

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING, WESTERN SYDNEY

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)
Dr Amanda Cohn
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Tania Mihailuk
The Hon. Cameron Murphy
The Hon. Emily Suvaal
The Hon. Natalie Ward

PRESENT

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

The Hon. Courtney Houssos, *Former Acting Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Former Acting 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**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Welcome to the first hearing of Portfolio Committee No.3 - Education for the additional round of hearings for budget estimates 2025-2026. 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 respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today either in person or online. My name is Abigail Boyd, and I am Chair of this Committee. I welcome Deputy Premier Car and Minister Houssos as well as accompanying officials to this 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 that they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of 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. Welcome and thank you for making the time to give evidence. Deputy Premier and Minister Houssos, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you've already sworn an oath to your office as members of Parliament. I'd like to take this opportunity also to extend a special welcome to the Deputy Premier; it is excellent to see you back at our budget estimates hearings. For all other witnesses, I remind you that you've already been sworn before this Committee during this inquiry and therefore do not need to be sworn again.

CORRECTED

Mr MURAT DIZDAR, PSM, 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, Acting Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr DANIEL FRENCH, Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

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 Department of Education, on former affirmation

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

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

Ms MELINDA McCABE, Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr DARYL CURRIE, Acting Commissioner, NSW Early Learning Commission, on former affirmation

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by both Ministers for the morning session 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 these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 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 crossbench—and that is me. Ministers, I appreciate that because Minister Houssos has been acting as education Minister I will leave it to you at times to work out which of you wants to respond.

I want to talk to you about the horrifying case of Ashley Griffith. As you know, this man is alleged to have committed 180 charges in New South Wales of sexual assault against girls. Twenty-three families are waiting their time to see him face justice in New South Wales. The families of those girls have been left to advocate for themselves in terms of trying to get him brought to New South Wales from Queensland, where he has been found guilty of, I think, 300 charges. He has been given a life sentence. He is currently appealing, I believe, his minimum part of that, but he's not appealing the actual guilty finding. These families have been left to try to get him brought here. Have either of you spoken with the Attorney General about bringing Mr Griffith here to face justice?

Ms PRUE CAR: Before I answer this really important question, I acknowledge your acknowledgement of the fact that we are both here. Of course, some of the questions that are asked of me today I may have to ask Minister Houssos to assist with as she was the acting Minister for some time while I was getting cancer treatment. I'm very grateful to Minister Houssos for giving up her time to this estimates hearing this morning. She has been a phenomenal support in making sure that the work continues apace. In regard to Ashley Griffith, you're right. This is an absolutely horrific set of circumstances.

I don't think any of us can imagine what those families have gone through, continue to go through and, in fact, probably will always go through because of the trauma that this person has put them through. My advice is that the Attorney General has written to his Queensland counterpart to request that whatever is possible to be done can be done asap to get Mr Griffith transferred to New South Wales. We do that with the acknowledgement that these families very much want that to happen so they have the opportunity to bring Mr Griffith to justice for his crimes in New South Wales. I await that correspondence between the two Attorneys-General, but my advice from our Attorney General is that that request has been made. I'll be keeping a close eye on that to make sure that it's followed up.

The CHAIR: I will also be raising this with the Attorney General. The families of these victims have got the Attorneys-General in both New South Wales and Queensland to this point by their own advocacy and—it is my understanding—not through any proactive work of the New South Wales Government before that, which is quite unfortunate. The importance of Ashley Griffith being brought to New South Wales goes beyond him being

CORRECTED

held responsible; it also goes to the potential liability of others who had positions of responsibility or authority in the services in which he offended. Are you concerned that a delay in trialling Griffith here could also compromise the success of the prosecutions of the others who may be held liable in relation to his crimes?

Ms PRUE CAR: If that would be the case, I would be very concerned about that. I absolutely understand that this is very complex and there is a very strong wish from the families involved to try both Mr Griffith as well as others who may need to be tried. I also need to be careful in the commentary I make, because I don't also want to jeopardise any legal proceedings. It would be fair for people to expect me to say—and I say this truthfully—I want to see those families get justice. I don't want to be doing anything to jeopardise that. Of course I am concerned about that.

The CHAIR: My understanding is that the Attorney General has not met with these families, despite their request to meet. I think their response when they spoke with the Queensland Attorney-General was that having a meeting where they actually could express the pain. We're talking about victims now, some of whom are turning 18. They've been going through this for a long time. These families are really struggling. I had a recent email from one of them who was saying that they've come together in a bit of a support group, which is great. This particular parent said to me that one of them was struggling with every element of his life because he's so angry. He describes it as a ticking time bomb. This person said that for them it's like the "Acme-waiting Road Runner with the threads snapping one by one". These are incredibly traumatised people. Given that the Attorney General has not met with them and that that may lead to a hastening, would you encourage the Attorney General to meet with the families to understand this issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am not aware about that communication between the families and the Attorney General. I will certainly commit to speaking with the Attorney General about this important matter. I can understand what you are talking about. There is serious trauma and I acknowledge that. I don't think anyone can understand what that is unless you have gone through it. I will speak with the Attorney General about this.

The CHAIR: I appreciate it. One of the issues that we spent a bit of time on in the last estimates with Minister Houssos was in relation to the community preschools and the Fair Work Commission. The Fair Work Commission has now issued a formal recommendation directing the New South Wales Government to take "all necessary action, including reviewing and increasing funding" to give effect to that agreement. Importantly, the Fair Work Commission absolutely denied—gave validity to the preschool teacher claims and rejected a lot of what the Government had been saying. Will the Government now comply with that recommendation?

Ms PRUE CAR: My advice is that the Fair Work Commission had directed the Government to review, as you said, the funding arrangement for community preschools. We will certainly do that. I would at the outset say I can absolutely understand and appreciate why community preschool teachers—educators—are arguing for a pay increase. They deserve a pay rise. I would urge community preschool providers to pay that pay rise to their workers. I acknowledge the community preschool providers who already pay above the award. Community preschools are in receipt of significant amounts of New South Wales Government funding. We will review that in line with the Fair Work direction, or recommendation, if you like, but I just think it's really wise to remember that the community preschools are the employer when it comes to community preschool educators. I acknowledge that the New South Wales Government is a majority funder—a hundred per cent—but I can totally understand why community preschool educators want a pay rise. Pay is a function of respect. We've got serious workforce challenges in that workforce and community preschool providers should be providing that pay rise to pay their workers correctly.

The CHAIR: With respect, that's the argument that was rejected by the Fair Work Commission, which found that these preschools are so underfunded that if they were to provide that pay increase for workers then that would have to come out of parents' fees. That is putting an incredible pressure on families, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, for these services, which are statistically safer and better quality, and they have these experienced, qualified teachers leaving because they can go to other places. That can't be the solution. The Fair Work Commission was saying that, as the entity responsible for the funding that would then flow through to those wages, the New South Wales Government needs to take all necessary action.

Ms PRUE CAR: And we will review the funding, as directed, as recommended by the Fair Work Commission. But just to get all facts out on the table for this really important conversation, we are not the employer of community preschools. I would urge community preschool providers to find a way to pay for this pay rise because many of them do have the ability to do that. We are not the sole funder of community preschools; we're the majority funder. We will review that funding. I think the community preschool educators have a really strong case and community preschool providers should be honouring that by providing their workforce with a pay rise.

The CHAIR: We'll come back to this.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Good morning, Deputy Premier. Good to see you back. Can I confirm when your return date was, just so I know? Was it February or January?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd just have to check. I think it was the first day the students were back—day one, term one.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's okay. I just wanted to know that it was roughly in February. The matter I'm going to ask you about is in relation to what I thought was a really shocking incident—and I'm sure you would agree—of the international Chinese academic Siu Hang Li who posed as a schoolboy—a 46-year-old man who was caught posing as a schoolboy in Hyde Park. I'm going by what's in the media. He was subsequently charged and has since left Australia and returned back to Hong Kong or China, wherever he's from. The article stated that he'd visited a number of schools, specifically schools with uniform stores, and he went to Sydney Boys High. I just want to ask you, Deputy Premier, when you might have been notified of this incident and if the department had any contact with any other schools. I want to ask you whether there was more to this incident than just one public school. What has happened since this horrific revelation?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is obviously a matter for police but, as you said, my advice is that he did visit some non-government schools and Sydney Boys. In order to answer this question properly I might have to ask Mr Dizdar to advise on what we know about this.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, they are concerning. I'm across the matter as well, Ms Mihailuk, and we're fully cooperating with New South Wales police.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What I want to ask specifically—because I had a look at the uniform policy. What I'm trying to understand is what safeguards are in place to prevent an individual from turning up to a school? In this instance, for example, Sydney Boys, the uniform store is onsite. I just wanted to clarify with you, Deputy Premier, and perhaps Mr Dizdar, whether the department has investigated how an individual can turn up on site? Deputy Premier, I'm happy for you to hand over if Mr Dizdar wants to respond.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's very concerning. I think for any person that read this, or saw this, it raises more than a few questions. My expectation is that that shouldn't be able to happen, but I'll just ask Mr Dizdar about that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Our schools that have got uniform shops onsite have sign-on procedures. Any visitor, including parents, you've got to sign in to the school.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is that part of the uniform policy or is that a generic, entering school grounds or shared school facility policy? Which policy would that be under?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's part of visiting a school, entering a school. This is not parents just simply drop-off; you're going in there to buy a uniform. Many of our schools do have uniform shops onsite and I want to thank P&Cs that often run them.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Perhaps you can put on notice how many schools actually have their uniform shops onsite?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to look at what we've got.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I think the majority have it offsite; is that right for public schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, there are still some that do that, and often it's parent-run with volunteers. I want to thank parents.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But what would the process normally be? Parents just turn up and buy a uniform? Do they need to notify that they have a child at the school?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell you the process from experience, how it normally happens. My children are at Newtown High School of Performing Arts. It's a fantastic school. It has a uniform shop. I went there to purchase their uniform and I had to sign in to the school and then the school pointed out and took me to where the uniform shop was. Often those uniform—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you think that process is consistent, Mr Dizdar, across all public schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a consistent expectation.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do we know if that happened here at Sydney Boys? Did this individual actually sign in at the office?

MURAT DIZDAR: As it's a police matter, I can't go into the detail.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The matter is closed, actually. He has been charged, convicted and it's closed. The police have closed their investigation, according to what's in the reporting.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to get on detail what I can for you.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: He's actually back overseas and, as I understand, has been suspended from his university.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. I'm happy to get on detail what I can for you. If I can just finish with the example, though. The uniform shops normally have operating hours and they're really well communicated to parents, as it was for me as a parent at Newtown High School of Performing Arts, and then I was accompanied by staff who showed me the way. I'd signed in, purchased the uniform and off I went. So there is a record then of entry of parents, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you would say that all schools are complying with that process?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd say that they understand that process really well, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But how do you know if they're complying with that, because obviously this individual somehow, on 27 February, was able to enter a public school and purchase a uniform? Have you undertaken a specific investigation as to what occurred at this public school?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I could assure the Committee is that the sign-on procedures in our schools are really well enacted and understood.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Did this individual sign on?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said, Ms Mihailuk—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you take that on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back on detail with what I can cover with it, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: As I said, as far as the reporting, the case is closed, so I don't know what police would be further investigating. In fact, the information was only released once the individual had essentially been already convicted and left. My concern is: Are public schools following a process, as you just articulated, and they're in fact asking people to sign on prior to going into a uniform shop?

Are parents providing detail that they actually have a child onsite, perhaps providing the class roll of that child or some confirmation of who they are?

MURAT DIZDAR: I am very confident around the sign-on procedures in schools, having visited 1,564 government schools in my career. I can't even walk in without signing in.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Mr Dizdar, this individual apparently did this in 2020 with one of the private schools. I don't know how much investigation was undertaken then on whether he visited public schools at that time either. He wasn't charged at that time, and I think that's part of the problem. It wasn't the first occasion that he'd come to Australia to do that.

MURAT DIZDAR: My understanding is that there were several independent schools that he visited, including Sydney Boys. I agree with you; it's concerning. Let me go and find out what I can and come back to you on notice with.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That would be great. Deputy Premier, I might just ask you a little bit about antisemitism in schools at the moment. I do recall, I think you might have made a comment—I'm not sure if it was yourself or Minister Houssos who was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* published on 25 January—that you are already working closely with your Federal counterparts on further measures to combat antisemitism. I just wanted to ask what those measures are for New South Wales public schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: That would have been Minister Houssos. At the time we were working with Minister Clare—who, of course, is the Commonwealth Minister—on the Antisemitism Education Taskforce he put together, chaired by David Gonski. We are working in that taskforce. In fact, recently I was at the education Ministers meeting, hearing an update on the work of the taskforce. I'm actually really proud of the work we're doing in New South Wales. We are leading the country in the work against antisemitism in schools, specifically, in nation-leading professional development for teachers in not just antisemitism but dealing with trauma response. We are working with the Jewish Board of Deputies on some of that professional learning. I believe that the antisemitism training that might be rolled out by UNESCO and the work that the Commonwealth envoy is doing—I'll stand to be corrected, Mr Dizdar. We're actually doing that work in New South Wales and, I think, hosting a discussion shortly. Is that right, Mr Dizdar?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, has the department actually dedicated a funding line for deradicalisation or extremism prevention programs? Are there those types of programs that the department might be involved in?

Ms PRUE CAR: In terms of the antisemitism question, we're definitely hard at work on the antisemitism question in terms of helping teachers in classrooms and in schools help to deal with any abhorrent increases of antisemitism in schools. We do run existing—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are we keeping records of that? Does the department keep records of incidences?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, we keep records of anything that happens in New South Wales schools. Mr Dizdar will have detail on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: In relation to the national work around antisemitism, we've partnered with UNESCO, the national antisemitism envoy in Jillian Segal and the Sydney Jewish Museum. We're hosting a national dialogue at our headquarters later this month. That work is being co-developed with those experts to pilot, in 10 government schools in Victoria and New South Wales together, to learn what would help the profession in stamping out any incidences of antisemitism in schools or that can come from community and impact on schools. The Deputy Premier is right: It's nation-leading work. It does follow a March 2025 livestream that I conducted with principals in New South Wales—with the antisemitism national envoy, the national envoy for Islamophobia and the CEO of Multicultural NSW—in March 2025 to help support our workforce around their impeccable work in fostering social cohesion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Welcome, Ministers. Deputy Premier, it's great to see you back. Congratulations and it's very good to see you here. We're very pleased you're back. It's great to have two for the price of one. Can I turn to public school enrolments. Your Government publishes annual public school enrolment data numbers at data.nsw.gov.au, which is very helpful. They show the enrolments each year from 1996 to 2024. Minister, there appears to be, from that data, a decline in public school enrolments, both as the absolute number and also as a percentage share of total school enrolments. Do you accept that those figures are accurate and that you are presiding over a decline in public school enrolments?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've been very clear that we aim to arrest the decline in public school enrolments. That can be put down to decades of underinvestment, failing to build schools in new areas where they had built. I tell you, in the electorate that I represent, there were whole suburbs full of tens of thousands of people without public schools that they simply couldn't go to. That might impact on public school enrolments. We're doing everything to turn that around. We have record low numbers of teacher vacancies. We have halved the number of merged and cancelled classes. We're investing like never before in new schools as well as in high potential and gifted education to attract parents and families to public schools to help their children reach their full potential. We admit that this is a challenge that we inherited, and we're hard at work to arrest that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you compare those years, it does show that, in fact, public school enrolments are generally stronger under Liberal-Nationals governments than Labor governments, if you compare the data and the years. That's just going on the numbers and the years from 1996 to 2024 but, nonetheless, I accept what you say about trying to address the issue. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported last month that the Department of Education has a target to increase the enrolment share of public schools from 62.9 per cent to 65.5 per cent in 2034. Is that report correct?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I said very clearly in the answer before, we've made it very clear that we want to increase our enrolment share. We're hard at work using all those ways to do that. Mr Dizdar in particular has made it very clear that a huge KPI of his is to increase public school enrolments. That's exactly what we're hard at work to do.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So that report is accurate, thank you. Nonetheless, rather than be on the way to achieving that target, the public school share actually fell under you in 2025 to 61.5 per cent.

Ms PRUE CAR: I would make the point that with a lot of this data, they're lagging indicators. This has been going on for some time. It not only is going on around the country but has been going on for some time. Anyone that has had anything to do with education policy knows that change is not immediate and investment in the long term means it takes time to turn a tanker around. We inherited a system that was underinvested in, where there were simply schools that did not exist in areas where hundreds of thousands of people lived.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's difficult to enrol in a school that's not built.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Actually, in fairness, Ms Ward, you can't compare 1996 to today because Marsden Park and Jordan Springs did not exist. They do now. They existed under your Government and you refused to build schools. That's why we're in the situation that we are.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about what you've done in the three years that you have been in charge. Rather than being on the way to achieving that target of 65.5 per cent, the public school share actually fell. What's the target each year between now and 2034?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think you're searching for a disagreement that's not going to exist. I agree that we need to lift public school enrolments. We have made it very clear. We're transparent about that. We're working at that. We're investing in new schools. We're doubling the amount of public preschools. It's the biggest investment this State has ever had in public preschools. We're investing in high potential and gifted education. We're changing enrolment availability.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll get to questions on those. I'm just interested in the target.

Ms PRUE CAR: But I'm agreeing that we've admitted—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the target?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've discussed the target, and we're working towards it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's the target each year between now and 2034?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've discussed the target—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But what is it?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've discussed what the target is. We're not going to be putting a target on each year. We are going to continue to make the long-term investment to win back enrolment share.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But surely between now and 2034, you would have to have interim targets that you're seeking to achieve or you're directing your department to achieve.

Ms PRUE CAR: My expectation is that the department is hard at work, and I know that they are. I'm sure Mr Dizdar can detail the ways in which they are, but we are working—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How can you be confident, though, to reach that 2034 target if you don't have those milestones along the way?

Ms PRUE CAR: I can be sure that we're working at it because this Government is investing in public education like never before. In fact, the investment in infrastructure alone is the largest ever investment—I don't think since the '50s and '60s we've seen an investment in public school infrastructure like we're seeing right now, so that's how I can be sure that we're doing it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Does the department have interim targets?

MURAT DIZDAR: The target that we've made publicly available on our plan for public ed is a 2034 target.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm aware of that. I'm asking about the milestones along the way.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we're hard at work every day is to arrest the decline, stabilise it and grow, and I'm very confident that we will get there. That's why we set an ambitious platform—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have interim targets along the way?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're a 2034 target. What we've also done that may be of interest for the Committee is, for the first time in my career, as a former principal on the ground, we've set enrolment growth measures with every single school in the State. Those measures are set for 2028—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We can get to that in Government time. I'm interested in the—

MURAT DIZDAR: I think this is important. We're using that as a guide in how we're tracking to the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sorry; I do have very limited time. Before that 2034, what are the steps along the way? It seems the answer, I can understand, from what you've said, is that we're aiming to the target, but we don't have interim milestone steps. Is that fair?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I didn't quite say that, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are the interim milestone steps, then?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: They are the school targets that we've set—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are they yearly?

MURAT DIZDAR: —the growth measures—

Ms PRUE CAR: For the first time ever.

MURAT DIZDAR: —for the first time ever—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And are they yearly?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're being set now in '26 for '28, so they're our interim steps.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you've got a 2028 interim step for measuring growth?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's fair, having been a school principal, that you give time for schools to grow their enrolments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you expect a further fall, Minister, before an increase to get back on track to the 65.5 per cent target?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I expect our work to continue apace to grow enrolments. Can I just say as well—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have an update—

Ms PRUE CAR: No, this is really important to put in perspective what we're dealing with. Because we're talking about, potentially, a generation of children we've lost, particularly in new-release areas, it actually compounds over time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just get to the targets, though?

Ms PRUE CAR: If in Marsden Park the five-year-olds don't have somewhere to go, that's their whole schooling career—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think we all agree; no-one's disagreeing that it needs to be dealt with. I'm asking about the targets, though, in budget estimates. Your data doesn't include 2025 because the 2025 figures just aren't up to date on that. Do you have an update on the total public school enrolments since the reported figures?

Ms PRUE CAR: These are transparently reported.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But it hasn't been updated, so can you provide an update?

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

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you provide that today? Can somebody in the whole of the department look that up today? It's obviously not published.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take that on notice unless I get advice otherwise.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Being transparent, I'm sure there's somebody in the thousands of people watching at home who could find that update, and hopefully it's a good one.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think you overplay just how interesting this Committee is, but yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm sure you're very interested, as am I. There's an election coming, as you, I'm sure, know, on 13 March 2027. Do you promise to release the 2026 public school enrolment numbers ahead of the election and no later than the same time next year?

Ms PRUE CAR: We'll be transparent with all data.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you'll publish those numbers?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not going to announce today when we're going to publish data for the election campaign—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why not?

Ms PRUE CAR: —but I can guarantee you that we'll go to the election with an extremely strong offering on everything we have done in public education after you left it in a complete mess.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about the data, though. You're being transparent but you're not prepared to commit to release that data before the election?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Look, I have to say I'm really trying not to be argumentative about this. But the fact that the Liberals come in in a committee to do with education talking about transparency of data is—the hypocrisy knows no bounds.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's your own data, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: The hypocrisy knows no bounds. When I came in as Minister, I said to the department, probably in one of our first meetings—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, your Government's been in for three years.

Ms PRUE CAR: —how do we know the merged and cancelled classes from the teacher shortage? They said, "We don't know, Minister, because the previous Government never asked us to ask for it."

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, you've been in for three years. It's budget estimates. I'm asking you about data that's published by the department, if I may. Can you rule out a further decline this year? If you won't commit to publishing the data, if that's something that you're able to commit to?

Ms PRUE CAR: Can I rule out a further decline of enrolments?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: What I can say is I'm not going to make ridiculous assertions at this Committee so that you've got something for your social media—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How is it ridiculous—

Ms PRUE CAR: No, what I'm going to do is continue to work to grow our enrolment share—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's ridiculous about it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm just not going to give you what you want for that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking for data, that's all.

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm going to do is continue to work to grow back enrolment share and to improve outcomes for our students. That's where the rubber hits the road here. That's what that's actually about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If enrolments have declined, have you failed, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've admitted that we need to grow enrolments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So if enrolments decline in this coming year, have you failed?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I've admitted that we need to increase enrolments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's an important issue, isn't it? We all agree on that—that the declining school enrolments—it's not acceptable, in my view, to label that as a ridiculous question, is it? How is it ridiculous?

Ms PRUE CAR: It really would have been nice for the Liberals to care about public school enrolments when they were in government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: These are important issues, Minister, for parents in New South Wales and for students.

