATTERY: I don't have that particular number. I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could provide that on notice, I would be very grateful.

ANSWER

Air-conditioners are serviced bi-annually. This is supported by reactive maintenance to address any faults, repairs and maintenance that is required outside of the regular cycle. This is part of the Department of Education's annual maintenance budget. Last financial year \$1.25 billion was invested in maintenance and local upgrades.

QUESTION 3, PAGE 5

The CHAIR: For the schools that demonstrated levels of carbon dioxide that weren't optimal, as well as the Georges River school with nitrogen dioxide, what communication has taken place with parents and staff?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'll ask Dean. He's had conversations with the school.

DEAN SLATTERY: We shared an email and the report with all 59 schools. The three in particular that we talk about, which is Hebersham, Mayfield East and Condell Park High School, were sent direct communications. I actually phoned the principals of those schools myself and we had conversations. Off the back of that, we are going off and doing validation of that data to try and understand what that looks like. As

Lisa was saying, we've engaged again an independent hygienist for all three of those schools. During the previous April school holidays, we went in and we've done assessments of the classrooms, size of windows, type of windows, numbers of windows, any heating or cooling sources that are in the rooms—we've put in some CO2 monitors, and we've got some baseline data with no children in the rooms while they were vacated. We're now coming back this term and into the next term to do 15 classrooms in each of those schools while the children are there, so we can get a better reading and understand. I think that runs over five days over 15 classrooms on a rolling basis.

The CHAIR: It's good to hear about the additional monitoring. Just to bring you back to the specific part of the question that's about communication, for staff at those schools, for parents of kids at those schools, have they been directly communicated with about the findings of the report and what's happening?

DEAN SLATTERY: Not to my knowledge.

LISA HARRINGTON: We've communicated with the principal. We'd have to come back to you in terms of the communication that the principals have with staff or the school community.

ANSWER

Communications were provided to school principals for sharing with their school communities as appropriate.

QUESTION 4, PAGE 7

The CHAIR: Mrs Carter asked an earlier question about research comparing students' performance relating to ventilation. I understand there are some independent academics interested in that question as well, but they're also interested in sickness absences. I understand that the data for attendance is readily available, but not the sub-data for attendance based on whether it's sickness or not. Is there a reason that that's not readily available for the purposes of academic research?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'd have to come back to you on notice. That's not in my space, but I can come back to you on notice.

ANSWER

The Department of Education collects data on attendance including reason for absence. The Student Attendance Factsheets are published annually and publicly available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/statistics/attendance-bulletin>.

Other publicly available attendance data is available at:

- <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/child-care-education-and-training/school-education/>
- <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/student-attendance>

- <https://myschool.edu.au/> (for individual school data).

Absence data for research purposes can also be requested through the State Education Research and Partnerships (SERAP) process.

QUESTION 5, PAGE 7

The CHAIR: I'd really appreciate that. I also have a question about the Cooler Classrooms Program—is that for Mr Slattery as well? It's my understanding that under that program, the outdoor air supply that's been nominated is six litres, which is half the minimum requirement of the Australian standard 1668.2. We had a significant amount of evidence two hearings ago about the potential value of that standard. I am interested to understand why Cooler Classrooms has got a different threshold?

DEAN SLATTERY: I wasn't around for the inception of Cooler Classrooms, but I can take it on notice and come back to you on it.

ANSWER

The Cooler Classrooms program is compliant with the Australian Standard. In a standard classroom, 2 outside air fans were installed, which each provide 6 litres per student, per second. This results in a combined design supply of 12 litres per student, per second.