Ms PRUE CAR: I agree, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We'll move on. Last week the ABS released its annual schools report, showing a decline in the public school system's share of enrolments. Again, 61.5 per cent of New South Wales students now attend public schools. It's actually lower than the national average of 62.8 per cent. Why do you think it's lower in New South Wales than the rest of the country?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I've said ad nauseam—I almost feel like this is a trick question—but I think in New South Wales—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There's nothing tricky about it. It's on data, Minister. I think you're reading way too much—I'm simply asking about the comparison with the rest of the country. That's ABS statistics.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, that is released annually every March—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why do you think it's lower in New South Wales?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: It might have something to do with the fact that your Government didn't build the schools where they were required.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's going to be the same answer to every question.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, that's not a small point. Students cannot go to public schools that don't exist. Would you admit that?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've been in for three years, Minister. I'm asking about this budget estimates, what you're doing—

Ms PRUE CAR: And we have built more schools in growth areas than you ever planned to build.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But, Minister, the data doesn't lie.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I know.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's ABS statistics showing that the enrolment is lower in New South Wales, and you're wanting to talk about three years ago. I'm interested, for parents and students, talking about now why you think it's lower than the rest of the country.

Ms PRUE CAR: Because when you failed to admit that the people of Jordan Springs needed a high school that they couldn't enrol in. That's why the data doesn't lie. I think that maybe you aren't understanding what I'm saying in this respect. It is because the schools didn't exist, the enrolments aren't there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: A Department of Education spokesperson told *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 5 March about:

... strategies being implemented to boost enrolments, including a program called Inspire in which every school will offer gifted education options to high potential students ...

The article also stated, "The spokesperson also noted enrolments were in part fuelled by a lack of public schools in high-growth areas." Is it the department's view that none of the decline in enrolments is due to the actual quality of education provided in New South Wales public schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you questioning the quality of our public school system, Ms Ward?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking the question—there has been a decline in enrolments. Is none of that attributable to the actual quality of education being provided?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am proud to be the education Minister in New South Wales, and I stand by the quality education that our 85,000 teachers provide our students in our public schools across New South Wales. I just want to make that point. I stand by that quality. But the spokesperson referenced in that article is just making the point that I just made: Students cannot enrol in schools that don't exist, and that has had a disastrous compounding impact on enrolments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the issue is that they are declining under you, so even in the schools that are built—

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I'm agreeing—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Hang on. Can I ask a question?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is a parallel argument. I'm agreeing with you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it possible to ask the question? In those schools that do exist, National Australia Bank behavioural economist Dean Pearson told the ABC on 5 March that his longitudinal research survey on parents indicated discipline was also a key motivator for both parents and students. Do you agree that the perception of better discipline, student behaviour and higher expectations, perhaps, in private schools is hurting those school enrolments?

Ms PRUE CAR: I certainly agree that high expectations are important in education. If you talk to any educator—and I'm privileged to work with one of the State's best in Mr Dizdar; he will constantly talk about high expectations. In fact, one of the first things we did upon coming to government was reverse your ludicrous changes to the school student behaviour and discipline policy to make it easier for principals to discipline students when persistent misbehaviour occurs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's look at teacher numbers.

Ms PRUE CAR: We actually turned that around.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about those teachers, then. Has the number of FTE teachers in public schools fallen on your watch?

Ms PRUE CAR: There are more teachers in New South Wales than there were before we came to government.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's look at the data. The public sector reports for 2023 and 2025 talk about those numbers in June '23, 70,442; June '24, 70,235; and June '25, 70,206. Those numbers have clearly fallen. Do you have any update since June 2025 on the FTE public school teacher numbers?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. There are more teachers in New South Wales than there were before. In addition to that, there are radically fewer vacancies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You see, according to the numbers, that's not accurate.

Ms PRUE CAR: What we've done also, in addition to lowering vacancies and increasing the number of teachers through things like a historic pay rise, is put more teachers in classrooms and not above establishment positions that weren't in the classroom. Even if we were to accept your proposition that there more teachers under you, which is a falsehood—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not my proposition, with respect, Minister. It's the public sector report.

Ms PRUE CAR: There were actually more vacancies, so what's your argument? There were more teachers and more vacancies. Was it just incompetence?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The public sector report—I haven't made those number up; it's from your data. Do you have an update since that June 2025 on FTE public school teacher numbers?

Ms PRUE CAR: There are more teachers, including—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you have an update?

Ms PRUE CAR: —more than 16,000 teachers and support staff that were made permanent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't have an update, yet you're claiming that vacancies at the start of 2026, term 1, are at a 12-year low. How can you claim to know that number but not have an FTE for teachers?

Ms PRUE CAR: We can claim to know that number because we're the employer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the number of FTEs?

Ms PRUE CAR: We can look at how many teacher vacancies there were in 2022 which, from my memory when we were in opposition, was in excess of 3,000. Your Minister, who is not on this Committee anymore, at the time said it didn't keep her up at night.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, that was three years ago. I'm asking about the data now. You've said you don't agree that that's accurate.

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, you're talking about a comparison rate for the 12-year low.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The public sector reports, you say, are not accurate. They show the decline. I've asked for the update as at June 2025 since then. You can't provide that, yet you claim that numbers are at a 12-year low, but it doesn't reflect that in any data. Can you provide on notice, perhaps, a breakdown of current vacancies by school?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've provided this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you provide it to the Committee? I'm asking you today.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, but we have already provided this many times over.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You may well have. Can I ask if you're prepared to—

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll take it on notice, but we've provided this number. Teacher numbers are in annual reports. We've provided vacancies.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that a no? Are you declining?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar, can you help with this?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can help the Committee. On day 1, term 1, 2023—

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I'm happy for you to provide it in Government time, if that's okay?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've got it here. I don't have to take it on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have one minute left. I might just ask you to provide that in the afternoon. That would be great. Thank you. I've got one minute.

MURAT DIZDAR: But it might help with your question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but it might also take up my one minute. I'm happy to deal with that in the afternoon. Thank you very much. It's important to know the projection of number of FTE public teachers as well for June 2026. I'd be appreciative of that also. Finally, can we look at the issue of the full-time employee-related expenses in the budget. Do you see, Minister, in *Budget Paper No. 04*, page 6-2, "Employee Related" expenses for the Department of Education? Do they consist of salaries, superannuation and employee on-costs?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to receive advice on that matter from Mr Dizdar, what that is, so I can give the Committee the right answer. What's included in that item?

MURAT DIZDAR: We can get Ms McCabe to help you with that.

Ms PRUE CAR: What's included in that item, Ms McCabe.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. That would be great. Are those salaries overwhelmingly employee-related expenses or what is the percentage of those? We can deal with that this afternoon. If you can come back to me on that, that would be great. What proportion of the department's employee expense budget do teachers represent, Minister?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take advice on that, so I give you the right answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's your budget.

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know if I'm being criticised for giving teachers a pay rise, but okay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not criticising. I'm asking what the employee expense budget proportion teachers represent.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's good for teachers just to know where they stand with the Opposition.

The CHAIR: Just before I go back to the questions I was asking earlier, in the annual report for 2024-25, it reveals that there 22 staff who went overseas to recruit inbound full-fee paying international students to the New South Wales schools sector. How long has that program been going on? How many international students are you recruiting and where do they then get enrolled, I guess is the question?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think this has been going on for some time. I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar to update the Committee on that work.

MURAT DIZDAR: The international students unit, I can get you the exact time frame, but it's been in the three decades I've been in the department, if not longer. What we do is send principals of our high schools on study tours to promote public education in New South Wales, including their schools and that's what that number refers to.

The CHAIR: I see. I might come back to that later. Thank you. Another thing in the annual report that stuck out to me was a statement that states:

The department has commenced phased recovery of unspent Early Childhood Education and Care grants from approved providers. While it is probable there will be an inflow of economic benefits, the recovery process includes confirmation of surplus balances to determine amounts able to be recovered.

What money is that that you're trying to claw back from the sector?

Ms PRUE CAR: Unless this is something that Minister Houssos is aware of—Mr Barraket, are you aware of that?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes. Under our Start Strong guidelines, there is a mechanism for the department to recoup unspent funds, so we have been working with for-profit providers that have received government funds, that have not spent those funds, to recoup those.

The CHAIR: Only for-profits?

MARK BARRAKET: That's my understanding, but I'll confirm that on notice for you.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Deputy Premier, going back to the discussion we were having about the Fair Work Commission, I understand the statements you were making before were very similar again to some of the statements that were made during that case and were rejected by the Fair Work Commission. In particular, the finding that 88 per cent of all funding that community preschools have is reliant on, or comes from, the Government means that they are almost wholly reliant on government fundings for their operations. Are you aware that if the Government doesn't provide extra funding to allow a wage increase, then one of two things will happen. We'll either have fees needing to be increased for families or we will have these community preschools closing down. Given that they're the only options, will the Government just commit to finally giving these preschools the money they need?

Ms PRUE CAR: With due respect, Ms Boyd, I sort of dispute that proposition. I don't believe that is the only set of options. I do believe that there are many community preschools that are able to provide this increase. I would like to see community preschool teachers and educators paid a fair wage. I just don't accept the premise of that question. I have asked the agency to review funding, as directed by the Fair Work Commission, and I support the community preschool teachers in their campaign to get fairer wages. We are not the employer.

The CHAIR: But you effectively are.

Ms PRUE CAR: In fairness, we're not.

The CHAIR: But that is what the Fair Work Commission—

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not what they said.

The CHAIR: —really knocked on the head, this fallacy—

Ms PRUE CAR: They didn't say that.

The CHAIR: —that somehow this Government, which managed to crow about the fact that it had provided increased funding for community services when their workers had a wage increase, even though they're not the direct employer—in this particular case they're saying, "Oh, no, no. no. It's nothing to do with us."

Ms PRUE CAR: No, we're saying we'll review the funding, absolutely. We're not the employer. With due respect, Ms Boyd, the Fair Work Commission didn't dispute that we're not the employer.

The CHAIR: No, because it's irrelevant.

Ms PRUE CAR: That is like people coming to this Committee and asking me to fund a pay rise for private school teachers. We're not the employer.

The CHAIR: No, it's completely different because private schools aren't reliant on you for funding, whereas these—

Ms PRUE CAR: Community preschools—

The CHAIR: —are reliant on you for funding.

Ms PRUE CAR: Many of them have the ability to pay their workers.

The CHAIR: That's not what the Fair Work Commission said. It said that all of that data that was brought—all of the misleading statements that were made in this budget estimates last time that somehow there was wads of cash that these community preschools had, the Fair Work Commission said that's not true. That's what the community preschools have been saying the whole time.

Ms PRUE CAR: Because the community preschools went to the Fair Work Commission with the union to say, "The Government should pay our workers."

The CHAIR: With actual data that was then accepted by the Fair Work Commission.

Ms PRUE CAR: With respect, Ms Boyd, the Fair Work Commission did not say the Government is directed to pay the workers, because we are not the employer.

The CHAIR: That's not what I just said though. I said that the Fair Work Commission accepted the data that your Government has rejected and instead made misleading comments to the media and here in budget estimates about, that somehow they had all of this excess cash, which they didn't have. But there is another option—you're right. The other option is that these services, in order to pay these wage increases, actually cut staff and degrade quality. Is that the outcome that this Government is looking for?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. No-one wants to see that. Nothing we are—

The CHAIR: Do you understand, though, that without that funding, that's what is going to happen?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: —doing in any early childhood setting would, I don't think, lead anyone to believe that that is what we want to see. We are actually leading nation-leading, remember, legislation that we worked with you on, Ms Boyd, in my absence to increase quality and put child safety as number one. We don't want to decrease quality.

The CHAIR: We want to increase the quality of these services. We want to be encouraging these services, which are statistically safer. They are better quality. So you will be recommending that the Government provide the funding then for these community preschools?

Ms PRUE CAR: We'll be reviewing the funding.

The CHAIR: Can I move on to something slightly different? You mentioned the reforms that went through last year. There is one of those that is causing a bit of concern in the sector. To be honest, I'm not sure if it's the actual implementation of it or if it is the communication around it, but it involves the use of devices on the floor. Particularly there appears to be a sentiment from the family day care operators that the rules have not been applied to them in a way that makes sense.

For instance, if you were to look at a long day care centre where you have educators on the floor, to say that they can't have their own personal devices in that circumstance makes more sense because they also have a front office function, where they can receive calls and do other things to do with the business. But when you're dealing with family day care, often it is one person in a residence who is expected to not only look after children but also be running their business. So for them to not have a device while interacting with children has been quite difficult. I just wanted to ask a general question around how you're seeing that implementation and whether there are going to be any adjustments to account for different circumstances for these different operators.

Ms PRUE CAR: In terms of what is in the legislation that was worked through in the Parliament, I don't know if Minister Houssos has anything to add, because obviously she stewarded that through the Parliament, working with members like yourself, Ms Boyd. But then I think Acting Commissioner Currie might have something to say about the implementation of that as well.

The CHAIR: Mr Currie, I can ask you in detail later but, yes, if there's any insight you can give on what has happened here.

DARYL CURRIE: There has been some confusion between the difference between functionality and capacity. Some of the workers have believed switching off the functionality was enough to comply. It isn't, because it's about capacity to take photos. We've worked with them on that and taken very low-level compliance action, as in reminding them—no fines or anything. In terms of family day care, yes, that is something that we have had communications with family day care about. I'm meeting with them very soon actually to discuss that concern. It'll need some negotiation because there is still the complexity that a personal phone that will then be used elsewhere will have the capacity to take photos of children in care. We understand that family day care is slightly different; however, the intent of the direction and the intent of what is there is to protect children from the capacity or potential of having photos. We recognise that there is more communication and more negotiation to be done on that, but we have to negotiate how it can work still protecting children.

The CHAIR: But people aren't being fined in the meantime inadvertently?

DARYL CURRIE: At the moment I can share with you—in the blitz that we had not long ago, we found I think it was 40-something workers that had the watches on. We actually explained to them, rather than taking action, and wrote a reminder to them about not being able to use them. That was enough. It was still a compliance action but it was at the lower level. That's the way that we're doing it or managing it at the moment until people are more confident with what that direction means.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, you mentioned earlier—just back on the antisemitic incidences throughout public schools. I just want to confirm you are keeping data. Do you have data that can be made available across which State electorates many of these antisemitic incidences are occurring?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't think as a rule we collect data based on State electorates. Incident reporting is something—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But some things you would—or by school. How do you normally keep data?

Ms PRUE CAR: Hang on. Incident reporting is something that schools are well versed in having to do, unfortunately, because they've just hundreds of thousands of kids coming and going. DOE is used to doing that. That data does come through the system via the incident report. Is that right, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we've got an incident report hotline.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, how is the incident report then quantified? How do we look at this data? Is it done by region? How can we obtain that data of where these antisemitic incidences are occurring? If it's not done by State electorate, do you indicate the school?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's school level. We don't do electorates.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you actually notify the school. Can that information be made publicly—

MURAT DIZDAR: The school calls the incident hotline, reports the incident—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You report it. You know where the school is.

MURAT DIZDAR: —and experts are at the other end to give advice and guidance.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is that information now publicly available, where these incidences are occurring?

MURAT DIZDAR: We release incidence report data annually.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you released any data since 14 December? Since the Bondi attack, have we had any data of any antisemitic reports?

MURAT DIZDAR: The incidents go to a range of things. We normally release a summary of incident report data for our system.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When would you get data—how recently has the Deputy Premier, as the education Minister—Minister, since your return did you ask for any data since the attack that occurred on 14 December to be clear on any incidences since that attack?

Ms PRUE CAR: What I've been asking for since my return is what the department is doing to foster social cohesion and protect social cohesion in our schools. Can I just take this opportunity to say—when people out there talk about, "We need social cohesion in society," go to schools. That's social cohesion every day. That's what I've been asking for.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, did you ask the department why they didn't make a submission to PC No. 5's inquiry into antisemitism?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I didn't ask for that. But we're at work—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is there any reason why the department didn't do a submission?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're at work doing a range of things to combat antisemitism.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But they could actually clarify that and provide that information to that inquiry. That would be helpful if the department actually demonstrated to the one very—it was a very specific inquiry that the Parliament is undertaking into antisemitism, but there hasn't been a submission from your department.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take advice on that, but we're running very hard at combatting antisemitism and doing that so that social cohesion—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Well, it would be good to let the public know that—

Ms PRUE CAR: —is retained in our schools.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —through a submission. That was the one process, Deputy Premier, that that could be made available. Can I ask you then, Deputy Premier—you'll come back as to why the department didn't make a submission in that regard? Thank you. Can I ask you—the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion is taking submissions until at least the end of May. Will you instruct the department to make a submission to the royal commission?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're working with the special envoy against antisemitism—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But will you instruct them to make a submission? They didn't do one in the parliamentary inquiry. Will the department then provide some information over to the—

Ms PRUE CAR: In respect to the parliamentary inquiry, I would say the department, and myself as Minister—and we've even got two Ministers here, by virtue of the fact that Minister Houssos was here while I was getting cancer treatment. The department and all of the deputy secretaries come to budget estimates to be questioned about absolutely everything. There's an opportunity to ask these questions now.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The Jewish deputies board has indicated there's been 100 incidences that they're aware of, at least, of antisemitic—

Ms PRUE CAR: Sorry, who did?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The Jewish Board of Deputies—their data has indicated at least 100 antisemitic incidences at schools. They've made that information available to the inquiry. I would have thought the department might want to provide some information to their responses to those incidences, for example. It would've been a good opportunity for the department to advise the Parliament.

Ms PRUE CAR: We're happy to provide any answer about what we're doing. In fact, we have a really strong relationship with the Jewish Board of Deputies and we work very closely with them, including on very specific professional development for our teachers.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you're not going to let me know whether you're going to do one for the royal commission or the department might provide some information on how they respond to antisemitic behaviour at schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: We'd have to have a look whether that would be appropriate. But we're happy to answer any questions about what we're doing about combating antisemitism, because we're hard at work to do it. It is abhorrent and schools are one of the places where we can foster and grow social cohesion.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, I accept that you, like everybody here—we all think it's abhorrent.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But I think it's important, given that we know there are incidences of antisemitic behaviour and that there have still been some incidences since the 14 December horrific attack at Bondi—it would be good to know precisely how the department is addressing that. If they're not going to do it as a submission to one inquiry, perhaps they can do one to another.

Ms PRUE CAR: In fairness, Ms Mihailuk, we are answering that today.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're answering it by telling me you're doing work. I haven't seen the actual reporting of that or any proper details.

Ms PRUE CAR: The agency is here all afternoon and Mr Dizdar, I know, actually has a plethora of information about what's happening to combat antisemitism.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: There are departments, including the police, that do make submissions, so I'm just interested to know why the Department of Education didn't, particularly given that you've been notified that there were at least 100 incidences. Can I take you very quickly to an incident that occurred in the electorate of Blaxland?

Ms PRUE CAR: The Federal electorate of Blaxland?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes. There was a school there that had an incident post 14 December where it was reported—and I just want to check whether you've had this report given over to you, Deputy Premier, or to the department—that students celebrated the death of the victims of the Bondi terror attack during class. Were you aware of any incidences to that effect since 14 December? What's your response to that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Obviously, my response is that that is disgusting. I don't know whether this is something that occurred that Minister Houssos was briefed on, but the department may have some knowledge about what happened there. You're not going to get anything from us but to say that that's obviously disgusting.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, do you know of any students that have been disciplined over any antisemitic behaviour?

Ms PRUE CAR: What my role is, as Minister, is to set, through things like the behaviour policy, the framework, and support schools to be able to do what is operationally required in their school setting to be able to discipline students that need to be disciplined because of the high expectations that we have. I'm not operationally across every student that gets suspended or expelled or disciplined in a school. I'll ask Mr Dizdar to update the Committee on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: We have a very strong anti-racism strategy and policy. The Deputy Premier is right: When she came in 2023, she asked myself to go and review the suspension and expulsion procedures and to reinstate the authority of principals to take appropriate disciplinary action, and that includes anything that can be perceived to dislodge social harmony. So, yes, there would be principals that have taken disciplinary action.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Does that information then get carried back to the department? Do you keep some data on that? Particularly given that this is such a big issue now, antisemitism, are you keeping some particular data in relation to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: We keep suspension data. Schools furnish that on a—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do they give you the reason for that suspension?

MURAT DIZDAR: There are categories for those reasons and we do make that data available also.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Where would antisemitic behaviour fit into that? Which category would that fit into?

MURAT DIZDAR: Just in relation to the matter that you read out, I would just concur with the Deputy Premier—totally unacceptable, and I imagine the school would have taken appropriate disciplinary action. They do have the department to support them with experts who look after the religious intolerance hotline, as well. In my experience, no principal would not take appropriate action in an instance like that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Again, if a student is disciplined on the back of making an antisemitic comment, what category would that fall into, Deputy Premier? Do you want to hand that over to Mr Dizdar?

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

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you take that on notice? Mr Dizdar doesn't have that answer now?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to give you the suspension categories. Let me come back to you.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How many students have been suspended on the back of the reports that we're hearing of at least 100 antisemitic incidences across our schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: The grounds for suspension are continued persistent disobedience and/or disruptive behaviour, malicious damage to or theft of property, verbal abuse, bullying, cyberbullying, misuse of technology, and, very importantly, Ms Mihailuk, discrimination including that based on sex, or race, or religion, or disability, or sexual orientation, or gender identity. They're all very strong grounds for behaviour concerns that can lead to disciplinary action.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could look at issues relating to planning for population growth. I understand that your Government is planning 10,000 new homes in Bradfield City. Has the Government formally selected and reserved a public school site at Bradfield?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm happy to talk about planning for population growth, particularly in Western Sydney, and you quite rightly say, Ms Merton, that the plan for Bradfield, in the aerotropolis, is to take advantage of the once-in-a-generation opportunity of the airport. We will, as a rule, provide public schools where they are needed, as evidenced by the fact that when we came to office and commissioned the enrolment growth audit, it clearly showed that the population explosions in north-west and south-western Sydney, not far from where Bradfield will be, demanded schools that were simply not built by the previous Government, and we are hard at work building them. Unlike the previous Government, we will build schools where they are needed.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, the Bradfield master plan in September 2024 says "appropriately sited education facilities will include the provision of a new public school, a new high school". Deputy Premier, are you telling me, as of today, there is no site or plan for those announcements?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I'm agreeing with you that there needs to be a school in these communities and that, unlike the previous Government, we will ensure that schools are built where they are needed in the south-west. Some of the very, very wicked problems we've had to deal with upon coming to government three years ago were all these areas where land was not reserved in growing communities.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In relation to reserving land for Bradfield—

Ms PRUE CAR: We will build schools where they are required.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —at this point, no land has been reserved?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. We will build schools where they are required. I can't be clearer than that. That's what our Government stands for. That's what we will do. At the moment, we are actually hard at work building schools in new communities in the south-west where people currently live. I acknowledge that in Bradfield that's the future. But, at the moment, in Leppington there is not a public high school, and we are now building it, even though there are thousands of people living there. We are playing this constant game of whack-a-mole, trying to turn the tanker around to build the schools where they are required in south-western Sydney.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I appreciate your enthusiasm here, but we've established there's no site identified for Bradfield.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, we—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, can I take you further on what you're saying. What modelling has the Government done on the school infrastructure impact that transport oriented developments will have across New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me talk for a minute about school infrastructure modelling and how that has changed under our Government. Unfortunately, we have seen writ large, and we await the findings of what this might show about what the previous Government did with schools infrastructure in failing to properly plan for population growth—in fact, investing and changing population growth numbers, so that there was no schools planned for growing areas. Upon coming to government, we commissioned the enrolment growth audit and in addition to that we have fundamentally changed the way School Infrastructure has operated as an arm of the Department of Education. Now I have to say I could not be prouder to be the schools infrastructure Minister now delivering schools in high-growth areas that should have been there, in some cases, decades ago. We are hard at work actually mapping the transport oriented developments, the aerotropolis including Bradfield, the growth in north-west, the growth in the south-west.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could just redirect. The question was specific to modelling the Government has done in terms of the TODs.

Ms PRUE CAR: I just answered that. I just said we are modelling for the transport oriented developments.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Further to that, Deputy Premier, yesterday your Government announced a further uplift of 3,000 homes in the Burwood north precinct, bringing the number of new homes there to 18,300. Deputy Premier, further to what you're saying about modelling and the priority you're giving, what is the expected change in the primary school student population and what is the expected change in the high school student population in light of the announced new housing plans?

Ms PRUE CAR: We will make sure that we model the impact on the primary school and the secondary school impact on that area around Burwood. The arrangement that we've come to with the planning Minister and with Burwood and Canada Bay councils—we will make sure that we do that modelling and respond accordingly—unlike what was done to the people of Marsden Park, Jordan Springs, Box Hill, Gregory Hills, can I go on?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's been three years. You talk about the modelling and the priority and the work you're doing, but we haven't been able to establish that there's a plan in terms of meeting the educational needs following the new housing announcements.

Ms PRUE CAR: What I would ask the people of New South Wales to look at is what you can see coming to life in the growing areas of Western Sydney. That is the proof that this Government will provide the schools where they are needed that were simply not provided.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, when did you last meet with the planning Minister specific to this issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm always meeting with the planning Minister. I talk to him constantly. In fact, it's not just me meeting with the planning Minister—School Infrastructure has a whole line of work with population planning and actually has really ramped up that line of work. I don't know whether that can be gone into by Ms Harrington in further detail, but I'm confident that we will plan for the population growth. What I say to people is that look at the evidence of what we are already providing in areas that are growing that were simply not serviced by the previous Government. The proof is in the pudding, isn't it?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, we've identified eight priority high-growth areas near transport hubs in Greater Sydney for accelerated rezoning. Rezoning around these transport hubs will create capacity for nearly 60,000 new homes over 15 years. We know the areas that are going to be facing this surge in housing, in population, in school needs. Separately for each of the eight tier 1 TODs, Deputy Premier, what is the expected change in the primary school student population and also in the student high school population relevant to each of these TODs? I preface this in light of you confirming you're in regular discussion with the planning Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: School Infrastructure will plan for the modelling around the impact of the TODs as well as other population growth in New South Wales on primary and secondary school schooling. We will provide the schools that are required. Sometimes that might be new schools. Sometimes that might be upgrades. Sometimes

CORRECTED

that might be existing catchments. We will do that. In fact, I would argue that is one of the main points of difference from this Government to the previous Government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if you wanted to take that on notice in terms of the statistics to those areas.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I've just answered it. I'm happy for you to ask me about population growth all morning because I am happy to answer it. We will model it and respond accordingly.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, also tier 2 transport oriented developments, as you would be aware—

Ms PRUE CAR: The same for them if that's the same question.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, thank you. The question, Deputy Premier, is what increase in public school capacity will there be relevant to these new planning areas and how will that be met?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'll just give exactly the same answer I gave to the previous questions: We will model the impact and respond accordingly.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Modelling is on the list to come but as of today, in terms of increased student capacity, it remains unknown.

Ms PRUE CAR: Hang on. I'm not quite sure, but I think we are at cross-purposes here. We are providing upgrades to existing schools, new school builds, schools that didn't exist in areas of high-growth populations. We are proving to the people of New South Wales that when it comes to population growth, we will provide the primary and secondary schools. Where there is population growth, we will provide it.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, it was relevant to the TODs in those areas.

Ms PRUE CAR: Which I said we will provide what is necessary.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could move to teacher training and recruitment. Almost 500 school leavers across the nation with an ATAR of less than 50 were offered places to study teaching at university in 2025. University admissions data released by the Federal Government shows that 499 students who achieved between zero and 50 were offered undergraduate teaching places. Deputy Premier, how many with an ATAR of less than 50 were from New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: As you referenced, Ms Merton, this is national data. I have no evidence that these are from New South Wales.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: My question would be how many from New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have no evidence that any are.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, touching back on the issue my colleague raised on antisemitism, if I could ask how many incidences of antisemitism have been reported to the Department of Education since October 7?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think Mr Dizdar has answered this. Before I go into the detail of this, any incidences of antisemitism are not acceptable in New South Wales schools. We are hard at work to prevent it from even being a problem to start with. Schools, if an incident occurs, will call the incident hotline where experts on the other end of the phone will provide advice. The department has that information as far as I'm aware.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm aware of the reporting line and recognise the phone reporting system. The question was specific to how many incidences of antisemitism have been reported through that phone line.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar first.

MURAT DIZDAR: Principals call 1800 811 523. That's the reporting line. They know it off by heart. It's the same number as when I was principal at Punchbowl Boys. They report the incident and they get expert advice and guidance. We release incident data on an annual basis.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So how many is that, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it in front of me. We release it on an annual basis.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So we release it annually. What is the time of that annual release to date?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back to you on notice with when we do that. We give the summary of that data each year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, how many teachers have had their accreditation revoked due to an antisemitic incident?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would have to take that on notice, but I think if the Committee is expecting there to be a huge number, I think they will be disappointed, no.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just to confirm, we haven't been able to establish or we don't know how many incidences—

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you talking about teachers in public schools, or teachers across all sectors?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Public schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: So not the other sectors?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: She's just said that.

Ms PRUE CAR: Okay, so teachers in all sectors—their accreditation is managed by NESA, not the department, and all school sectors have very clear codes of conduct and ways of managing those employment matters through their codes of conduct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm aware of the code. The question was how many have had their accreditation revoked?

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

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It remains unknown?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, it's not unknown; I'm saying I'll take it on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, has the department investigated either Malek Fahd Islamic college or the Al Zahra College over their links to antisemitism, respectively?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I said before, this is not the department's role; this is NESA that oversees the registration of schools. That is the incorrect agency. It is NESA that oversees the registration of schools in all sectors. They are two non-government schools and I believe that NESA, in both incidences, would probably have something to say because I know in both cases—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Okay, I'll talk with NESA this afternoon.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, so it's a question for NESA, Ms Merton, not the department.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Has NESA investigated it?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are you aware of any investigations NESA has held?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, what communications have you or the department had directly with Teachers for Palestine or Teachers and School Staff for Palestine about compliance with the code of conduct regarding pro-Palestinian activity?

Ms PRUE CAR: As I've said to this Committee before, this is not a department-sanctioned group. This is an individual group of people that happen to be teachers in the New South Wales public school system. The code of conduct applies to them as it applies to everyone else who works in a public school and schools are non-political places and teachers respect that. They're places that have to remain apolitical because we welcome all in public education and it must be a safe place for students and staff to come to every day.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, what communications have you or the department had with teachers generally about compliance with the code of conduct regarding pro-Palestinian activity?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar, as the employer, has had quite a number of communications with the workforce directly about this matter.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, on numerous occasions throughout the '25 school year, both myself and Ms Summerhayes, who is our Deputy Secretary, Public Schools have sent entire staff emails to the workforce because the code of conduct and ethics applies to myself, it applies to all the 95,000 teachers and the over 40,000 support staff. The latest communication was the update to section 5.3 of the code of conduct and ethics around the hate speech laws. I've got to say on maybe five or six occasions we've made it very clear. Also,

CORRECTED

Ms Merton, it might help you to know that myself and Ms Summerhayes connect with principals in two live streams every term—we've got one coming up next week—and we also cover it there with principals.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, are we able to have copies of the correspondence you refer to?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've got EDMs that I can—they're called EDMs. I'm happy to give you an example of that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. Deputy Premier, if I could raise the issue of the decision announced by the department this week allowing the display of the Palestinian scarf, the keffiyeh, within the schools, my question is how does this fit with the priority of social cohesion? How does this fit with what your secretary spoke of earlier about wanting to resist anything to dislodge social cohesion? We've now got the allowance to wear the keffiyeh in the school grounds, which is identified by many of different faiths and cultures as being of some concern, of being divisive.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think, Ms Merton, it fits right in with what the secretary just said. We made it very clear to schools that, on occasions of formal school events, students are expected to wear their school uniform. That is the most important priority. Then, on occasions of cultural significance—for instance, Harmony Day is coming up and many schools celebrate it as a week, Harmony Week, if you like—schools will celebrate that in many ways. Some will have an assembly, some will have a day where students bring in cuisines of their culture and some will wear culturally appropriate attire, which might include a keffiyeh, a yarmulke or a hanbok. That would be an appropriate time to celebrate that connection to culture.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, can non-Palestinian staff and students wear the keffiyeh to school?

Ms PRUE CAR: Principals and teachers know their communities very well. I have every faith that principals and teachers will be able to manage those specific questions on a school-by-school basis.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if we take the activists at their word, the wearing of the keffiyeh is a political act. If so, and done by teachers, it must be a breach of the Department of Education's code of conduct, specific to section 5.13. Separate employees must not participate in private political activities while on duty or on work premises. You must not act in a way that casts doubt on your ability to act impartially. I'm sure you're familiar with the code and what this is. Do you agree?

Ms PRUE CAR: I agree that the code of conduct is very clear, as I've said. And as I've just said, on days or celebrations where it is appropriate to celebrate culture, that is a celebration of culture.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This is not a breach? The keffiyeh is not a breach of the code?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I've just made it very clear that in a celebration of culture, like at Harmony Day, that may be an appropriate thing to do, like it may be appropriate for a Korean student to wear a hanbok on that day.

The CHAIR: You'll be aware, Deputy Premier, of the P&C Federation's governance issues, which have resulted in several staff within the organisation being sacked or resigning. There are a number of serious allegations involving P&C board members. Will the Government step in following these serious concerns and allegations, given the significant amounts of public money that go to the federation?

Ms PRUE CAR: Our partnership with the P&C Federation is one that we really value. You're right; there is funding that goes towards it. It is the crucial vehicle by which we consult with parents and their member P&C organisations, noting the fact that P&Cs throughout New South Wales are all volunteer parents with a thousand million things going on in addition to being active in the P&C at their local school. I don't know how any of them fit it in, but that's really important for us to maintain. We will continue to work with the P&C Federation, of course. That's a valued partnership. Some of those particular matters are before the IRC. They're internal employment matters for the P&C Federation. It's really not for me to get involved. I will continue to work with the P&C Federation. I hope very much that they can sort that out because it's important that we have a strong P&C Federation to work with the Government on providing public education for their children and our students at the end of the day.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, we all want to support the royal commission's work on antisemitism and social cohesion. I just want to clarify, Mr Dizdar mentioned earlier the hotline—the incident reporting—that teachers have access to. If there's any information that can be provided to assist this commission, can you make a guarantee that you will ensure that that data is collected from the hotline? I know it's released

CORRECTED

annually, on a date which you have not yet provided. Can some data be provided from those instances reported from that hotline to the royal commission?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will certainly commit to going away and requesting for the department to look at what can be provided and how we can assist.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Back on the antisemitism issue, can you explain to the Committee, under your code of conduct, how could the wearing of the keffiyeh by a non-Palestinian teacher ever be complying with the code of conduct?

Ms PRUE CAR: What I'm saying is the code of conduct is clear. If there is a political statement inside a school, that is inappropriate. That's against the code of conduct. We made it very clear that on days or occasions that celebrate culture, if it's culturally appropriate, the wearing of a cultural garment might be appropriate in that instance.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So is it appropriate for a non-Palestinian teacher to do so, in your view?

Ms PRUE CAR: But that doesn't negate the need for adherence to the code of conduct for schools to be non-political. The thousands of teachers I've met actually love that fact about New South Wales public schools.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. But the wearing of a keffiyeh by a non-Palestinian teacher, how could that be anything other than a prohibited political statement?

Ms PRUE CAR: Schools know their communities. They will manage that on a case-by-case basis. I'm not going to sit here and tell principals exactly how to do that. They will manage that knowing their community and the make-up of their community on a case-by-case basis. I have faith in them to do that.

The CHAIR: It's time for Government questions.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: We don't have any questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: That brings us to morning tea. We will take a break, and we'll be back at 11.15 a.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: It's 11.15 a.m. Deputy Premier, it has just been reported there's NAPLAN test chaos after a widespread tech issue. Did you have prior notice of this tech issue?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm glad you've asked me about this because I just was informed in the break about this. NAPLAN has been paused across the country. This is a nationwide problem in relation to some technical difficulties with the Commonwealth platform. I just would say to schools and to students not to panic about this. There is a window of opportunity to do the NAPLAN testing until Monday 23 March.

The CHAIR: Has it been paused then for everybody, or are some people doing it today?

Ms PRUE CAR: My advice is that it has been paused in schools across the country. The Commonwealth technological platform—obviously something has gone very wrong there, so that's down. I just want to get a message of reassurance to students in 3, 5, 7 and 9 that have started sitting their NAPLAN today that there is a window of opportunity for them to do that until Monday 23 March. Obviously I'll be working with my Commonwealth colleague and ACARA, nationally, which is basically the NESA equivalent at the Commonwealth level. We'll work to remedy this ASAP.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, because people are asking about this, if you had somebody who was able to log in today and was in the middle of their test, has that test been paused, or are some people doing the test?

Ms PRUE CAR: My advice is the whole test has been paused but Mr Martin from NESA probably has up-to-date specific information.

PAUL MARTIN: Information is coming through, but earlier some students were able to log on and some weren't and the download was slow, at which point ACARA provided advice to all schools to pause the test. So all schools have stopped testing this morning. It was the writing test, I believe, and there will be more information provided. As the Deputy Premier indicated, quite a wide test window. Students in particular shouldn't worry about it. The information will come through their schools.

The CHAIR: But there was a statement put out by NESA earlier saying that ACARA advises schools to finish the current tests.

CORRECTED

PAUL MARTIN: The first advice that NESA received from ACARA was interim advice. When it continued to be a problem after they provided us with that advice, they paused the test. We're responsive to the press releases and information from ACARA.

The CHAIR: So that has now changed and those children who were halfway through a test, they've all been pulled out of those?

PAUL MARTIN: That has all been paused, that's exactly right.

The CHAIR: How many students then in New South Wales would have been affected by that disruption?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to get briefed on how this has impacted our New South Wales schools, but there will be students right across the country because it's a Commonwealth platform. I'd have to take advice, but our main priority today would be to assure schools and students that they've got that window of opportunity to do the test and to work with ACARA to make sure that they can resit that test during the window of opportunity up until the Monday 23 March.

The CHAIR: Those children that have already started the test and now had it paused, will it be a different test, or will they have seen half the test and get an advantage over the other students?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Mr Martin.

PAUL MARTIN: We're going to have to await advice from ACARA. Some of the variables you've raised are absolutely relevant. But we don't have enough information at the moment. It's the writing test, so there is a prompt. You're correct that some students will have seen the prompt, so there will be issues in relation to that. We're really at an early stage of understanding what ACARA does, because of the nationwide nature of it, and we'll provide advice as soon as we can.

The CHAIR: We faced technical issues last year with NAPLAN as well. Is there a backup option with paper? At what point are we looking at going back to paper tests? Parents are pretty frustrated at the moment.

PAUL MARTIN: Those matters are matters for Ministers and AESOC, the secretaries board. At this stage the online testing platform has largely been successful. There have been two issues with it, and today's is another one. I couldn't possibly comment on going back to pen and paper testing.

The CHAIR: But after the issues last year, and keeping in mind that each of the State and Territory Ministers are responsible for ACARA, was there any pre-test testing this year?

PAUL MARTIN: There was quite a degree of work done between ACARA and the people who run the test platform, Education Services Australia, or ESA, in order to try and make sure there were no issues. As far as I understand, that testing was done comprehensively. Today's events indicate that there is another problem or something that wasn't detected.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think this will be you, Minister Houssos, because it's within your period of acting. Why did you not intervene to stop the destruction of critical koala habitat at Tacking Point Public School?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You would be aware that, as part of our election commitment that was made by the Deputy Premier, we committed to doubling the number of public preschools. That is 100 new public preschools. In order to establish where to place those public preschools, the Deputy Premier commissioned an independent assessment of where they should be located.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Allegations have been raised with you, Minister, that Schools Infrastructure NSW underquoted the cost of the preschool development by \$1.3 million in order to avoid publishing a review of environmental standards. Are you investigating those allegations?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm not aware of those specific allegations. I know that there was some community concern about the location of the Tacking Point preschool. Again, I would say it was an independent assessment. I've been advised that the particular location—I understand the concern about the intersection with koalas—I'm told that that isn't zoned for that purpose by the local council. But I'd be happy to refer to Schools Infrastructure in relation to the specific allegations that you're raising.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I can come back to that. I wrote to you alleging that Schools Infrastructure NSW was unlawfully felling koala habitat at Tacking Point Public School in December of last year. I still haven't received a response. That new preschool is being developed at a site, and it's under complying development, which I allege—and I am fairly certain on good advice—that the way that's proceeding is entirely unlawful because it doesn't fit within the State Environmental Planning Policy that you're relying on. Multiple trees were removed. How did you identify this process—the trees that are being removed in August then cut them down in December—when it appears it's in absolute contravention of the planning laws of New South Wales?

CORRECTED

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd just make a couple of points in response to what you've just said, Ms Higginson. I haven't read the correspondence that you wrote to me. You would appreciate that I don't—I learnt many things during my period that I was acting for the Deputy Premier while she was getting treatment. One of those is the huge volume of correspondence that the education Minister receives. So I haven't—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: But this was a letter that was alleging that laws were about to be broken—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Higginson, I'm providing a response to quite a lengthy question, so if you would allow me to respond.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: The allegation, Minister, was that laws are about to be broken, environment is about to be carnage. Have you seen the videos? I think you saw. You were sent the videos of koalas—and joeys—literally in the trees that have now been cut down, taken away, and the Department of Education was posting videos of the koalas in Tacking Point at that public school before their homes were destroyed. Why has such a monumental failure in what was meant to be delivering a much-needed preschool, apparently—not in that area, according to the local community—you've destroyed koala habitat, literally the homes of koalas. It looks like the laws that you've purported to do this under, you've breached them, and you haven't even released the environmental assessment. We've asked for that. Will you now commit to looking at what has gone so monumentally wrong?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you finished? That was quite a long answer; there were maybe seven or eight individual questions there. Let me start by saying the location is not regarded as koala habitat. I'm advised the location is not regarded as koala habitat under the SEPP.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That is rather bizarre. There were literally koala trees that had koalas in them the day before they were cut down.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Higginson, I can only act on the advice that's been provided to me, which is that the location is not regarded as koala habitat under the SEPP. What I can tell you is that an independent process that looked across the State and evaluated where we should place these 100 public preschools that are going to make life-changing differences to so many families, to so many individual kids—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: That's not what the community says about this particular one. I'm sure it's the case for many of your other projects.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you opposed to public preschools then, Ms Higginson?

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Absolutely not, and don't try to verbal. That type of outrageous response—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You've just given a really long run-in and you're not giving me the opportunity to respond to some very serious allegations that you are making.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: They are serious.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The response that I can give to you is that that is not consistent with the advice that has been provided to me, and that an independent assessment across the State about where to locate these important public preschools identified that particular location, and that's why it's being located there.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I make the declaration I made previously here that I'm a first cousin of Deborah Summerhayes, who is a witness to the Committee. Can I come to the Minister and this question of falling government school enrolment share and your statement that it's not to do with teacher quality or falling academic standards, or ill-discipline, or values, but rather availability of government schools. Minister, can I take you to your own electorate of Londonderry, where you've got 22 government schools? This would mean that normally parents have got a pretty good choice there. Can you explain why in the period 2020 to '24, the most recent enrolment data, nine of those schools have lost enrolment numbers?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Latham, I didn't say that was the only reason, but I certainly propose to the Committee that not having public schools to attend is a reason why the global figures in terms of enrolment share have dropped. I think that's a pretty fair "one plus one equals two" calculation. But we admit, and I agree with you it's not acceptable that public school enrolments have fallen, many of these are lagging indicators that have been lagging for some time and now we're only seeing the compound impact of them, and it's a range of things. It is all the things that we are attempting to work on that you have quite rightly said we need to focus on, which I think the secretary has brought a new-found focus on.

We're talking about—you quite rightly said: discipline, new student behaviour, expulsions and suspension policy—a new-found focus on high potential and gifted education, so we can really market to parents the ability of public schools to stretch your child to excel in their area of interest, as well as building the schools where they

CORRECTED

are needed, and that has happened in communities that I represent as well as right across New South Wales. But I'm telling you, when you ask about my electorate that I am privileged to represent, a huge reason why public school enrolments have fallen, I can think of two major, huge suburbs that we've only just built, or are building the schools in right now, and they've been there, in one case, for decades and in one case almost a decade.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You've got 22 government schools in your electorate.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So parents have got a fair bit of choice there, one would expect.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, but only within their area.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you explain why nine of them have gone backwards in their enrolment numbers in the four-year period?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've just said to you there are lagging indicators after decades of underinvestment, failing to build the schools, failing—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But these are existing schools. These are not schools that hypothetically are being built years from now. These are existing schools.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Llandilo's gone backwards by 40 per cent in enrolment numbers. Why is that?

Ms PRUE CAR: All of that has impacted on enrolments throughout New South Wales and we're committed to fixing it. I'm not disagreeing with you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But if there are not enough schools, you'd think they'd be flocking to the existing schools. Why has Marsden Park gone backwards by 56 per cent in its enrolment numbers?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think you'll probably find in that case of Marsden Park it's probably because a lot of the new area of Marsden Park started going to Marsden Park across the road on Richmond Road, and then once we opened the new school at Melonba, they then took their enrolment out of Marsden Park into Melonba. That's probably that particular case there.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: An extra school provided extra choice, but they left Marsden Park. Why did they leave Marsden Park if it's such a wonderful school?

Ms PRUE CAR: To go to the Melonba school that we built.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But why, if Marsden Park's such an excellent school under your local leadership?

Ms PRUE CAR: Because they were then in catchment for Melonba.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about Werrington Public? It's gone backwards by 25 per cent. Why's that?

Ms PRUE CAR: We don't want to see anyone going backwards. That's why we're investing—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I know you don't, but why? You're the Minister. You've got to answer. Why?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm agreeing that it's a challenge and we're working hard, at pace, to fix it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But this question of choice is very low in the order of priorities compared with the other factors that you've mentioned.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's not. The argument about choice—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Demonstrated in your own electorate—

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —where existing schools in a growth area are losing enrolments.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm agreeing with you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The parents vote with their feet.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: But the choice argument is strong, okay? That is why we are investing in two things like never before: enrolment availability and high potential and gifted education, so that a parent can go onto the website, go onto School Finder, to see not just the school that they are in catchment for, but perhaps schools surrounding them that have availability and what their high potential and gifted education offerings are. As parents, we all want to see our children succeed, excel and sometimes be stretched, right? For instance, you know with teenagers you have to push them a little bit, and we want the school system to be able to do that. That's why we're investing in high potential and gifted education. That goes to what you're talking about, Mr Latham, with choice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To clear up this debate, when a family leaves the government school system—and a significant number have in recent times—why don't you run exit surveys to find out the real reason they're leaving? Because you're afraid of finding out the truth. Is that it?

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Wouldn't it just be common practice in any major organisation to ask the families why they're departing?

Ms PRUE CAR: Principals do speak to families.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why doesn't the department do that?

Ms PRUE CAR: Principals do speak to families.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No. Why isn't there a systematic system of exit surveys to get to the truth of why these families are leaving?

Ms PRUE CAR: Principals do speak to families and—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have you collated all that data?

Ms PRUE CAR: I have to take advice on that from Mr Dizdar, but principals do speak to families when they unfortunately leave.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You don't want to know, do you. I've raised this over five years why you don't run exit surveys. The only answer could be you don't want to know. You don't want to know the truth of why they're leaving.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not the case.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's so easy to run a survey. They leave. They fill out a survey form.

Ms PRUE CAR: No. That's not the case.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You find out the real reason.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not the case.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Secretary?

MURAT DIZDAR: We run exit surveys. We run them at individual school level and then we support schools with what information comes to hand.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why don't you collate the data and publish it statewide?

MURAT DIZDAR: You know—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's frightening, isn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I wouldn't concur.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's a huge vote of no confidence.

MURAT DIZDAR: I wouldn't concur.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You think people are confident, but leave?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're refusing to hide behind a national challenge here and we've set ambition to lift public school enrolments. I wish it were a very simple diagnosis. It's multifaceted and we're hard at work to do that and deliver on the plan for public education. There's customer sentiment data—it's not conducted by me—in New South Wales from '23 to '25 that shows public school parents in the system are more confident in the

CORRECTED

system—a 5-percentage-point increase. There's the private school parents over the same time. They've grown in their confidence in public education by 7 per cent.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why isn't that reflected in the enrolment share?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not naive enough to think that automatically goes into enrolment share.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In a cost-of-living crisis, people are paying to get out of your system.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's why we're driving hard, Mr Latham, on the school excellence plans on explicit teaching. This department, when I was principal on the ground and a teacher on the ground, didn't have a statement of pedagogy. Two years down the track, I know many schools that you've visited, and I've gone with you where we've seen that in action, so we're rolling that out across the State alongside high potential and gifted education. In my career, we've only ever had 100 public preschools, so to double that number in the system will lead to stronger transition because where we've really struggled, or are struggling, Mr Latham, is with kindergarten enrolments. We need to increase those, and public preschool enrolments will help on that front with transition.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We know the spiel. Minister, when do you expect the government school enrolment share to rise?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Latham, as you can understand and appreciate, I'm sure, this is not an easy problem to attempt to remedy. This is going to be long-term investment and seeing this through in the long term. You've been talking about education for a long time. As you well know, investment in the long term is what is needed and commitment to the long term. We have targets around enrolment share and we are committed to that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But your internal projections all show decline.

Ms PRUE CAR: We have a target to increase enrolments.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When do you expect that to happen?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're working towards our target and, in the previous session, as Mr Dizdar said, each school now has enrolment share targets, which they've had before. We're working with them over the next two years.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, some five months ago I asked the Acting Minister, your very good colleague Courtney Houssos, in Legislative Council question time what data she had showing that student academic attainment had improved under this Government.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: At the time, she didn't produce any. Can you tell us now, after three years in government, how students are academically advancing in New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't have an announcement on that today but all I can say to you is that we hope to very shortly be able to show that the investment in public education and the focus on explicit teaching and small group tutoring, phonics, the rolling out of the numeracy check, the science of learning and a knowledge-based rich curriculum—we hope to be able to share with the people of New South Wales that that is having an impact.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That would be fantastic. What is the data base for that and when do you expect to share it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't have an announcement on that today.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But when do you expect to have an announcement? Because parents around the State—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I know.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —are wanting to hear that your schools are improving academically so they can stop paying private schools and go back to them.

Ms PRUE CAR: I think the parents of New South Wales deserve to know that and, when that is ready to be communicated and when we're ready to do that, there will be an announcement.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to the decision of the Fair Work Commission recommendation of February this year—I think my colleague asked some questions earlier. Deputy President Judith Wright recommended that the New South Wales Government—that's you—take all necessary action, including reviewing and increasing funding. You've said that you're reviewing. Will you commit to increasing funding?

Ms PRUE CAR: What we'll be doing is, as I said, reviewing funding—

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We know that. You've said that, but just the funding—

Ms PRUE CAR: We're looking at the funding of community preschools and we urge community preschools to pay their workers fairly. I think the workers and teachers and educators in community preschools deserve better than what they're currently getting.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I'm asking you what your Government will be doing, not what the community preschools will be doing. What will you be doing?

Ms PRUE CAR: We'll be looking at the funding provided to community preschools.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What does that mean, "looking at"? Will you increase it?

Ms PRUE CAR: That means reviewing it, as asked by the Fair Work Commission.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But they didn't say "review it".

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, they did.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They said "including reviewing and increasing funding". Will you increase funding?

Ms PRUE CAR: We're reviewing it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's one part of it. But I can take it from your answer you're not going to increase funding—is that the case?

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not what I said.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are you saying in relation to funding?

Ms PRUE CAR: I said we're going to be looking at funding. We're reviewing it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Community preschools have told us that ignoring this decision means they may have to close or cap enrolments or raise fees. In combination with the downgrade of the Government's Start Strong funding and the massive increase to their annual service fees, isn't this just a case of the Government fundamentally opposing community preschools?

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How is it not?

Ms PRUE CAR: I do not accept the premise of your question. Start Strong—I'm not sure if you're aware, Ms Ward. I know you're new to this Committee.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This is the community talking to you, Minister.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm aware of that. The—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you aware of how much they're hurting and how much they're concerned?

Ms PRUE CAR: Can you please let me answer this question about—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Please do.

Ms PRUE CAR: —community preschools without—I know it's hard for you not to interrupt.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I beg your pardon.

Ms PRUE CAR: Community preschools are the employer of the community preschool teachers. We have not reduced Start Strong. What Start Strong is is a demand-driven program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not my question so I'm going to redirect back to the question.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, actually, you alleged something that I'm clearing up. Just for the community's—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The community wants to know about what you're doing about the recommendations of the Fair Work Commission and the deputy president to increase funding. You've said you're reviewing it and you'll take a look at it. That's not an answer. You're not prepared to commit a cent to them, are you? That's right, isn't it?

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's not right? So how many cents will you give to them?

Ms PRUE CAR: You're not going to get a gotcha out of me for this. I get it. You're up for—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many cents are you going to give them?

Ms PRUE CAR: —preselection. You need your Instagram; I get it. But what—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Wow. You don't listen to the community in this.

Ms PRUE CAR: —I'm going to say is this. The community preschools—actually many of them, I'm sorry to admit this, have the capacity to pay their teachers. I have some information in front of me, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which ones, Minister? Which preschools have the capacity to pay?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said they do.

Ms PRUE CAR: There are some preschools—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You said they do so tell this Committee under oath which of those community preschools have the capacity to pay. Tell us now.

Ms PRUE CAR: There are some community preschools' information that I have in front of me that have in excess of \$200,000 or \$300,000 or \$400,000 in profit.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Name them.

Ms PRUE CAR: They can actually pay and I urge them to do that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which ones?

Ms PRUE CAR: —because their teachers deserve better than what they're getting.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you name them today? You're so confident that they've got plenty of money. They're swimming in money. It's perfectly fine.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I'm not going to do that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've just said you know of them.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's publicly available information.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Why don't you table it today?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've given you my answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've said that you're aware that they are swimming in money but you're not prepared to name them.

Ms PRUE CAR: Some of them have the capacity to pay and we will review the funding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Aren't you just being an arrogant education Minister who is turning your back on these community preschools? You won't commit a single cent today.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, that's not what the case is.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How not?

Ms PRUE CAR: Because I'm saying that the community preschools should be paying the community preschool teachers. It's pretty basic, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Of the 700 community preschools, how many do you think can issue pay rises without increasing fees for parents?

Ms PRUE CAR: I understand opposition is hard. I know what it's like. You have to do your own research—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm having fun. I'm having a great time.

Ms PRUE CAR: —but you can actually find that information.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Of the 700 community preschools, Minister—

Ms PRUE CAR: You can do your own research, can't you?

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking you as the Minister paid by the taxpayers of New South Wales, the parents and the students who want answers to their questions.

Ms PRUE CAR: I've answered you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Instead of an arrogant Minister, they'd like some answers. So I'll ask again: Of the 700 community preschools, how many do you think can issue pay rises without increasing fees for parents?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've clearly said there are some. Ms Ward, I understand the Liberals like to go low and they like to throw things across the room—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, we just want answers, Minister, as do those parents. That's all we're asking—

Ms PRUE CAR: —calling this name and that name. I'm giving you the answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —but your arrogance belies any commitment to these community members, the parents, the kids, the teachers, who are not being paid equity. You talk equity.

Ms PRUE CAR: Are we all to now suddenly believe that the Liberals believe in pay rises for teachers?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This isn't about me; it's about you.

Ms PRUE CAR: It's funny.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And your best form of defence is attack.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's true.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you're not committing a single cent, you're not going to support them at all, you say they're swimming in money, it's all perfectly fine out there—

Ms PRUE CAR: That is not true.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —and you're just going to review it. You're going to take a look—

Ms PRUE CAR: Stop verballing me, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —and they should just stop their complaint.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are they in your electorate?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm fascinated by the exchange but I can't follow the information because the Minister is interrupting Ms Ward's interruptions, who is interrupting her interruptions, and it's a bit chaotic.

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Latham is correct.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll move on. Have you seen the media comments, Minister, by the centre manager of Drummoyne community preschool—a concerned community member?

Ms PRUE CAR: I haven't seen those particular comments, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll help you out. Do you agree with her comments that "community-based preschools are already under fire, and this is just one more nail in the coffin"?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't agree with that, no. I will say what I've said this morning, which I've said again just then. We will work with community preschools. We will review the funding and, if there are any community preschools—and I make this really clear. Maybe I haven't made this clear enough this morning. If there are any community preschools that feel that this decision, this direction, this recommendation from the Fair Work Commission will undermine its viability, we will work with that centre.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I've got one for you. I'll put it on the record: Drummoyne community preschool. They're telling you what I'm telling you right here and now.

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm just saying we'll work with that centre.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've just said that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What funding will you assist them with?

Ms PRUE CAR: —we'll work with that centre.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you'll review it and you'll work with them and have a chat but not a single cent from this Government for community preschools. That is—

Ms PRUE CAR: I've just said we will work with that centre.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —what you've told this Committee under oath today. Would you characterise the "nobody in government talks to us" quote as correct, considering what you've said today regarding pay for community preschools, the changes to the annual service fee, the increases and your response to the previous questions?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know if that's the case or not.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're perfectly fine with the whole scenario? Annual fees have gone up, prices have gone up.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I'm not okay with it. I just said—sorry, please stop verballing me. I just said that, if there are community preschools that feel like this recommendation, this direction will undermine their viability, we will commit to work with those community preschools.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, the very reason they had to go to the Fair Work Commission was because the Government was not working with the sector.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, that is not true, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is exactly why they had to—

Ms PRUE CAR: That's not true.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —go to Fair Work to get a decision. A decision was made.

Ms PRUE CAR: That is not true. Just because you say something doesn't make it true, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you say you don't agree with Deputy President Judith Wright's recommendations that all necessary action, including reviewing—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The review is the easy bit. This is a government that loves a good review.

Ms PRUE CAR: If you think any of this is easy—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Increasing funding.

Ms PRUE CAR: —then you're very naive.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Allan Fels might be available. He's available to do it. I think he's sitting around doing nothing. So you're the Government. How are you aware if the Government is speaking to them?

Ms PRUE CAR: How did this become an attack on Allan Fels? I have no idea where that came from.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You're just kicking it down the road with another review, aren't you?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, we're not.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Like everything else.

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No opportunity, no money. You're not committing a cent today. That's what the sector is going to hear.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I think that's what you want them to hear. That's not what I said.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I've asked you the question. You've had the opportunity to answer.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have answered.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've declined to do so. You're not committing a cent. So the answer is to them—it's a middle finger from the arrogant Minister.

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Point of order: I just think the last—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I withdraw. Can I move on to the ACECQA annual service fees? They're up tenfold. Following your Education Ministers Meeting in Adelaide last month, you made a decision in a cost-of-living crisis to increase the ACECQA annual service fee by up to tenfold. Some other States have only applied a CPI increase. What modelling did you rely on to make this fee hike decision?

Ms PRUE CAR: This proposed change in fees is a sliding scale. They will not all apply across the board. They're different fee changes based on the size of the service, whether it's profit or not-for-profit. Really, this comes after our nation-leading legislation, shepherded through the Parliament by Minister Houssos—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but I'm asking about the modelling.

Ms PRUE CAR: —to establish the Early Learning Commission, which, at the end of the day, in addition to \$55 million in extra government funding, does have to be resourced. This about a strong regulator—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You may want to talk about that, but what the sector wants to talk about—and my question to you—is what modelling did you rely on to make this fee hike decision? What advice did you get?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is about a strong regulator to ensure that the commissioner can increase its visitations to ensure that child safety is paramount and being adhered to in every centre. It's fairly common practice for industries to have regulators that are funded in part by fees. I think even the food safety regulator is funded in part by fees from restaurants. I would argue the safety of children—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So students are on par with food safety, are they?

Ms PRUE CAR: —is probably more important than the safety of food. That is pretty common practice, and that will be a sliding scale based on the size.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's talk about the sliding scale. Where did that come from? What was that based on?

Ms PRUE CAR: That was based on modelling that reflected the size of the centre, whether the centre was not-for-profit or for-profit.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So there is modelling?

Ms PRUE CAR: That is the modelling that was used to propose the increase in fees. We are not making services pass this on to parents. Any service that tells parents that it is the Government making them do that, that is erroneous. Even if they were doing it, I think it's just over a dollar increase across the board.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Where did the sliding scale come from? That's never been used before.

Ms PRUE CAR: That was advice provided to me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It has never been used before. It isn't being used by other jurisdictions. It's not being used elsewhere. Why is New South Wales using it?

Ms PRUE CAR: I will ask Minister Houssos because I believe that this was also part of the legislation. Yes, you're right, other States and Territories haven't embarked on it. We're proud that we're nation-leading with this legislation to—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Increase fees?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, increase in visitations and compliance actions for child safety. I am proud of that, Ms Ward, actually. Ms Houssos?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I want to know about the modelling and where it came from.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think it might be helpful, Ms Ward—I understand, as the Deputy Premier said, our Government provided additional funding in setting up this new regulator known as the Early Learning Commission. That was one of the things that we did whilst—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm interested in the modelling, though.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —I was acting in the role, and I'm telling you that—

Ms PRUE CAR: She's answering that.

CORRECTED

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —you may have missed, as the nation-leading legislation passed through the Parliament, that it distinguished, in relation to the fines, the nature of the early learning centres—if they were for-profit, if they were not-for-profit and if they were large providers. It provided differing levels of fines according to the size of the centre and the nature of the work. But Mr Currie—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Did the Government consider funding these measures through consolidated revenue like other jurisdictions have done, rather than just imposing an additional cost on families?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think I just answered that. We did give additional funding to the Early Learning Commission.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You did?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So that has come from consolidated revenue?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, we've increased funding to the Early Learning Commission—it used to be the regulator—after the passing of this legislation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How much did you commit?

Ms PRUE CAR: There was an extra \$55 million.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So there will be no fee hike or additional cost to families?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are not the ones passing it on to families. We are saying that centres, in fairness, based on the size and the nature of whether they are not for profit or profit, should be expected to pay into the regulator, as exists in most other industries. We need a strong commission. I think that we have seen the reason for that. I'm not sure if the Liberal Party is arguing against strong regulation in the childcare sector.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We just want to know where the money is going. We want to understand where the money is going. I'll move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: Do we not want strong regulation in the childcare sector? That's an extraordinary point to make.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, I have limited time. I'd be appreciative of asking the questions. It's not a press conference, it's budget estimates. I would like to ask some questions about that. Did you consult with any centres before increasing those fees to understand if this would be passed on to families?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are in constant consultation with centres. In fact, during the passing—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which ones?

Ms PRUE CAR: —of the legislation—hold on. During the passing of the legislation—I know Minister Houssos may have more to say about this—we were in constant communication with the sector as well as people from across the Parliament, working with your shadow Minister, Ms Boyd and the crossbench in the drafting of this legislation and the amendments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand the legislation. I just don't understand the funding.

Ms PRUE CAR: But this is connected to the legislation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the funding is your funding. I'll move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: But the fees are connected to the legislation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you see, Minister, the problem for you is this: The community and the sector say that they were not consulted. They were shocked by the decision in New South Wales. They were shocked by the disparity with other jurisdictions and they're very concerned. They don't feel like they're in constant consultation with you, as I quoted. But I will move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you know—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to social media, schools have—

Ms PRUE CAR: —even if centres were to pass this on, which I'd urge them not to do, it would only be \$1.43 per child.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, schools have noticeably increased their posting of Instagram reels, dance videos, "a day in the life of" videos and other social content. Has the department conducted a risk assessment of the impact of filming content in classrooms on teacher workload and student learning outcomes?

Ms PRUE CAR: I am happy to talk about teacher workload, Ms Ward. I think that teachers across New South Wales are proud, happy and excited to share the exciting work they're doing in their classrooms on social media and through other forms of communication. In fact, I think they're quite welcoming of the fact that they now have a department and a government that shares in their wish to advertise what is happening in public schools. We are hard at work—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. Has the department conducted a risk assessment on the impact?

Ms PRUE CAR: —at reducing workload. It's one of the reasons we are seeing retention increase among public school teachers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But has the department conducted a risk assessment on the impact of filming content in classrooms on teacher workload?

Ms PRUE CAR: We assess everything we do on the basis of teacher workload.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So an assessment has been done?

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're really proud that schools are promoting their outstanding work. We don't compel them to do that, but we are thrilled that they are willing to show their community and their parent body—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. I'll take that as a no.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not a compulsion from the organisation.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But the modelling hasn't been done. That's okay, I'll move on.

Ms PRUE CAR: This is schools celebrating what they're doing.

MURAT DIZDAR: If you want us to talk about what we have done with teacher workload, we can unpack it for you.

Ms PRUE CAR: There are quite a few things there.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right, let's do that in the afternoon. Is content creation or brand ambassadorship now considered an informal part of a teacher's role?

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you suggesting that our hardworking public school teachers don't want to celebrate the work happening in their schools?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll repeat the question for you, Minister. Is content creation or brand ambassadorship now considered an informal part of a teacher's role?

Ms PRUE CAR: I genuinely don't know where you're going with this.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's a very simple question.

Ms PRUE CAR: I suspect it's some sort of strange trick that I don't understand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There are no tricks. I'm asking on behalf of teachers, students, parents and the community—

Ms PRUE CAR: On behalf of teachers?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —that pay your salary and pay my salary to do my job to ask you questions. Respectfully, the question is quite straightforward. Is it an informal part of their role?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. I don't know about you, but I've spoken to thousands of teachers and they really want to celebrate what is happening in their classrooms.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Great. On that, then, does the department track the total number of teacher hours spent on producing social media content for departmental accounts?

Ms PRUE CAR: Do you know, when Mr Dizdar and I go to schools and say to teachers, "When it comes to workload and that one magic thing that we can give you to help you as a teacher—which is time—what is the

CORRECTED

one thing we can take away from you to make your job easier?", not one has ever said to me, "Please, take away the celebration of public education on social media."

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll take that as a no, then, that the department doesn't track it.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Point of order: I reluctantly take a point of order, but I've sat here for some time where Ms Ward asks a question, the Minister or someone else responds and, at the end of that, there's a statement with some sort of invective in an attempt to verbal the Minister or the departmental official. That shouldn't be happening, as a matter of fairness. They should be allowed to respond to those sorts of interjections at the end of their answers.

The CHAIR: I don't uphold the point of order. I think that is quite standard backwards and forwards in these things. However, I encourage the Government to use their time to allow the Minister and the Deputy Premier to scoop up anything like that that they do want to respond to because I do agree, from a procedural fairness perspective. Carry on, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, can we go back to *Budget Paper No. 04* on page 6-2, the employee-related expenses for the department. Again I say, what proportion of the department's employee expense budget do teachers represent?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to take advice on exactly how much of that employee expense is in relation to teachers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You must have a rough figure. Mr Dizdar, you must know what percentage of your budget teachers—

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy for Ms McCabe—if we have got that for you. If we don't, we'll come back.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I asked it earlier today. Has no-one had a chance to check? You've got to have a percentage. Is it 50 per cent? Is it 30 per cent?

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy for Ms McCabe to give it to you, if we've got it. If we don't, I'm happy to come back on notice.

MELINDA McCABE: Yes, we'll come back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you come back today in budget estimates to answer what percentage of your budget teacher expenses represents?

MELINDA McCABE: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you trying to draw attention to the fact that we gave teachers a pay rise?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'll ask the questions, Minister, if it's all right with you. You can scoop up and clean up in your 15 minutes or in a press conference any time you like. I'm asking about the budget papers. I have asked twice for the number—

Ms PRUE CAR: We've just said we'll get it to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —and you want to take it on notice. It's part of your budget. The proportion has seen a cut of over \$86 million in employee-related expenses this year. Teacher salaries will be 3 per cent higher but similar salary increases have been made for other departmental workers. Taking into account that salaries per employee will be higher, that suggests a cut of around 3.6 per cent in the number of full-time employees. That's right, isn't it? That's a cut.

Ms PRUE CAR: I have to take that on notice, because I don't accept the premise of your question at all.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There has been a cut in the FTE number.

The CHAIR: Order! Deputy Premier, coming back to you, in relation to the community preschools—I know quite a few of them are throwing things at their computer monitor at the moment, watching this—you said previously that some of the preschools had up to \$400,000 in profits. I think you maybe misspoke and meant "reserves". Is that right?

Ms PRUE CAR: You are right. The point remains, though, Ms Boyd—I'm not saying that they're all in this position. But just for the purposes of having an informed discussion about this, there are some that are available and are able to do this. They just are.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Can we drill down into that? Obviously these preschools are standalone businesses. They are required to maintain reserves to meet their solvency requirements. It was found in the Fair Work Commission case that 70 per cent of services reported one year or less of reserves to cover their operating expenses, and that they also need sufficient reserves for significant maintenance, emergency repairs, expansion of services et cetera—but also that a one-off pool of reserves is not appropriate for an ongoing increase in wages. Taking your concession that there are, perhaps—I know there are—a great number of these preschools that cannot afford a wage increase, will you at least accept that there will be some additional funding required from your Government in order for these services to pass on these wage increases?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is why we are doing a review of the funding. I don't know if there are a lot that can't afford it. I accept that that's what you're—

The CHAIR: Have you read the Fair Work Commission judgement?

Ms PRUE CAR: Listen, the Fair Work Commission, Ms Boyd, has definitely directed us to look at the funding, which we are doing. This is why we are doing a review.

The CHAIR: But do you understand that the Government's continual declarations at the end of last year that all of these preschools could somehow afford this, and making all of those statements, has been incredibly damaging to the people who work in those preschools, who love those preschools and know exactly what has been going on? The Fair Work Commission—

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't accept that that's been damaging to the educators in preschools.

The CHAIR: You don't?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. I think that if community preschools have that funding available, they should be providing a wage increase.

The CHAIR: They don't have that funding available.

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't know if that's true.

The CHAIR: We will go back. Have you read the Fair Work Commission judgement?

Ms PRUE CAR: You are presenting to me that that's the case, and I am not sure if that's the case.

The CHAIR: Have you read the judgement?

Ms PRUE CAR: I've been briefed on the judgement, yes.

The CHAIR: You have not read the judgement.

Ms PRUE CAR: I've been briefed on the judgement.

The CHAIR: I would encourage you to read the judgement, because I think then you might understand—

Ms PRUE CAR: Where in the judgement, Ms Boyd, does it say that community preschools can't afford it?

The CHAIR: I will find that piece of the judgement for you. It says it very explicitly. We have a statement in there—sorry, I assumed you would have read it. I don't have the actual judgement in front of me, just the pieces. I will come back to you with the exact quote. The Fair Work Commission's judgement states:

I am satisfied that in providing the majority of funding required by NSW preschools to operate, the NSW Government exercises such a degree of control over the terms and conditions of the employees who will be covered by the Proposed Agreement that the participation of the NSW Government in bargaining is necessary for the Proposed Agreement to be made.

The New South Wales Government's participation is "necessary in order to deliver the pay increase required". The judgement also states:

The findings which I regard as uncontroversial and available for me to make, based on the material before me and the findings of the 2001 decision, 2009 decision and the 2021 *Teachers decision* are:

1. NSW preschools are reliant on NSW Government funding for the public provision of preschool services.
2. Labor costs represent the vast majority of standard operating costs of NSW community preschools, being around 80% of total costs.
3. Rates of pay in comparable sectors including long day care and public (government run) preschools are substantially higher.
4. Outside of government funding NSW community preschools can only generate revenue through fees to families. Without additional funding, the impact of addressing wages gaps between community preschools and the long day care and government preschool sector and implementing the *Gender-based undervaluation case* will result in increased out of pocket costs for families.

CORRECTED

Now that I have read it to you, do you understand that the Government is required to fund these services in order to deliver this wage increase and that—

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Boyd, I do not disagree—

The CHAIR: —I have not finished my question—the failure to do so and the misleading statements made by this Government have damaged your reputation with the sector?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, this is not misleading and I don't disagree with anything that was in that finding.

The CHAIR: You just did for the past morning of estimates.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I didn't. I am saying the teachers deserve a pay rise.

The CHAIR: And the Government needs to deliver it.

Ms PRUE CAR: We are reviewing the funding.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Good morning, Minister. My questions are on a totally different topic. I have previously raised my concerns about synthetic turf with you and with the acting Minister, particularly about the health risks to kids. Even though the Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines indicate a preference for natural turf, it has now come to light that your own survey, conducted in term 3 last year, found that a majority of public schools have synthetic turf installations. What work are you now doing in light of those findings?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Ms Harrington to give an update on that for you, Dr Cohn. Is that okay, Ms Harrington?

LISA HARRINGTON: Sure. The survey last year—the asset management teams surveyed 1,600 schools. There are still quite a few schools to get to. The asset management teams are doing that in the next few months. We will be reviewing our EFSG this year to reflect the latest guidelines. Late last year, as well, the planning department also released some additional detail about how it should be assessed with our part 5 review of environmental factors, so that gives us more detail to understand exactly what we need to do differently. There is a bit more work to do to understand the use of synthetic turf currently in schools. But in relation to the DPHI guidelines and the part 5 further detail, that relates to sports fields, and we are needing to update our EFSG to reflect that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Coming back to you, Minister, having heard that 58 per cent of 1,600 public schools have synthetic turf, which is not consistent with your own guidelines, do you think there is a need to go back and assess those and actually look at phasing out some of this plastic grass?

Ms PRUE CAR: Of course we have a preference for natural turf, and we will ensure that that is communicated to schools and that we work with schools. Sometimes I do think that schools feel like there is not another alternative. The alternative is bitumen or concrete, and that is obviously not ideal, either, for children running around. Yes, we've made it very clear time and time again that our preference is natural turf, and we'll continue to work with schools on that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Some of those findings in terms of the heat of the synthetic grass turf are that if it is unshaded, it is actually hotter than the concrete. I'd question whether it is actually better in those circumstances. I am aware of at least a couple of examples where there are current plans to put synthetic in, including at Endeavour Sports High School and Kogarah High School. Will you be reviewing those installations?

Ms PRUE CAR: Let me come back to you on that. I'll have a look at that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate that my last question might go back to Ms Harrington. I understand that the Charles Bean Oval, which is used by Lindfield Learning Village as a playground and a sports field daily, is due for renewal. Has the department been involved with the council in the process of looking at the renewal of that field?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes, we are engaging with the council on that. As part of the lease agreement, it is council's responsibility to upgrade that field, so we are engaging with council on that.

Dr AMANDA COHN: What advice has the department given council since that eco or natural turf question?

LISA HARRINGTON: Whether it's council doing the work or School Infrastructure doing the work, we need to adhere to the latest guidelines in relation to synthetic turf on the sports field. So, that will be adhered to.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Have you indicated to the council as part of this process that it's the department's preference that that should be natural turf?

CORRECTED

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

The CHAIR: Can I ask about the level of voluntary contributions in 2025? I'm not sure we've seen the data yet.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, I'll ask Mr Dizdar for an update on this. We have a history of being very clear with schools on this.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Boyd, let me see if I can find it for you during the hearing.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. Deputy Premier, what are you doing to monitor schools outsourcing for private tutors for things like band programs, which are curriculum related but not tracked in school budgets?

Ms PRUE CAR: We made it very clear that the delivery of the school curriculum—that the department will support principals and teachers to deliver that, and that principals and our well-qualified teachers are best placed to deliver curriculum.

The CHAIR: What are you doing to track it then, to make sure that it's not happening?

Ms PRUE CAR: I just have to get advice from either Mr Dizdar or Ms Summerhayes in terms of how much that is happening and what our work around that is.

The CHAIR: Finally, picking up on the questions that the Opposition was asking in relation to principals and others having to do social media activities in their work time, is it the case that it's actually a formal part of their role—"social media management" is classified as a teacher priority task?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not part of the principal role description. We have a New South Wales principal role description and that's not a dot point there.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I said as a teacher priority task.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not for a teacher or a principal. Schools, in my experience, have a school account, normally, and it would be administered by the school. Some individual teachers have their own accounts.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Deputy Premier, earlier we talked about the hotline for incidences reporting. That included bullying and, I think you said, discrimination as well—Mr Dizdar said that. Can I just clarify, Deputy Premier, do you know if the data that you receive separates incidences from primary and high schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Just for completeness, Ms Mihailuk, they were the suspension categories I read out.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry. But the hotline itself then, does that separate the data between—

Ms PRUE CAR: Are you talking about the incident hotline, Ms Mihailuk?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: That's a process question. I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar. Does it discriminate between primary and secondary? The school would have to make an incident report with the detail—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, but the data that you get in the end—

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes, with the detail.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you see what incidences are occurring? Essentially, what I want to know is how many antisemitic incidences are happening at high school level and how many are at primary? Do you have any reporting to that effect?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me see what we have.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You'll take that on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If I can just refer to an incident that occurred at Granville South Public School, a primary school, post the Bondi Beach terror attack, in which students celebrated that particular attack. I understand a notification was made. Were you aware of that, Deputy Premier? Or, Minister Houssos, were you aware of that?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, I don't—Minister Houssos? I was not aware of that. I don't recall that.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Mr Dizdar, were you aware of an incident that occurred at Granville South Public School?

MURAT DIZDAR: If it was reported to the hotline, we're made aware of it and we see what actions—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But does it ring a bell at all to you, Mr Dizdar, an event that happened post 14 December at Granville South Public School?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to go back and see.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If that event was notified to you, is that something normally you would let the Minister for Education—

MURAT DIZDAR: Well, It's not going to be notified to me as the secretary. The principal is going to deal with that matter at the school level. They're going to report it to the hotline and, if they need advice and expertise—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But given the gravity of what we're dealing with with the terror attack, and both of you said earlier that you're doing everything you can to stop incidences of antisemitism in our schools and that you'll do everything you can to assist, bar providing a submission to an inquiry—but, other than that, you're going to assist. I'm just wondering, if the reporting happens, what happens next, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a really good question. I would normally be informed of something like that if it was not well handled. You might have the family that's not happy with the outcome or the school felt like they weren't supported. I'm in regular contact with the Jewish Board of Deputies. They might make contact with me and say they've had the family approach them, for example, and they're not happy with the outcome. You've got to appreciate that with close to 780,000 students, four million humans, in public schools every day, I'm not going to get every single incident report.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But it's such a very—

MURAT DIZDAR: It would normally escalate to me. In fairness, it would escalate to me.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But let's be honest, at the time, that was taking a lot of media—there was a lot of interest in what occurred, obviously, at Bondi and I would have thought an incident like this at a primary school would be something that you would be immediately notified of.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to go back and check for you. I was just giving you how, operationally, incidences work.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can I also put on notice, were any students disciplined at that school? Was there any disciplinary action taken post this incident at Granville South Primary School?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go back and check. I read out the discipline procedures which allow our principals to take appropriate disciplinary action in instances like that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Could I just confirm, Minister Houssos, you were never notified of that? I don't believe the Deputy Premier was there at the time. You were never notified of an incident at Granville South primary school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't recall that specific incident, but it's probably best that I come back on notice with a response.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, do you support the CESE document What Works Best and its recommendation for high expectations in our schools—that is, not only high expectations about student achievement but also teacher involvement and commitment with learning?

Ms PRUE CAR: CESE does an excellent job providing research, an evidence base—as you say, What Works Best. When it comes to high expectations, we have high expectations for all in public education—for students, for staff, for families—and for behaviour, as well as high expectations in terms of learning outcomes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did the Government announce last week, with the Teachers Federation, abandonment of the rule by which teachers need to be at school at least 30 minutes before the commencement of class? That is, teachers can now walk into their classrooms, as the students do, immediately after the bell, obviously without any class lesson preparation that morning?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'd have to ask Mr Dizdar to answer what was—there may have been a minor change to the fact sheet.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: We clarified the *Attendance and Student Supervision Factsheet* and it says teachers have to be, at the commencement of the school day, ready to commence their duties, and we said that the principal, in consultation with teachers, can create a roster for what 30 minutes before the school day looks like.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: For every teacher?

MURAT DIZDAR: As a principal in the system, I had a roster to make sure I had the duty-of-care requirements in place before the formal commencement of period one, or roll call, and so we've clarified that for the workforce.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What was the previous statement? I don't understand the change.

MURAT DIZDAR: There's no real change there; we've just provided clarity around the consultation and rostering.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To what effect?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said, section 1.1 says that, at the commencement of the school day, everyone, every teacher, must be ready to commence their duties, and section 1.2 says that the principal is responsible for the care and supervision of students, and teachers can be required to be rostered on to be on duty 30 minutes before the school day starts.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did principals previously have that discretion—or every teacher had to be there 30 minutes before the bell?

MURAT DIZDAR: We wanted to give clarity because it wasn't consistently done.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, that's not answering my question. Did principals previously have that discretion?

MURAT DIZDAR: Around?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: This roster that you're talking about.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. They would operationalise it, like I did when I was a principal, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But previously did every teacher have to be at school 30 minutes before the bell?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, not necessarily.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So what's the change you've made?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've just made it clear that they should consult with their staff and create a roster.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And why wasn't it clear previously?

MURAT DIZDAR: It lacked that clarity. It wasn't as specific as saying that you should have a roster and consult that roster.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What were most principals doing?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think they were just leading with an expectation that everyone should be there, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Consistent with high expectations, I've heard complaints from teachers that the limit on one-hour meetings per week makes it harder now to run professional development. Is that the feedback that the Minister and the department is getting?

Ms PRUE CAR: I mean the one hour a week is more about regular school meetings.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Sure, but there's a run-in with professional development.

Ms PRUE CAR: We've actually given teachers more opportunities for professional development across the board, which I certainly do get a lot of feedback about.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why have you introduced teacher-determined time—teachers determine their own activities on school development days, ignoring the benefits of Hattie's collective efficacy particularly in professional development areas? Teachers go off doing their own thing.

Ms PRUE CAR: Mr Dizdar can answer this. There are teacher-determined times during professional development but also collective efforts and mandated professional development. One doesn't exist without the other. They are not mutually exclusive.

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why do you need any teacher-determined time if the school should just have one direction, one policy, one PD?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every school community is different.

MURAT DIZDAR: What we've also done here, Mr Latham, which never has happened in my career, is mandated school development days. We've run a mandated day on explicit teaching, no option.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So each teacher can go off and do their own thing.

Ms PRUE CAR: No, we're doing it mandated.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've mandated particular topics and days, and alongside that on school development days we've given space for teachers because they've got individual—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the share? What's the percentage split?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's eight school development days and we've got an even split between them.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Fifty-fifty? Why do you need any teacher-determined time? Isn't this just a concession to teachers going off and not being accountable ultimately for the overall professional development efforts?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think that's a really fair question. Every teacher has a performance and development plan and that non-mandated time for them has to be in line with their performance and development plan.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why are those plans determined by the teachers themselves in the goals that they have and the observers? Shouldn't you have an independent assessment to lift teacher quality?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's determined by the teacher with their supervisor.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But why do they get to choose their own supervisor? Shouldn't the principal allocate someone who is independent and objective, rather than picking your best friend in the school who's most likely to go soft on you?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, that's a fair point. They don't get to choose their supervisor. They can choose another observer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But why do they get to do that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Because it's a collegial profession. You've tabled around collective efficacy—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'd pick my best mate for an objective report about my performance in life, but in a proper outfit you wouldn't do that, would you? You'd be tough and independent. I think Rod Roberts should write up all my assessments.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think we should give credit to the professionalism of teachers, and collective efficacy, which you're a big believer in, Mr Latham, would say that the collective growth of teachers is important.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could touch on discipline and anti-bullying. Anecdotally, we know many parents are concerned about behaviour and safety in New South Wales public schools. They are not certain that schools will always respond decisively with clear consequences to serious incidences of misbehaviour. There is a lack of clarity for parents regarding what kinds of behaviour automatically result in a student suspension and what is left to the principal's discretion. Deputy Premier, to give you an opportunity to finally clarify and remove any ambiguity for New South Wales parents in New South Wales public schools, is it an automatic suspension if a student assaults another student?

Ms PRUE CAR: I would say I think you're right in that parents are concerned about bullying and behaviour. I will say I think parents in all sectors are concerned about this. It is an international challenge that we face made worse by the onset of social media. It is why I am so grateful that we were able to work with our partners in the Catholic and independent sectors to work together on the State's first ever bullying framework. It ensures that no matter where you send your child to school in New South Wales, you are going to be met with a framework that is pretty much compulsory for schools to comply with to act on complaints about bullying or concerns about bullying, including very clear triage systems where parents must be responded to within two days. That's actually a first. I'm really grateful to the independent and Catholic systems for working with us on that, moderated by NESA. That was really something I'm really proud of. We have also in the public school system, with the suspensions—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This is New South Wales schools and parents are asking these questions.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: That's what I'm saying about New South Wales schools, because I think parents in all sectors are concerned about bullying. Bullying doesn't just happen in New South Wales public schools. It happens everywhere, unfortunately. That's why we're working with our sectors. This is not a public school problem.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could just recap. The question is in New South Wales public schools is it an automatic suspension if a student assaults another student?

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm going to give you the detail on this, but I just will say we made changes immediately upon coming to government to actually make the suspension and expulsion policy clearer for principals to act. Actually, under the previous Government, it was harder to suspend a student because the Government was obsessed with getting suspensions data down. Sometimes you do have to suspend a student. I don't know if any principals—I look around me; there's some amazing principals sitting here. I'm sure they didn't go to work saying, "I can't wait to suspend kids." But sometimes you do have to suspend students. Mr Dizdar can go into the detail about suspensions.

MURAT DIZDAR: The Deputy Premier is right—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm happy to do that this afternoon, Mr Dizdar. I'm conscious of everyone's time.

MURAT DIZDAR: I was just going to answer your specific question. With the change that the Deputy Premier got us to make, principals can issue an immediate suspension for students who engage in physically violent behaviour.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, if I could move to gifted and talented students. You've announced the Inspire high potential and gifted education program. Deputy Premier, will every public school student in New South Wales now be able to access opportunities to pursue extension classes?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every student in public schools in New South Wales will be able to access high potential and gifted education opportunities. That may not be an extension class. That may be other opportunities but they are high potential and gifted education. People are familiar with extension classes, with selective schooling, with opportunity classes, but some high potential may be in creative and performing arts, some may be in leadership, some may be in academia, some may be in technology, in STEM. You go to schools and the potential in terms of robotics and things like that is beyond your wildest imagination. Every child in every school will be able to access that. On every single website it is advertised so that parents, going to Mr Latham's point about choice previously, can go on to School Finder and see the schools that are available to them and what HPGE offerings are available in those school settings.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, how many schools will have enrichment streams offered and in what school years? How many schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every school will have a high potential and gifted education offering. In some schools that will be enrichment in some areas, some will be enrichment in other areas. Every community is slightly different. Every single public school will have a high potential and gifted education offering. That's live now. It's on their websites.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Deputy Premier, how is the STEM offering any different from ability-streamed classes? Or what might be some examples of the offering of STEM in New South Wales schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: How might a STEM class be different from an ability-streamed class? Well, a specific robotics club, maybe that might be—I'm just using a hypothetical because it's hard to answer a hypothetical question. It would be different to an ability-graded class.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In terms of every school student now being able to access those opportunities to pursue the extension classes, will those extension classes go beyond the eight schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: No. Every school student will have access in every public school to a high potential and gifted education offering. That won't necessarily be extension classes everywhere. We're actually expanding like never before the offering of high potential. Because it's not just about extension classes. That really is maybe the way that it was thought about previously, that the only way to stretch a student, stretch a child, would be those that are gifted to take an extension. What about actually noticing potential in a child and nurturing that and stretching that? Teachers see it every day, but now the department is actually helping them to stretch those children. It's not just extension classes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, so the extension classes will only be in eight schools then?

Ms PRUE CAR: High potential and gifted education is in every school for the first time ever.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's move on to the enrichment streams. In how many schools will the enrichment streams be offered?

Ms PRUE CAR: Sorry, I don't think there's an understanding of what we're saying. The high potential and gifted education offerings, which will be different in each school—every single school will offer that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So enrichment streams won't be generally available across years and subjects in schools?

Ms PRUE CAR: No, enrichment streams may be the high potential and gifted education offering.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In what school years will those enrichment streams be offered?

Ms PRUE CAR: I hate to sound like a broken record, but every school will offer—is offering—high potential and gifted education offerings and some of those will be enrichment streams. Some will be extension classes. Some will be other opportunities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's involved in the enrichment streams? In what subjects will they be?

Ms PRUE CAR: They'll be different based on different school communities and what the school plan may be for that particular school. Mr Dizdar, I don't know if you can help as an on-the-ground perspective?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. There'll be enrichment opportunities. There will be enrichment classes. Schools will determine what that looks like. The Deputy Premier is correct: Previously, schools had really focused on only academic or sporting, and HPGE goes to the four domains. It goes to the creative and performing arts also, alongside the academic, alongside the sporting and it goes to things like leadership and debating. So you could have a student who the teacher identifies and puts them into a debating opportunity as an enrichment, but they're not part of the mass enrichment class, for example.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In what years will those enrichments and subjects be? For many schools, enrichment might just be a sport.

Ms PRUE CAR: What do you mean just a sport? If your child has high potential in sport, I think that's a great opportunity.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But in many schools it might just be sport.

Ms PRUE CAR: Just be? That's going to be a future Olympian.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sport is a mandatory part of the curriculum, but then there'll be students that we identify who can benefit.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So in one particular school it could be a limited offering.

MURAT DIZDAR: It'll be offerings in every school. It'll be K-12.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In every year?

MURAT DIZDAR: The opportunities will cut across the full spectrum of learning.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You can't tell us where it will be, in what subjects or what years; it's just going to be broadly available. Is this just a tick-a-box exercise to say that you're doing something for this?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, not at all.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There don't seem to be any specifics when you talk about on the ground.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I wouldn't—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, what are the specifics—what subjects, what years, in what schools and where?

MURAT DIZDAR: I wouldn't concur with that. Ninety-five thousand teachers undertook high potential and gifted education training and development across this State. I wouldn't call that tick a box; I'd call that professional investment.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What about the students undertaking these courses? Are they undertaking enrichment, is it STEM, is it sport, what year is it in, what's offered?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've answered that. It'll be across K-12. Their parents will be informed around what those opportunities are. They're on the websites.

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: Can I also suggest Ms Summerhayes will have detail—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When will parents be informed?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're already on the website.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So parents will be informed by the website?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Summerhayes will know in detail what's happening in schools.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Certainly, but if it's all right with you, Minister, if Mr Dizdar and I could continue that conversation: Mr Dizdar, what role will the P&C at each of these schools have in determining enrichment opportunities within each school?

MURAT DIZDAR: Parents of a school—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Other than checking a website?

MURAT DIZDAR: Have you finished the question?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay, let me answer the important question. They'll be able to find out in that school community what the offerings are in that school and, if their child is chosen for an enrichment opportunity or an enrichment class, the individual parent will be informed as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So they can check the website and they'll be informed. What role will the P&C have?

MURAT DIZDAR: P&Cs are really pivotal, and I want to thank them for their volunteering efforts in schools. We would obviously work with them around what those opportunities were as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You'll work with them?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'd inform them what those opportunities were and why we would also work with them is because they might have particular areas of expertise or interest that they want to see fostered—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know that. I'm asking on their behalf how they will get involved and what role you anticipate they will have in this process.

MURAT DIZDAR: Our principals attend P&C meetings on a regular basis and will capture their input.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I didn't ask about the meetings; I asked about their role.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's how we'll capture their input.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For many schools there won't be any academic enrichment, it's fair to say from what you've said today—it might be sport; it might be drama.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I don't think that's fair to say at all.

Ms PRUE CAR: No.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What are you saying then?

Ms PRUE CAR: Every single school will have on their website what their specific offering is.

MURAT DIZDAR: I said that we're chasing the four domains of potential and giftedness. I said it's not limited to academics. There's the academic stream; there's sporting; I said there's the creative and performing arts; and then there's things like leadership, debating, public speaking et cetera.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What about the value of getting a job, which is academic, isn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Everyone thinks they're going to play cricket for Australia. It's 100,000 to one. But it's odds on if you—

The CHAIR: Order!

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: We're not talking about my son, who thinks he's going to be an F1 driver, being able to do that at school. The issue is if they have a high potential for it and, to be honest, I don't think it is "just sport", if you're going to be a future Olympian. That's the type of stuff we're talking about.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Latham can interrupt. I suggest that we might get back to the questions, but thank you for that enrichment opportunity. For many schools, just to be absolutely clear on this, there won't be academic enrichment. It could just be, should it be chosen by that principal, creative or sport. That's correct, isn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: For many schools it will be across a multiplicity of domains.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Child safety—can we go to the productivity commissioner's recent report, Minister. It paints a terrifying picture with massive increases in serious incidents across early childhood education and care services in New South Wales with 9,430 serious incidents. That's a rate of 154 incidents reported per 100 centres, an increase of almost 1,000 cases since you came into government in 2023. How many childcare services has the NSW Early Learning Commission, which is of course the regulator, immediately closed this year upon inspection and how many have since reopened?

Ms PRUE CAR: We actually have increased inspections by upwards of 26 per cent. I think the briefing I got yesterday showed that. The new commission is hard at work rolling out tougher penalties, more transparent reporting of compliance breaches. I agree that—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In the interests of transparency, how many have closed?

Ms PRUE CAR: I agree that these are not acceptable breaches. In fact, upon coming to government, when we increased the visitations and saw the increase in compliance breaches and then instituted the Wheeler review, and then that led to the nation-leading legislation, the commission is hard at work rolling out those compliance actions based on the breaches. I know Acting Commissioner Currie would be able to answer that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Terrific, we can take that up in the afternoon, but can you provide the numbers acting on those breaches of how many centres have closed as a result and how many have reopened, or can you take that on notice?

Ms PRUE CAR: I think Acting Commissioner Currie was about to provide that answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We can deal with that this afternoon. I'm just asking if you know the number, as we sit here today, given the concern that we all have in relation to this. How many have been immediately closed upon inspection, or will you take it on notice?

Ms PRUE CAR: We have made it easier for the commission to act, thanks to the passing of that legislation. I think it is fair that I ask the acting commissioner to answer that specific question—and he's trying to answer it, Ms Ward.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many have closed?

DARYL CURRIE: Would you like it from the passing of the legislation or from the standing up of the commission?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This year. How many have closed immediately this year upon inspection?

Ms PRUE CAR: It's only March.

DARYL CURRIE: I think, from the standing up of the commission, there have been two services cancelled, 73 providers cancelled, six service suspensions and 42 prohibition notices to individuals from 1 December.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How many have since reopened?

DARYL CURRIE: One, we noticed the other day, was a suspension that had reopened after working with us and us putting conditions in place so that we could be confident that the children in that care service were safe.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How long had each of the centres been in breach of those standards, and why did it take so long to act?

DARYL CURRIE: I'd have to take that on notice in terms of time frames. I can get that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We might come back to that this afternoon. If you could find that today, that would be very helpful, because there is some concern that it has taken a long time to act. How many families have been impacted by these sudden closures?

CORRECTED

DARYL CURRIE: I'm going to have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The data also shows there were 18,743 breaches of the National Quality Framework recorded. That's an increase of 859 breaches from 2023, which can include services not meeting legislated staffing requirements, with 685 staffing waivers granted. What are some of the reasons that waivers were given?

DARYL CURRIE: Usually, waivers are given to cover a period of time where the service may not be able to get the services of an early childhood teacher or for other reasons, usually to do with spaces. They may be having renovations and cannot use the space, so there's a waiver in terms of space allocation. Most of them are time limited. They are all assessed on their own merits, and they won't be granted if it means risk to children. We actually assess those very closely.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You and I might come back to that this afternoon. Thank you, that's very helpful. Minister, are you aware of how many families have been impacted by the sudden closures?

Ms PRUE CAR: It is a very difficult thing to have to manage because we've stood up the commission to finally have a regulator with enough teeth, backed in by legislation, that means that we can actually do the work that is required to act on breaches. As a result of that, if centres are closed or suspended, sometimes places are affected. But I would say bad places are not acceptable places for children and, because of the legislation putting child safety as the paramount consideration, we have to act on that. But if places are taken away from families because they're bad places and we've had to act, then we do work with those families to attempt to place them in other childcare settings. We understand the importance of child care, not just for early education but for the running of families. That's reality—the logistics of having small children. The regulator's job is to actually crack down—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know the regulator's job, thank you. I understand that. My question to you is, if so many waivers are being given due to insignificant staffing, what are you doing to rectify the 35 per cent decline in staff holding ECEC qualifications, particularly when New South Wales is increasing measures on safety?

Ms PRUE CAR: This is the balancing act that we must do. We must basically crack down on providers that are doing the wrong thing and also provide places in the community for young students—for children—to go to.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, but the productivity commission has said there's been a 35 per cent decline in staff holding those qualifications. I'm asking you, as the Minister, what's your Government doing to rectify that?

Ms PRUE CAR: We are increasing visitations by the commission to ensure that centres are meeting their obligations under the quality framework and to ensure that ratios are being covered and that there are no breaches. If there are compliance actions that are taken, I'll remind the Committee now, as a result of the legislation that this Parliament faced—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But that's not the question, Minister. The question is about the 35 per cent decline in staff holding that qualification. It's not about workforce capacity; it's not about qualifications. It's a standalone issue, given what the productivity commission has pointed out. My question is what are you doing to address that?

Ms PRUE CAR: We've resourced the commission to increase visitations, and we're proud to have done that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, on teacher quality, how can we tolerate the news that across Australia last year 499 students were offered undergraduate teaching places when they had ATARs between 0.00 and 50.00—that is, they failed the HSC. How many of these were in New South Wales, and what are we doing about it?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Merton asked this question before.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did she? Sorry, I wasn't here.

Ms PRUE CAR: My advice is I'm not aware of any of them being in New South Wales. That was the answer I gave to Ms Merton, so I'm giving it to you as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you take that on notice and check? As there are 500 around the country, you'd think some are here in the biggest State.

CORRECTED

PAUL MARTIN: Mr Latham, New South Wales has slightly different entry requirements from other States and Territories. We have something called three band 5s, so you have to have got a band 5 in three subjects in the HSC, including one in English. If you still want to do education but you don't have those results, you have to have gone into and got and passed a first full year of another course at a university before you can enter into the education parts of the organisation. That 500 is a national statistic.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In New South Wales last year, what's the lowest level ATAR of someone in an undergraduate teaching position?

PAUL MARTIN: I would have to take that on notice but the three band 5s, including one in English, is an ATAR roughly somewhere around 75 to 80.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What progress has been made with the universities to lift entry standards and also to ensure all graduates take explicit instruction as their pedagogy? I know Minister Houssos was negotiating and talking to the universities. Have we locked them into something definitive?

Ms PRUE CAR: Ms Houssos can definitely answer about the work that she was undertaking as acting Minister, but this is something we're dealing with around the country in initial teacher education. We're continuing to work with the universities because we want to see, as you said, Mr Latham, the students coming out of initial teacher education being trained in explicit teaching, because we've now mandated that in public schools. Minister Houssos might go into what she was working on with the universities.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can just briefly say, as you're aware, Mr Latham, I did have the opportunity to meet with a number of universities, and the really encouraging thing is that the public school system is working in concert with the Catholic schools and the independent schools. This is something that we're particularly proud of because we feel like if all of the schools who are taking the newly graduated teachers can get together, it really sends a strong message to universities that this is clearly what we need our graduates to be capable of.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But beyond a message, is there an agreement? You're the biggest employer of teachers in the country. Surely, there's a lot of leverage there to get an agreement.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Dizdar is very keen to jump in and provide an update.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Martin can talk to the work NESA has been doing, but education Ministers across the country agreed on mandated content, and explicit teaching must be delivered in every teacher education faculty from the commencement of '27. I'll get Mr Martin to talk to the work NESA's been doing to assure the fact that faculties will deliver this.

PAUL MARTIN: There are 104 initial teacher education qualifications in New South Wales. Each of those providers who have been brought into NESA, we have examined all of their courses for the national requirements around content, explicit teaching, the various other recommendations of the TEEP review that came out a few years ago. We have worked very closely with some providers more than others. They've all been put through that process. Then they again will be subject to a national quality assurance process. But New South Wales is completely up to date with having assessed its qualifications for the issues that Mr Dizdar referred to.

The CHAIR: Just a quick one from me. Deputy Premier, earlier when I asked you about the P&C Federation, you said it was not for you to get involved. It has been noted that in 2014 the New South Wales Government appointed an administrator until a new governing body was elected. Some of the allegations being made in relation to the board now are quite serious and involve corruption and other allegations. Is there a potential that if these things can't be quickly cleaned up that you would appoint an administrator until a new board is appointed?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't believe we're at that stage at this point. My expectation is that the P&C Federation does deal with these issues. I do note there are some employee or ex-employee matters that they're working through now. We are in regular dialogue with the P&C Federation. My expectation is that they sort this out. Mr Dizdar, you're dealing with the P&C Federation quite a lot.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can add, Chair, I've met with the acting CEO Tim Spencer, who the organisation has appointed. I've also met with Kaitlin Serrano, the P&C President of the federation, and I have also written to the President of the federation around some of those raised concerns. I look forward to working with them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Minister, are you aware about Jannali High School? They were very concerned because they raised some money by their P&C for a specific project. We've since been advised that the Department of Education has taken those funds away. Do you agree that if a school P&C raises funds for a specific project, those funds should go to that project?

CORRECTED

Ms PRUE CAR: I'm not aware of that particular project. If school communities raised funds and they had approval for that project—I believe that they were in a very long list of projects that we will work our way through. But Ms Harrington might have knowledge of what's happening at Jannali.

LISA HARRINGTON: Happy to get some more details to look into that. But the Deputy Premier is right; if the community has raised funds, it's just a matter of working through—the asset management teams will do that as soon as they can. If the school itself has raised funds, we have committed to honour and to deliver all the projects that were in before the end of December 2023.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This is not the school itself. Minister, are you aware that \$22,000 raised by the P&C at Jannali High School, including \$4000 in donations from local businesses, to go towards a library upgrade, has been confiscated by the Department of Education?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't think that's accurate.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Well, it is. They're telling us it is. The P&C is telling us that's exactly what happened. Are you disputing that?

Ms PRUE CAR: I don't think that's accurate. We will come back to you on what is happening at Jannali.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you come back today because they're very concerned?

Ms PRUE CAR: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They've raised money. They'd really like to know that it's going towards what they raised it for—the library. And the Department of Education, they're telling us—and I don't see any reason to disbelieve them; I don't think they're making it up. But why should the students at Jannali High School go without the essential library upgrade simply because the department didn't provide enough funding to cover the school's cost? It doesn't seem at all fair.

Ms PRUE CAR: Well, I've committed that we'll come back to you on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just correct one of the things that Ms Higginson said to me. She said that she hasn't received a response. I'm advised that a response was provided to Ms Higginson on 20 February by the Parliamentary Secretary.

The CHAIR: That concludes this part of the day. Thank you very much to the Deputy Premier and to Ms Houssos for attending. We will see the rest of you after lunch at 2.00 p.m.

(The Ministers withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms MARY NOY, Executive Director, Health, Safety and Staff Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms ALEXANDRA SNELLING, Acting Executive Director, Professional and Ethical Standards, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, can I come back to you on the voluntary contributions question. Do you have the 2025 figures?

MURAT DIZDAR: They've been trending down since 2019. Let me see if I have the figure. I don't, so let me come back on notice, but I can tell you it's been trending down since 2019.

The CHAIR: When you come back on notice on those things, I understand there are a few different categories, a few different line items. There would be extracurricular, there's a subject, and there's also sports and things, isn't there?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back with the category breakdowns, if you like.

The CHAIR: That would be great. Thank you. Are you able to do that in the course of this afternoon? Is there someone who can provide those to you?

MURAT DIZDAR: If they send it through to me, I'll make sure I read it out to you; otherwise, I'll come back on notice.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: That would be very useful. In terms of canteen sales, I know that amount went up in the last report. Do you have any figures on that line item?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it in front of me. Is that okay if I come back as a package on those things?

The CHAIR: Yes, that would be good. If you could tell me, those canteen sales, that line item, is that an indication of the licence amounts that are collected from people that those canteen premises have been licensed to, or is it a figure of profit made from the sale of items?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't want to get it wrong for you, Ms Boyd. There's a number of canteens that are P&C operated, school operated, and then there's a number that are leased out to private operators. When I come back with the figure, let me spell that out for you.

The CHAIR: That would be great. We've got here excursions as one category, sports and extracurricular activity, and subject contributions. I'm trying to get an understanding of exactly how much out of pocket contribution is being made.

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said, let me come back with the specific figures, but since 2019 both voluntary contributions and subject contributions have been trending down in a global amount for the system.

The CHAIR: Have you got any visibility over the amount of in-kind contributions being made by teachers? This is one of those things that we do hear anecdotally where teachers are saying that they need to buy books and pens and things or they simply won't have enough. Is any work being done within the department to try to get any hard data on what that looks like?

MURAT DIZDAR: No. We don't have centralised data on that. We do provide all necessary resources to our schools. I am across what you're saying, as a former teacher. I also made decisions around things that I would buy to supplement my teaching and learning practice. Obviously, I did that as a decision I made and I could use that on tax purposes but, you know, the reports around things like whiteboard markers or things of that kind, we supply all those to schools and no teacher need buy that.

The CHAIR: We've got an acting commissioner for the new Early Learning Commission. As a result, we've also got an acting executive director for PES. When will those positions become no longer acting? When will we have them as permanent?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Boyd, the Early Learning Commission was set up on 1 December. It's a position that reports directly to the Minister. It responded to the Wheeler review that recommended an independent commission. Mr Currie, since 1 December, has been asked by the education Minister, the Minister for Early Learning, the Deputy Premier, to be the acting commissioner. When the Deputy Premier makes that appointment, whatever that may look like, I'll then make any subsequent movements. It's not a decision for me to make.

The CHAIR: I know.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a decision for the Deputy Premier.

The CHAIR: But you don't know where that is up to? Are you at all involved in the recruitment just as an adviser on a panel, or anything, or is that purely with the Minister?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was the Deputy Premier's decision to put Mr Currie in as acting commissioner. It wasn't my decision. I didn't have any involvement with that, but I do support the decision.

The CHAIR: No, I mean for the permanent appointment. I'm trying to get an idea of what the likely time frame would be for putting a permanent commissioner in place.

MURAT DIZDAR: That'll be up to the Deputy Premier.

The CHAIR: I will go to you now, Mr Currie. I wanted to come back on this issue of devices, just to get a little bit of clarification on how the rules are working. I think it's fair to say that a lot of people were a bit surprised that the restriction that they thought was only applying to phones and taking photos also applied to wearable Fitbits and Apple watches and things. I understand your point about capability but, for example, I've got a Fitbit. I don't think it can take photos. I have no idea.

DARYL CURRIE: If it can't take photos, or have the capacity to store photos—so a photo taken off a phone and stored on a watch—then that is okay to wear. If it has no functionality to either take or store photos, then that is fine to wear. The confusion has been that people think that if they put the device into airplane mode and therefore it's not taking a photo, then it complies. But it doesn't if it has the capacity to do so if it is switched on. When they're on duty, they're actually supplying education, they can turn it on to take a photo, then that doesn't

CORRECTED

comply with the legislative change. That is why we have decided to do more communication around that—go out to talk to peak bodies but also send communication out with people so that clarity can be achieved.

The CHAIR: Why storage as well as taking the photo? If there's no ability for it to take a photo, but you could get a photo on there—

DARYL CURRIE: It's purely risk mitigation. If you have a phone at that site that can take a photo and then it gets stored on your watch, if that's a storage device—it's about limiting the capability or capacity of somebody to take a photo of a child. It's pure risk mitigation.

The CHAIR: Apologies—maybe there are devices I just don't know about—but I don't understand how having the capacity to have a photo that was taken somewhere else at another time on a device falls within what we're trying to capture, which is people not taking photos of children.

DARYL CURRIE: Correct. But if you're taking a photo with a phone and it's being stored on your watch and it's not on the phone, the evidence isn't there on the phone. It's stored on the watch, it can be—I'm not saying—

The CHAIR: I see.

DARYL CURRIE: We know that the vast majority of educators, the vast majority of providers and workers are not doing the wrong thing. It's about limiting the ability for people to use technology to get around legislation regarding capturing pictures of children.

The CHAIR: We're all on board with what it's trying to do. If you've got a phone and you've taken a picture of a child when you shouldn't have, and you've stored it in a locker, say, if someone—

DARYL CURRIE: Or you've stored it on the other device so it's not actually there.

The CHAIR: But the actual problem is the taking of the photo. As long as you don't have something that takes a photo in the environment with children, then how does it matter that you've got a device that could have a photo on it?

DARYL CURRIE: If the device cannot take a photo and cannot store a photo, you can wear it.

The CHAIR: We agree with the first bit. It's the storage-only bit, which is confusing and doesn't seem to actually mitigate any particular risk.

DARYL CURRIE: I can go back and we can look at it, but it's all about risk mitigation. These were the decisions that were made to limit all risk regarding covert photos being taken. But we can go back and actually look at that and clear it up in the communication. The key thing though—the biggest issue that we are seeing are phones that do have the capacity to take a photo that are being switched on to flight mode and thinking that that is complying. That's the biggest issue that we're seeing. But we will go back and have a look and clear that up.

The CHAIR: I'd appreciate that because people are saying that, for example, if they have something like I have, it's actually making them less safe on the floor because they used to be able to—while they were changing a nappy, they could voice control to tell their watch to do a particular thing or to monitor. They could set timers and do all sorts of things with their watches. They didn't know that they could even store a photo on there and now suddenly they don't have that capability.

DARYL CURRIE: I commit to go back and have a look at it and speak to the sector and communicate with it a bit better.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To Mr Graham, who is deputy secretary for teaching, what are the plans for 2026 to ensure explicit instruction is being used in every classroom in New South Wales?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, happy to talk about explicit teaching. The department in its plan for public education has a clear statement that will prioritise explicit teaching based on high expectations and the use of formative assessment. We've had every teacher and every school undertake professional development as part of a school development day on this. We have a plan for explicit teaching. We have an explicit teaching statement that we work closely with AERO on. We have professional learning right through the system on explicit teaching. That goes from the leadership of explicit teaching—we're working with the School Leadership Institute for leaders. We've got it for high school teachers, primary school teachers. It's built into all the materials. You shouldn't have to just go to professional learning about explicit teaching. If you're doing literacy and numeracy—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But how do you know it's happening in the classroom? I've got a plan for my kids to do homework, but I only know they've done the homework when I check.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's right. The important part is it's built into our whole system. For example, the School Excellence Framework has explicit teaching as a key part of expectations for schools. When they have

CORRECTED

the routine work that happens between the director of educational leadership and the school, it's built into that process. I don't think there's any DEL at the moment who's not seeing a huge amount of evidence of explicit teaching happening in schools.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do principals have to certify that, in every classroom of theirs, explicit teaching is the main pedagogy?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can help there, Mr Latham. We've set a clear expectation that that should be part of the school excellence plan. I think where you're spot on is—the challenge will be across 95,000 classrooms to get the consistency and understanding of practice. This goes to an earlier answer with the mandating of ITE, initial teacher education, with explicit teaching. When I walked into Ashcroft High in '97, I walked out of Sydney Uni without training in explicit teaching. I was just fortunate enough that John Norris and Gary Joannides, who led the school at the time, were actually driving explicit systematic teaching. That's what we are doing. It'll take us a bit of time to build up that workforce. What I see as I move across the State, Mr Latham, is there are schools and many classrooms in that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you can't be a one-person verification unit, can you? What guarantees that it's actually happening in 95,000 classrooms, which is a hell of a lot? Because, let's face it, teachers love going to conferences where there are all sorts of wacky stuff that they're told is the latest fad of the day. If they follow that approach and forget about the fundamentals, then we go backwards.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, the good news is there's no wacky stuff being delivered by us. It's explicit teaching. That's all of our PL. That's everything that we're driving. Mr Graham is right around the DEL. I've been in those roles and Ms Summerhayes can talk to how—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do the DELs verify that?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Yes, they can, Mr Latham. There are 114 directors of education leadership. They look after 20 to 22 principals in a network. Since we've brought in the explicit teaching focus, those DELs have part of their responsibility to work with their principals—not just in conversation, but they go into the schools and they observe classrooms. They do learning walks. Colleagues from other schools will join them doing that. It's part of the regular conversation about what's it looking like from kindergarten to year 6 or 7 to 12 in your school.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you've made that a major part of the work of the DELs—to check that it's explicit teaching that is happening?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Absolutely, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's good. While I've got you there, Ms Summerhayes, I saw in *The Daily Telegraph*, that organ of record, on 17 December—I hope this is true—the department for the first time released value-added data about school performance, in this case the top 20 Sydney high schools and top 10 regional high schools, as measured by years 9 to 12 growth between 2019 and 2024. Why hasn't all the value-added data for every school been released, given it's the fairest, most consistent measure of school success, and parents and students have got a right to know?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I might ask the secretary to address that because you're talking about whole-of-system data, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You gave the top 20 in Sydney and the top 10 in regional. Why don't we get the top 2,200?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've been doing the same for HSC because we concur wholeheartedly with you. The ultimate measure is growth and what value a school adds. We're showing that data to every school. We were just trying to highlight—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why can't you show the public?

MURAT DIZDAR: We were trying to show and highlight those schools that are punching above their weight. We've made them features of the CESE What Works Best series that we've updated. Mr Latham, I'm not sure if you've seen the updates.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, I've looked at that. I've also studied this material that you've released. What conclusions has the department reached about the data, given that 15 of the top 20 Sydney high schools were in Western Sydney? Perhaps counterintuitive for some but a reality once you visit these schools—does it say something, for example, about the importance of parental commitment to education in the predominantly

CORRECTED

Asian communities in the Fairfield LGA, which seems to have pretty good representation in the top value-added schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: Cabramatta High School and Canley Vale High School and Fairvale High School across a decade feature really heavily. Of course, we want every parent to be supportive of their child's education. That looks different in different contexts. But when you ask what did it reveal, it revealed that we need to double down on the ingredients of high expectations, explicit teaching, effective feedback, schools using data to inform their practice at a global level in the classroom, the importance of assessment, the importance of collective efficacy. They're the features of what works.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, we know what works. The great puzzle is always why doesn't it work everywhere.

MURAT DIZDAR: That is the big challenge in a big system to get that right across 95,000 classrooms. I want to thank the workforce for coming with us. If you look at the nation, Mr Latham, in some other jurisdictions, they've had excitement around trying to take this direction, whereas here, 2½ years ago, we put our colours to the mast and the workforce is coming with us. In fact, many in the workforce—some of those schools that you visited that are well down the track—have said, "Hooray, the system's come out and really backed it in and we've been liberated." We've also been partnering very strongly, Mr Latham, with AERO and are filming illustrations of practice with them, because what teachers also like to do is actually see other New South Wales practitioners in action delivering explicit teaching.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We look forward to the data you're going to release. The Minister promised data about how this percolates into overall academic performance. Given that you have extensive value-added data—and I think that's fantastic; what gets measured gets done—what use is made to identify and intervene with schools that are underperforming? What are you doing about the weakest 100 schools value added or value declined in the State, the bottom 5 per cent? Is this the new method of intervention to give them extra support and change to lift up their performance?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a really good question. I just want to round out the value-add part for you too with every school. I know you are a regular examiner of My School but now, for every school in Australia, on My School there is actually student growth data. It's a new reporting feature that's there as well, which is good because then you can look at different socio-economics and see how you're comparing for similar contexts. For those that are struggling to demonstrate school improvement, this is where we go in with our strategic support. If that's in literacy or numeracy—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's what it's called now—strategic support. It used to be something else, didn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: We used to sometimes label it intensive support. We do call it strategic support and we go in and help those schools.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: How many schools in New South Wales have gone backwards in their value added in the period of 2019 to 2024? Have you got that data?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have that sort of data.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Maybe you can take that on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me see what we've got. Every school has a success measure around reading, around numeracy, around attendance and, to your question earlier around getting kids into jobs, around pathways as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Martin, do you handle the homeschooling numbers now or has that moved to the department?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's moved to the department.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What are the latest numbers about the growth in homeschooling? And have you got a handle on where these homeschoolers come from? Are they coming out of government schools or non-government? One would expect it's out of government schools, isn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: The function moved across from NESAs to the Department of Education in May 2025. I might get Ms Summerhayes to tell you any data we have on the numbers.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: We're close to 13,000 students in homeschooling. Since the homeschooling came over to the department in May, we've been engaged with consultation with the homeschooling stakeholders as well as any interested parents, carers or other stakeholders across the country that

CORRECTED

wanted to contribute to the conversation. You can appreciate it's early days—we've only had the group since May—but the feedback that we've been receiving ranges from anything from philosophical, religious, ability of child, family beliefs about how well children are catered for in schools. It's a really broad church in terms of the people that we're working with in homeschooling.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Of these 13,000, which is a rising number, what proportion come out of government schooling and what proportion come out of non-government into homeschooling?

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

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you all for coming back to play a bit more. I think we were talking about the budget. Ms McCabe or somebody might like to come up with those numbers that I asked for in relation to teachers' employee-related expenses.

MELINDA McCABE: I'm happy to take that one, Ms Ward. For the 2025-26 from the budget papers, approximately 74 per cent of that employee-related expenses relates to teachers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's helpful. I appreciate you coming straight back with that. I might ask you a couple more questions on that, unless you would prefer to take these, Mr Dizdar. It's a matter for you.

MURAT DIZDAR: Between the two of us, we'll do our best to help.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Looking at those numbers for employee-related expenses on page 6-2, if the budget papers are correct, we've gone from—given that some 74 per cent of those are employee related, it's essentially revised down, isn't it? There's a cut between those two years—2024-25 and 2025-26—of about, broadly, \$86 million in employee-related expenses. Is that right?

MELINDA McCABE: Maybe I'll unpack that first. The number that I gave you before was just related to teachers. The numbers that we're looking at there on page 6-2 of the budget papers is everything. Also, you're comparing then the budget number for this year, 2025-26, to the revised numbers from 2025.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am, yes.

MELINDA McCABE: And then we'll do that same process this year when we revise the numbers in year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But assuming that I'm not incorrect in saying there is a cut, even with the revised numbers and the vast majority of that budget being employee-related expenses, that's around 0.6 per cent of the entire budget. That's about right, isn't it?

MELINDA McCABE: Approximately.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm a lawyer, not an accountant, so forgive me—a recovering lawyer. I understand that teacher salaries will be about 3 per cent higher in 2025-26 than 2024-25. That's right, isn't it?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a 3 per cent pay rise later this year in October.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are there similar salary increases for most other departmental workers?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's dependent on government wages. Teachers were in a three-year award and they're set.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that. Do the other employee-related costs get a similar increase? Are you saying you don't know, or no?

MURAT DIZDAR: No. The employee-related cost at what I'd describe as the centre has also been reducing because I have reduced the consultancy spend and the contractor spend.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: By how much?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've reduced the consultancy spend by 79 per cent since March 2023. On contractors, I have reduced the number by about 2,000 contractors in that time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right. We might compare apples and apples. If you might perhaps be able to come back with that in dollar terms, that might help given we're talking about dollar terms.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell you the dollar terms on the consultants, if you would like?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. While you're looking for that, taking into account the salaries per employee will be higher—so at least with the teachers component, which is the vast majority, the teacher salaries will be 3 per cent higher. That suggests, doesn't it, that with the lower overall budget there's got to be a cut of around 3.6 per cent of the number of full-time employees?

CORRECTED

MELINDA McCABE: I think what you heard from Mr Dizdar was that 3 per cent is in October, so it'll fall outside this financial year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay. You might just talk into the microphone, I'm sorry.

MELINDA McCABE: Sorry. I'm just clarifying the date of the 3 per cent, which is October 2026, falls outside of this financial year that we're looking at here.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But between the two numbers there's, let's say, a decrease in the budget.

MELINDA McCABE: Correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The vast majority of that is teachers, or employee costs—sorry, teachers, you've said.

MELINDA McCABE: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given that, and given that they've got an increase, there has to have been a cut, doesn't there? You can't pay more and budget less. You must be budgeting for less teachers.

MELINDA McCABE: For teachers, are you saying?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MELINDA McCABE: No, not for teachers, I understand.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How does that work? What is the assumption then?

MELINDA McCABE: Can I just kind of play back to you so I understand the right question. You're looking at the 2025-26 budget statements.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MELINDA McCABE: And so you're comparing that to the revised numbers from the previous year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Correct. It is less.

MELINDA McCABE: Obviously we'll revise the numbers again in April this year, so we're not kind of doing apples and apples there. If I compare it to the original budget, it has actually gone up from the original budget in 2025. The revised budget comes through in April, and we'll do that again this April. The comparison—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So understanding that context—yes, I get that. That's fair. I don't want to mislead this. But given that, and given there's overall a 3 per cent increase in salaries and what appears to be, depending on the actual revised, when it comes down—what is the budget assumption then for the change of number of FTE teachers in the budget?

MELINDA McCABE: Not a change in the FTE numbers of teachers there. What you're seeing is what the secretary talked about, which is head office projects that might have finished or budget reductions for employee-related for head office.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can we get those numbers?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can give you the numbers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: For head office?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. There's been a \$112 million reduction in contractor spend between 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you say contractor, does that come under employee related?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're still employees of the organisation, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you get \$112 mil.

MURAT DIZDAR: And the consultancy spend—I referenced a 79 per cent reduction—in 2024-25 was \$413,175.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That was the reduction?

MURAT DIZDAR: That was the actual spend.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So for contractors, you've told me a dollar figure. Can you also provide a dollar figure?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: In the '22 year it was 3.38—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, just what you've reduced the spend by.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've gone from \$3.383 million to \$413,175.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There must be some kind of assumption in the budget. Can you tell me what that is for the change in number of FTE support staff in the budget? What assumptions have you made?

MURAT DIZDAR: Are you speaking about the central part of the organisation or teachers?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The whole budget assumption for your full-time employee numbers. I don't care how you slice or dice it.

MURAT DIZDAR: Our employee cost inside the school gates has risen, and it's offset by some of the reductions I've made inside the centre.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So just on teachers—let's put aside consultants and contractors and all the other bits and pieces, as important as they are. What I'm trying to understand is that the Public Sector Report 2025 said there were 70,206 FTE teachers at June 2025. What is the budget assuming for 2025-26?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll have to take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can someone come back with that this afternoon? It's a pretty big figure. I would have thought it's something that's pretty central in your budget planning.

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll do our best. If we can't come back to you this afternoon, we'll come back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you're doing that on notice, can I be clear that the information you'll be providing will be the budget assumption for 2025-26, disregarding consultants and contractors and addressing the issue of the Public Sector Report for 2025 saying 70,206 FTE teachers at June 2025?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would be really helpful. While you're doing that, can you give a breakdown of all of those jobs that are being scrapped this financial year?

MURAT DIZDAR: The contractors and consultants?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just teachers.

MURAT DIZDAR: We haven't scrapped teacher numbers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So not a single teacher number has changed?

MURAT DIZDAR: The headcount has gone up.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So then any other jobs or any FTE positions that have been scrapped, and what they are.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we'll do our best.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Incidentally, what's the budget assumption for total public school enrolments, for student numbers?

MURAT DIZDAR: We discussed enrolments. Enrolments are captured by the Commonwealth in term 3 each year for every jurisdiction, and then they're reported on by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in March of the following year. They're not assumptions I make.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What is the budget assumption, though, for public school enrolments?

MURAT DIZDAR: I just said how it works. What we do is we have anticipated and actual enrolments—that's how we staff our schools—and then the Commonwealth captures those figures in term 3 for every jurisdiction.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And then you—

MURAT DIZDAR: We provide that to the Commonwealth as a term 3 figure in or around August-September. They're the numbers that are reported on by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in March the following year for the previous year's school enrolment numbers.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's a helpful explanation of the process, but the budget itself must be based on a forecast. I'm asking: What is that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me grab that for you on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can we have that this afternoon?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll do our best, like we do with everything. If we can't, we'll come back on notice like we do at every estimates.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We have three hours. It would just be helpful. Given it's a huge assumption on the number of students, I would have thought someone in the thousands of those diligently watching at home could provide something. I understand the process, but there must be an assumption in this budget—in budget estimates—about what that is.

MURAT DIZDAR: I hope they're not watching. I hope they're getting on with their important jobs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In any event, what is your forecast for 2026 for student enrolments?

MURAT DIZDAR: We covered that forecast this morning. We've got a forecast out to 2034, which we set an ambitious target around. And then we covered the fact that, for our schools, we've set a '28 ambition as a point along the way. We look at our numbers every year in term 3.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand. I was here this morning, so I don't need a rinse and repeat. I'm asking: What is your forecast for 2026?

MURAT DIZDAR: I won't know what the numbers are until August-September, later this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you would surely, as head of the Department of Education, running a budget of this size with many employees there—I'm not asking about the ambition. I'm asking about the forecasts that you have for 2026—for this year, which we're already into March of—about public school enrolments for students in this year. You must surely have that number.

MURAT DIZDAR: You asked about the assumptions for the budget and I said we'll come back to you on that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm asking now about what your assumption is for 2026, for school enrolments for this year, which we're already in.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll know the enrolment numbers in August-September this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I'm asking what your forecast is at this point in time.

MURAT DIZDAR: My forecast is to keep working to grow them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So no-one in the entire Department of Education can tell me what your forecast is for student numbers for 2026 enrolments?

MURAT DIZDAR: To grow them from where—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is that what you're telling this Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, that's not what I'm saying. That's what you're saying; that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that the process for data is a consistent process right across the country, and it involves every jurisdiction, every sector providing their enrolment numbers in August-September of that school year. I don't make that process. The Commonwealth does that process, and then it's reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in March the following year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr Dizdar. I think you've said that already, and that is the process. I'm not asking—with respect—about the process. I am asking: What's your forecast for 2026 public student enrolments?

MURAT DIZDAR: My forecast is to grow enrolment share to 65.5 per cent by 2034.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's that increase this year?

MURAT DIZDAR: And I've worked with schools to have a '28 target around that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's when you get an actual number. So your forecast is what, at the moment, as we sit here today in budget estimates?

MURAT DIZDAR: To keep growing enrolments.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. By how much?

MURAT DIZDAR: To get to 65.5 per cent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And what's your forecast for this year?

MURAT DIZDAR: From where we are at the end of the '25 reporting period, which was just released recently?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: Which was just under 62 per cent market share.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Dizdar, we can sit here all afternoon and this can be as excruciating as you like. I can't honestly believe that everybody in this room is seriously telling this Committee that there is no forecast. You have an ambition, but there's no forecast for student enrolments for this year?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure I can answer it in any different way apart from repeating myself. I wouldn't characterise it as excruciating. I'm just trying to help the Committee. I've told you that we've set—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can grab my thesaurus and we can workshop some other words.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've set ambition for '28 with every school in the system, and we set ambition for the system out to '35.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But you must surely understand—how on earth do you fund, staff, resource and make all those decisions without an idea of student numbers for the next year?

MURAT DIZDAR: We have a census date in the system to staff our schools on, and then the Commonwealth captures those numbers in August-September.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, but that's process. This is a \$14 billion budget. Mr Dizdar, I've given you plenty of opportunity, with respect, to answer this. Do you agree that you're being evasive and you're refusing to answer a question to which you know the answer?

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm putting it to him squarely.

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

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: *Browne v Dunn*.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: The member is repeatedly asking the same question in various different ways, which I believe Mr Dizdar has taken on notice and undertaken to provide an answer. I don't think it's procedurally fair or respectful or courteous to the witness to continue along this line of questioning and badgering. I ask her to withdraw the final remark, which I think mischaracterised Mr Dizdar's good character.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Chair, I have sought at all times to be entirely courteous and put to the witness a question in budget estimates about the budget. I won't be withdrawing. *Browne v Dunn*—I'm giving him the opportunity. I'm squarely putting it to him so that he has the opportunity to answer the allegation that I'm making. It's fair to say that after six or seven questions I haven't received an answer on the number, and I am entitled to ask whatever questions I like. He's entitled to answer however he likes.

The CHAIR: I agree that courtesy needs to be extended and I remind everyone to be conscious of that, but I do not uphold the point of order in relation to the repeated question. It is up to the member how she wishes to use her time, and the secretary is well entitled to repeat the answer if that's what he chooses to do.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On a further point of order, the Hon. Natalie Ward is undertaking the unique technique of actually quoting from the budget papers in budget estimates. How long can this go on? This is so unusual a practice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I bring them every time, Mr Latham—even as a Minister.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's so unusual.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: They are fascinating reading.

The CHAIR: Continue.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Dizdar, I put it to you again: *Browne v Dunn*. It's only fair. We have gone back and forth on this. Are you seriously telling this Committee that as the head of the Department of Education, with thousands of employees, with a budget of \$14 billion, you cannot tell us that you have a number for public school enrolments that you use as your forecast?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the '26 figures in front of me, so I'm happy to come back on notice with what we've got.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But why is it that you can't do that today in budget estimates, in a hearing where you oversee a budget, you make planning decisions for the resourcing, and there is a number out there somewhere?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm happy—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You and I both know that, and everybody else playing at home knows as well. What are we hiding?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back to you with what we've got on the '26 figures.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This afternoon?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I've said with other questions you've asked me, if I can come back this afternoon, I will. If I'm unable to, I'll come back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You've got three hours, so it would be terrific if somebody out there could find the number. That would be very helpful.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Could we look at issues relating to teacher misconduct? Mr Dizdar, in 2024 and again in 2025, how many teachers have been sacked or placed on the "not to be employed" list over sexual misconduct with students?

MURAT DIZDAR: A very small number, but I'll come back on notice with what that is. I don't have it in front of me. In a workforce of 95,000, the professionalism and conduct tends to be exemplary, but there are some that transgress that code of conduct. I'll come back to you with the number.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, do you agree that reporting is now radically less transparent than previously?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I don't agree.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Why did the department decide not to make public these incidents in its annual reporting of teacher performance and conduct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Because I have to protect, in my role, the required privacy and potential identification of individuals.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But, Mr Dizdar, nothing in the 2028 to 2023 format disclosed any details which would identify individuals or give details of offending. It would just be the nature, in terms of "casual teacher".

MURAT DIZDAR: Just for *Hansard*, Ms Merton, I know you meant 2018 to 2023—I think you said 2028. We haven't got to 2028 yet. Like I said, I've got to be respectful of the privacy and potential identification of individuals, including whether criminal proceedings are afoot or not. I'll still provide data, but I'll have to be mindful of protecting the identification of individuals.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It was done earlier, and issues around confidentiality were addressed and weren't a concern. The issue is what's changed now.

MURAT DIZDAR: I've been secretary since about March-April 2023, and I've received advice that I need to be really careful with what I release by way of the privacy and the identification of individuals.

The CHAIR: Could I ask Ms Noy some questions, while we have her, in relation to workers compensation. Are you able to tell me, for regional psych claims, what the primary cause of injury is in the department?

MARY NOY: I actually don't have the data in front of me for psychological claims or the nature of those based on region, but I can come back on notice if you like.

The CHAIR: That would be good—and how it compares to metro. That would be very useful. Do you have the data—I know when I asked last time, it looked like the work pressure and bullying/harassment claims

CORRECTED

had been going down, but that bullying claims perhaps had been going up. What's that looking like in the latest figures?

MARY NOY: I am pleased to report that our total workers compensation claim numbers have been trending down since 2022-23, when we had a total of 6,418. In 2023-24 that reduced to 5,768, and in 2024-25 it reduced again to 5,642. Year to date for this financial year, at 31 December we are tracking well, with 2,670, so that is looking like a further reduction. With regards to work harassment or bullying claims. I did mention last time we were seeing a positive trend downwards. In 2023-24 we received 386 claims. In 2024-25 we did see a reduction to 354. Year to date this financial year, at 31 December we've received 152, so it is tracking down.

The CHAIR: That's good. Sorry, did you put bullying in there or did we just do workers—

MARY NOY: Work harassment and bullying is sort of—

The CHAIR: Work harassment and bullying was the first one, great. That's excellent. How many workers comp claims result from occupational violence?

MARY NOY: I'll have to come back to you on notice with that question.

The CHAIR: Also, outside of claims for workers compensation, how many occupational violence incidents happen in schools, that you're aware of?

MARY NOY: We do receive reports to our injury hotline around a myriad of categories. We'll have to come back to you on notice with that as well, as I don't have that data in front of me.

The CHAIR: I think what I'll do now is go to Ms Snelling, because I'm aware we've only got you until three o'clock as well. Does Professional and Ethical Standards currently triage allegations into different investigative streams? What are those streams?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: Can you explain for me a little bit there, Chair? I think my answer is no, but just to make sure that I understand what you're asking.

The CHAIR: There have been some suggestions that it might be useful if you did. When you've got complaints coming in, is there a way in which you allocate different resources to them? How do you triage these claims when they come in?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: We have a preliminary investigations team. That preliminary investigations team receives—I can give you the exact figure—in the vicinity of between 4,000 and 5,000 referrals per year. They do a preliminary investigation into all of the matters that we receive and then, obviously, the ones that require a full investigation get allocated. We have a number of investigation teams. I think, if I understand what you're asking, no, the numbers—if something needs to get allocated for investigation, it gets allocated based on availability of investigators and there are no defined streams per se. So is it right, Chair, if I said—do we have investigators doing child protection and ones doing fraud? No, that isn't the case. We do, of course, have a range of skills in our investigators, so we do try to target particularly high risk ones, if the resources permit and where that makes sense. But, no, every investigator does every type of investigation.

The CHAIR: Is there a different process for something like a serious misconduct investigation versus a general negligence or misconduct investigation? Is there a seriousness divider—

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: No, they all follow the same process. What I would say is the difference in process is that different inquiries are required, obviously, of different types of investigation. If we're talking about a child protection allegation, obviously most of the time it would be witness evidence based. Whereas, if you're talking about a serious wrongdoing or fraud investigation, it may be very document based. They follow different paths in that respect. But in terms of the procedure, they're all conducted in accordance with our guidelines for the management of conduct and performance, which are created under the Teaching Service Act and the education support Act.

The CHAIR: What's the average time taken to finalise an investigation at the moment?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: In 2025, 95 per cent of matters were finished within 12 months.

The CHAIR: Is there any data available that breaks that down into types of investigations, like serious misconduct versus others?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: I could give you that. I would have to take it on notice, because we would need to break it up, and I'd just need to be clear how you would want that broken up.

The CHAIR: I guess serious misconduct investigations versus general negligence or misconduct investigations. What the average is for—

CORRECTED

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: Perhaps we could break it into reportable conduct—that's ones that the Office of the Children's Guardian oversees—serious wrongdoing and then generalised misconduct. They're kind of the three. Would that be helpful?

The CHAIR: Yes, perfect. What percentage of investigations get referred to external agencies?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: I immediately went to say none. Do you mean for them to do or for oversight?

The CHAIR: If you're looking at a matter and it becomes clear that actually it's something that the police should be involved in, or someone else—how many of those?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: I don't have the exact figures on that. There are a few things to be mindful of. We don't outsource any of our investigations. Occasionally we do if there is a conflict of interest, but that is kind of counting on one hand the times that we would do that. We make reports via the secretary to the Independent Commission Against Corruption, and they oversight some of our corrupt conduct investigations. We also make reports of reportable allegations to the Office of the Children's Guardian, and they oversight a category of our matters. And then our preliminary investigation team and all of our investigators are well versed in when a matter may amount to a criminal offence, and we engage the police, obviously, around those as well. I would be able to get figures on, for example, how many matters we had last year that involved a report to police. We could pull something like that on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: I know this is obvious, how many of the matters would cease while the external authority is conducting their work. Sometimes they might ask us to assist with certain aspects but they would take carriage of the matter. When the matter is finalised at their end, we would then pick up any actions that we were going to possibly take as well.

The CHAIR: Got it. You said that 95 per cent of them are finalised within 12 months, so for that other 5 per cent, how long are we talking? How many of them are finalised within 18 months?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: I could get you the figures but it's very much on a case-by-case basis. We know that we experience a number of delays based on factors that are outside of our control. For example, as Mr Dizdar has recognised, we've had a police investigation, we've had delays in the Local Court and District Court that we've had to wait through. It is also quite common for a person to be found not guilty in a criminal matter and then we would have to pick it up at the end of a court process and then run a misconduct investigation, which obviously impacts time frames significantly. While the complexity of issues is one aspect, the other thing that we work closely with Ms Noy's directorate on is when we have health and wellbeing issues with either the person who is subject of an investigation or also sometimes the witnesses or the victims in the matter. We are really just trying to get them to engage so we can do a full and thorough investigation and ensure it's a robust one.

The CHAIR: Who is PES's PES?

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: As I said before, we are closely oversighted particularly by the Office of the Children's Guardian. I can get you the figures. In my substantive role I did the ICAC reporting so I can—last year we made 129 notifications to the ICAC. They regularly ask us significant questions around what we're doing. Same as the Children's Guardian; they often send us inquiries under their Act. The other one that we often also deal with, or deal with very regularly, is the NSW Ombudsman.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've also had two reviews into PES, Chair. You're across the Tedeschi review and the Wheeler review.

The CHAIR: Has the Wheeler review been made public?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll have to take it on notice if we made it public.

The CHAIR: I think we've been trying to get a copy for a while.

ALEXANDRA SNELLING: It was released under GIPAA and I think it's on the disclosure log and you can ask for it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To the secretary, in September the Auditor-General produced a report on alternative school settings and homeschooling. Has the department accepted each of its findings and recommendations?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Ms Summerhayes to tell you the details but we accepted all the recommendations. There was different wording around different recommendations.

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Could I ask has action been taken on the main three? Firstly, expediting registration processing times to shorten transition periods. It can take a long while to get out of a school into homeschooling. So expediting the registration process to move into homeschooling, has that been—

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Ms Summerhayes to talk to that. Since May, when it came across from NESA—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Dizdar, you say you'll give it to Ms Summerhayes and then you answer it.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're in the rough timelines that NESA had at the same time, too. Ms Summerhayes might give you the specifics.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: We appreciate your expertise, but if someone's got line duty of it then it would be good to get that answer.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: We are working and reducing the time frames, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You are?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Yes, we are.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Additionally, departmental oversight and support for students in homeschooling?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Yes. Part of what I mentioned to you before about consulting with stakeholders and parents has been part of that discussion as well. We take very seriously our oversight of our children, particularly in the child protection space. There's work happening in that space as well. I think you can appreciate that we are working very hard to get the unit working well as we move forward. But it is very new for us and bringing folk on board.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So that's a priority to get this unit up?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Absolutely a priority.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Because there was a fear in moving it to the department out of NESA that things would slow down because the department's got a bit of an incentive not to allow homeschooling to flourish.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: We take our responsibility to all of the children in our care very seriously, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's good to hear. Could I ask among the officials here today who's in charge of the Football in Schools program?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ultimately myself as secretary, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And below you? Who actually does it day to day?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's administered out of Mr Graham's area.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Graham, you know a bit about Football in Schools?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's very good to hear, because there appears to be a racket underway in south-west Sydney where in return for party political donations the Macarthur Bulls soccer club and also Liverpool Olympic club are lavished with multiple government grants, Federal and State, while other clubs miss out. In particular, why does the education department fund the private company owning Macarthur Bulls for the Football in Schools program when clearly much of that money is used for other purposes such as head office costs, insurance, \$121,000 for printing and also T-shirts and advertising? Why is this allowed?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The Football in Schools program, there are two clubs, the Macarthur Bulls and the Western Sydney Wanderers—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm just interested in the Macarthur Bulls.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Certainly. So the Macarthur Bulls, they're funded for three programs. There's the Bulls in Schools program, which is a program run in schools. There's a girls-only program, which is run after school and in the holidays. There are multicultural programs, which are after school and in the holidays. They cover foundational ball skills and important things that children need to do to get off screens, get outside. There

CORRECTED

is an agreement with the department which clearly indicates what outputs are required of the club and also the conditions.

I think it's important to note, as is normal with these grants, a proportion of head office costs are permitted under the agreements. For example, they employ someone to run the program; that is acceptable expenditure. T-shirts are important. For example, the girls-only program, it's after school and in the school holidays. If the students are out on a field where there's lots of other people perhaps playing in the school holidays, as they should be, it's really important for child protection purposes that we're able to identify the students in that program. Absolutely, T-shirts are a permitted expenditure under the program.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: At any time have you or anyone else in the department seen the internal accounting documents by which the Macarthur Bulls themselves account for how this money is being used?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We have just undertaken an audit of the program. Grant Thornton, the auditors, have gone in and audited them. I've met with the auditors and they've gone through the program. So they've gone and individually, as auditors do—go and look at individual transactions. So they check for receipts. They go through the books of the clubs and do that work.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the status of that audit? Is that going to be made public for the purposes of financial transparency?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I can certainly look at what we'd be able to release and what might be privileged information. I've met with the auditors. They've delivered that audit. I've also met with the clubs about the results of that audit.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When did they deliver that, please?

MARTIN GRAHAM: They delivered that in December 2024.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: December 2024?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Sorry, '25. It seems to have gone—it seems to be a long time since then. We've been very busy.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've got in front of me a document headed as "Macarthur FC, profit and loss, Department of Education funding for the year ended 30 June 2024", where the club is booking a gross profit from the program of \$878,000, having covered operating expenses of \$443,000 for head office staff, \$82,000 for insurance, \$87,000 for media and social media, \$112,000 for printing and overall total operating expenses of \$884,000. Did the Grant Thornton audit reach back that far? And if the club is basically siphoning off money into its own purposes and seeing this as a gross profit-making opportunity to the extent of nearly \$900,000, how can that be justified?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have the document that you have in front of you. I'm not sure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Was Grant Thornton able to access Macarthur FC internal accounting of how they've been using the money?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm not sure what that document is but I think one of the issues might be—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've just told you what it is. It's from Macarthur FC Limited, a private company run by a multimillionaire, for the period ended 30 June 2024, profit and loss, Department of Education and training funding.

MURAT DIZDAR: The audit did go to financial acquittal as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Financial acquittal meaning what? They were able to access the Macarthur FC material?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I might be able to assist you. I think if that statement might actually reflect a carry-forward of funding. So the agreement we reached with the club—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They don't say that. They call it a gross profit.

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm not an accountant. That might be something that you might want to take up as an accounting treatment or a technical term.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On notice, can you find out if Grant Thornton accessed documents such as this? I've given you a description of what it says. The club holds it. I've got hold of it now, but it comes from the club.

CORRECTED

MARTIN GRAHAM: I think if we could have a copy of the document, I might have a better chance of being able to do that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'll consider that, but I've given you a pretty good description of what it says and I'm asking on notice: Did the auditor access the way in which Macarthur FC itself accounts for these funds as opposed to what they tell you?

MARTIN GRAHAM: As professional auditors, they certainly access—they were satisfied with the information they could access to be able to undertake the audit required.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, no, did they get Macarthur FC accounting documents as part of their process?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's double-check for you, Mr Latham.

MARTIN GRAHAM: We can take that on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: If there's particular material you're prepared to give outside of the Committee, I'd value that too to take back to—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've given you a description of what it says.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The club appears to be spending 60 per cent of the Football in Schools funding on other purposes and 40 per cent on the actual program. Given this is inconsistent with the funding deed signed by the Government, why hasn't the program been cancelled and also referred to the New South Wales Auditor-General? Why did you go to Grant Thornton rather than the New South Wales Auditor-General, who obviously has a broader brief and greater public credibility?

MARTIN GRAHAM: That wasn't the finding of the audit.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But why did you go to Grant Thornton instead of the New South Wales—

MURAT DIZDAR: We didn't audit them ourselves, so rather than have our internal audit undertake it, that's why we went to an outside—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What did Thornton find on the split between funding on other purposes and actual funding on the program?

MARTIN GRAHAM: They did find that there were expenditures on head office expenditures, which were allowed under the program, and there were some findings around that, which included that some of the expenditure they've actually double-counted, so they actually spent less money on head office expenses than they'd reported to us because there was a double-counting of items within that expenditure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does the department regard Macarthur FC as appropriate role models in our schools—this is an important issue; they don't let any old joe into our schools—after its high-profile match-fixing scandal, a threat by one of its players to kill a New South Wales police officer and the adverse mention of the club owner, Gino Marra, in the District Court of WA in a mortgage loan scandal? Has there been a probity check about this outfit? Match-fixing people, a player threatening to kill a police officer and this adverse mention in the WA District Court raise concerns. Or, rather, was this sort of lumbered on you as a Labor election promise? The Labor candidates got donations, the Office of Sport found some money and you've had to administer it ever since. Did you do a probity check on Macarthur FC, who they are and this sort of worrying background to their activities?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham can add more detail, but the individuals who actually undertake the activities with children have got to have a Working with Children Check, on my understanding. As to the probity, let me take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Was there a check, other than Working with Children Check, which sometimes is handed out without full disclosure of the sort of matters that I've raised?

MURAT DIZDAR: Of prime importance to me has been, because these are after-school activities—some are in-school activities—making sure those individuals conducting those—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They had three players pinged for match-fixing, which is a very serious offence in sport.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, so let me take on notice whether they've been involved in the program or not.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Dizdar, how are you going with those numbers on student enrolments?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When do you anticipate you may have them?

MURAT DIZDAR: If I get them before the end of estimates, I'll read them out. If I can't, I'll come back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I put it to you, as head of this department, aren't these numbers so basic—teacher numbers and student numbers—they should be at your fingertips, surely?

MURAT DIZDAR: They're not as you characterise because they're captured in August-September, that's for the reporting purposes, but schools were just at the mid of term one. For staffing purposes, if I get a number that they send to me, I'm happy to give that to the Committee.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would be helpful. I would have thought that you'd be insisting on it in your role to do your job, with a budget coming down in May of this year from the State Government. How do you advise the Minister if you're relying on figures that you'll apparently not have until September or October?

MURAT DIZDAR: We staff our schools according to the numbers they return with, so if I've got that number I'll give that to you. But in terms of the funding that we obtain from the Commonwealth, we use the August-September numbers like everyone does.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And, again, that's the process, but I would have thought that with all of those staff and all those employees, somebody would be able to find the forecast number for student enrolments, given the importance of that to your role and to budget estimates today. I wouldn't have thought that everyone's sitting and waiting until September-October for that number.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure, and sorry to repeat myself, but if I get that advice I'll provide it to the Committee. If I don't get that advice, I'm happy to come straight back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What would be the difficulty in getting that advice? What's been the difficulty? I asked this this morning. What's the difficulty that it can't be—

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it in front of me.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —or are we just covering it up?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have it in front of me and I've got our folk undertaking their roles.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: At a previous estimates we had these forecasts. I tabled them.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. I don't have it in front of me. Let me chase it up in the break that's coming up.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I asked this morning, Mr Dizdar, and I asked when we came back immediately. I've asked and asked.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It's not a State secret, is it? It's not Cabinet in confidence; it's student numbers. It's not that difficult. We've had them before. There's no trick question here.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, and in the afternoon break I'll see if I can obtain them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We said that this morning and I'd be appreciative if, of the thousands of staff out there, somebody is able to get that number. I thought, just trying to help you, the number should be at your fingertips, particularly when you've got a budget coming. Can I get the actual number of enrolled students from September last year?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. That would have been what was reported by the ABS and that would have been the figures that you referenced earlier this morning with the market share at 81-point-something per cent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. Do you have the number?

MURAT DIZDAR: That number is around the 780,000 mark, but let me get you the exact number.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at the issue of demountables, are you aware that kindergarten enrolments at Austral Public School have increased from 33 in 2018 to 129 in 2025, being a 291 per cent increase? Are you aware of the growth of enrolments at Austral Public School?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. I'm really proud of our leadership there. Austral Public School—we've grown by 550 students in the last five years.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, can you confirm that Leppington Public School's kindergarten intake has increased from 40 to 103 students between 2018 and 2025, being a 158 per cent increase?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the Leppington numbers in front of me, but I take what you're reading.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Can you confirm that, as of 2025, Leppington Public School is operating with 11 demountable classrooms?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take on notice the amount of demountables it's got. I don't have every site and what demountables they have.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: At Austral Public School how many kindergarten classes are currently housed in demountables? Do you need to take that on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I don't have individual sites and figures.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What percentage of teaching spaces at Leppington Public School are now temporary structures?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have individual sites for you, Ms Merton. Demountables are a feature we use when there are growing enrolments that might precede what capital upgrades look like. We use boundary changes, the demographic shift in locations—I mean I don't have a list of individual sites here. We do publicly report on them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Would you be able to provide those reports relating to the question of—

MURAT DIZDAR: It's on our School Infrastructure website, yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is the number of demountables listed by school?

MURAT DIZDAR: I believe so, in the "Explore our schools" search.

LISA HARRINGTON: We do list the number of demountables per school. But I would say, for both Austral Public School and Leppington Public School, we're currently undertaking upgrades at both of those schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Upgrades relevant to?

LISA HARRINGTON: To deal with the growth, to address the capacity.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If we could confirm what the current situation is with demountables at those schools, that would be helpful. Mr Dizdar, can you guarantee that students in Austral and Leppington will not spend their entire primary school education in demountable classrooms?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think Ms Harrington just said we're underway with an upgrade at that school and they're normally designed to remove demountables.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, could we get details of that upgrade in terms of possibly the time frame in 12 months or 24 months, what we can expect in the grounds?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes, we can do that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, since March 2023, only one new school for specific purposes has been officially opened and completed in New South Wales. We have reports of another being relocated in the Gregory Hills area. What, if any, plans are in place to increase the number of places available for students in New South Wales in SSPs?

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to thank Ms Harrington and her team. We've established 280 support classes this year, to have the right provision for those students that may need adjustments. The vast bulk of our students that require adjustment or have a disability are in the mainstream and in support class structures.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Where will these SSPs be located?

MURAT DIZDAR: I was talking about support classes. They're located in the mainstream school.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If you could just confirm, how many places will be available?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I can tell you. I'll take on notice how many places that created. I don't have that figure in front of me, but I do know the 280 figure.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What money has been allocated in the last two budgets to fund these places?

MURAT DIZDAR: Significant funds go into low-level adjustment for disability through access request funding. That goes with these placements. But let me come back on notice with the quantum of those figures.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: More specifically, how many places are there in western and south-western Sydney of the 280 classes?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I come back on notice with that?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes. Are there waiting lists currently in place for each SSP?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, I can take something off notice and just give you the figure. I've found the figure for you. On the low-level adjustment for disability, we spent \$393 million as at 30 June 2025. This goes to all disability. On integration funding support, we spent \$550 million as at 31 December. On SSP, which is special schools supplementary funding, we spent \$43 million as at 31 December 2025. Sorry, I missed your last question. I reverted back to those figures.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What was the actual number of enrolled students from September last year?

MURAT DIZDAR: We had approximately 25,830 students that were enrolled in support classes in mainstream schools as at 19 December 2025. We had approximately 6,090 students who were enrolled in support classes in SSPs as at the same time period—19 December 2025. There are 4,810 support classes across the system as at 19 December 2025.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could have a look at Rhodes East Public School—once again, another area with significant population growth—what is the current status and timeline for the proposed Rhodes East Public School, given the Rhodes Place Strategy anticipates up to 4,200 new homes and thousands of new residents?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Harrington might help out if she's got any info on Rhodes East. Ms Harrington?

LISA HARRINGTON: We are in the process at the moment of acquiring the land for that primary school. We have identified a site. There are various lots. We're in the process of that now. Our time frame at the moment to meet the need in that community is day one, term 1, 2029. I also do have some more information on Austral and Leppington, if you would like. Later this year is when we plan to finish stage one of each of those upgrades. For Austral Public School and Leppington Public School, it's 20 permanent classrooms for each school. We have committed to stage two for both of those primary schools as well. We'll have some more information shortly about the design and the scope of stage two.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How many stages are in that?

LISA HARRINGTON: Two.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: On the Rhodes East Public School, Ms Harrington, why has the Department of Education project page remained in the early planning stage, without any updated information relevant to this school since 2023?

LISA HARRINGTON: We do try to do regular updates. We do recognise that the community, when a project is announced, is keen for information. I will need to check with the team around why we haven't had an update for that project. It has taken some time to engage with the developer to acquire those lots, and we are comfortable at this point that we can meet the service need with the existing schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just to confirm, a site for Rhodes East Public School has been finalised?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes, we have identified it, and we are also acquiring more lots to provide a public preschool co-located with the primary school.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the opening of the school, can we go that far?

LISA HARRINGTON: Day one, term 1, 2029.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could go to Castle Hill High School, you may recall at last estimates it was established that Castle Hill High School currently has 51 demountable buildings. We spoke about the growth in the area there. What action has the department taken to locate land for the construction of a new high school?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Harrington, do you want to dive in?

CORRECTED

LISA HARRINGTON: We are looking at land in that vicinity, obviously recognising we've got TODs nearby. I don't have any further information that I can share at this point apart from confirming that we are progressing that work to identify the land that we need for future schools in that area.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, can you advise the time frame for a decision for the construction of a new high school?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can advise that the work is underway at the moment. There's quite a lot of need in that north-west region. We are doing a lot of work to identify the right land, depending on where the houses are going. Last week the infrastructure opportunities plans were released by the department of planning. You'll see in the north-west plan there are quite a lot of education projects listed there. We are working really closely with Planning to make sure that we are going to identify and secure land that's near the houses.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So discussions and plans are still in place, but no commitments and no site finalised or identified.

LISA HARRINGTON: There are a lot of projects that we're doing in the North West Growth Area. We're not stopping, though. There is still more growth there, and we're still working with Planning to make sure we can meet that growth.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in February this year the Department of Education entered an enforceable undertaking with SafeWork NSW regarding the long-running asbestos management issue. As a result of being charged with breaching work health and safety laws, the department was forced to pay \$3.5 million to launch a new asbestos management plan at the school. What plans are in place to ensure the future safety of the Castle Hill High School community?

MURAT DIZDAR: We take those responsibilities with the enforceable undertaking seriously. I might grab Ms Noy, who's leading this work to good effect for us, because the benefit of the work here will be right across the organisation, not only at Castle Hill High School. Ms Noy, do you want to talk to what the undertakings are and what we're doing there with them?

MARY NOY: Yes, thank you, Secretary. As you rightly commented, the department has agreed to an enforceable undertaking with SafeWork in January 2026. One of the key initiatives that we will be required to deliver under that enforceable undertaking is the delivery of an innovative hazardous management platform. That platform is proposed to centralise asbestos-related data and information, integrate and streamline contractor management, and enable asbestos risk profiling to better inform how the department manages its asbestos.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just in light of that, the school remains open?

MARY NOY: The school does remain open and safe.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, if I could move to the Cherrybrook precinct, the Government has recently announced a proposal for an additional 9,300 homes to be constructed near the Cherrybrook metro station. As you would probably be aware, the existing schools, namely Cherrybrook Technology High School and Tangara high school, are already over capacity. What steps is the Government taking to secure land for the construction of new schools to meet the needs of the growing population within the Cherrybrook metro precinct?

LISA HARRINGTON: That is an area that we're really focused on, talking with Planning. I can say that we do see that there is more growth coming there. That is one of the areas where we're really looking at the right land to acquire to meet that growth.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Any details in terms of identifying land or plans or acquisition?

LISA HARRINGTON: There's nothing further that I can add at this point, apart from confirming that we do see that growth, and we're working very closely with Planning to make sure we acquire the right land at the right time to meet that growth.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there a time frame in which you're working at relating to the Cherrybrook metro precinct?

LISA HARRINGTON: Currently we're okay with the existing schools, but we do see that demand coming quite closely. That's all I can really confirm at this point.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There is a lot of discussion at the moment in the school community relating to AI. Mr Dizdar, parents are asking what's being done to protect assessment integrity from AI misuse?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham can help us here. We've got NSWeduChat—we've built and designed our own AI tool. It's Socratic, and what that means for students is it doesn't give you the answer. It guides you and walks you through, unlike other platforms. That's one way we're ensuring that we're using it as an assistive tool in the learning process. But to assessment, Mr Graham?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We provide advice to our schools, and our schools are certainly aware of the impact of artificial intelligence. We find that, compared to universities, schools have a very different profile. Because teachers actually have the students in front of them all the time and they know the students, their ability themselves to pick whether a student has used AI is very, very different to the university sector. We particularly find with senior assessments, schools are being very careful about including a range, such as in-class, pen-and-paper old exam style, to verify that the students actually understand the information. They're also doing a lot more work in seeing the students' written work, which is where AI can be so effective. There's a lot of change to actually seeing the writing process in place. You actually work with them. The amount of work teachers do on that is really quite phenomenal. We're confident teachers are absolutely at the front of this. They see it every day. We're confident, particularly in schoolteachers' ability to pick this in their students.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just touch on domestic and family violence. Mr Dizdar, how will the Department of Education implement the domestic and family violence common approach to risk assessment and safety framework to ensure staff have the capacity to identify domestic and family violence and assess or manage risk?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Graham will help me here. This goes to our Respectful Relationships work and curriculum work and the funding that's associated with that.

MARTIN GRAHAM: For our students, in particular our Respectful Relationships work, which is taking an approach across the whole syllabus. The questions you have go to staff as well. Obviously, professional learning for our staff and ability to identify risks for students can include domestic and family violence. We make sure that that's included in that professional learning as well. We work closely with the Department of Communities and Justice using exactly the same kind of frameworks and approaches.

The CHAIR: I understand that the department is responsible for organising school buses. But when it comes to school buses that are for private schools, what is the role that the department has in that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure, Ms Boyd, around our responsibility to organise school buses. We have the assisted student transport program. Is that what you're referring to?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You get a bus pass.

The CHAIR: That is funded, is it not, by the NSW Department of Education?

MURAT DIZDAR: That provides transport for students across the sectors for those with disability. That's the assisted student transport program. Mr Latham's right when he reminds me that we do the administrative aspect for travel passes for bus and rail, and there are rules around that.

The CHAIR: What's the total expenditure then in relation to school buses or bus transport that the New South Wales Government actually pays for? Do you know?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'd have to take that on notice and try and help you out and come back.

The CHAIR: That would be useful.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Graham, in answer to my question 4950 on the *Notice Paper* on 23 February—and this must have been referring to Grant Thornton and the Grant Thornton audit. It said the audit also highlighted opportunities to improve administrative processes in the Football in Schools program. What were those processes that needed to be fixed up?

MARTIN GRAHAM: One of the processes in particular was the reporting of student participation because these activities take place at night on a field in the rain with staff who are trying to manage the children. We did want to work with them to make sure we do accurately report the actual attendance in each of those programs. I've met with the CEO of the club about making sure that we improve those reporting processes, and our departmental staff will be out there in the field working with them to make sure that we fix that. I also spoke previously about a double counting of some expenditure, which was counted as head office expenditure. We really want to make sure that those accounts are absolutely clear, and that the expenditure is appropriately captured, counted and put into the right category. They were the two main items we discussed.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So the audit was critical of the way in which participation numbers are counted and recorded?

CORRECTED

MARTIN GRAHAM: The audit identified room for improvement, which is how the auditors described it, and we're working with them to make sure that that improves.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I have in front of me an email from Tracy Ma in your department written on 13 March last year to Kevin Amaya at the Macarthur Bulls raising concern about a series of discrepancies in the Football in Schools participation numbers. Are you familiar with that document and the attached table?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have that in front of me, no.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Was it given to Grant Thornton to have a look at?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I've expressed to you what Grant Thornton found so, you know, they did also find that there was need for improvement on the reporting side. I don't dispute that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Here's some improvement that I'm interested in. Tracy Ma lists 19 sessions of the program where the Macarthur Bulls were claiming total student participation of 2,080, but the actual numbers, once checked with the school, was just 641. That is just 30 per cent of the total that the club was claiming. How can the education department continue down that pathway when the numbers are 70 per cent out from reality compared to what the club claimed. You can call that room for improvement, but it's a basic fraud, isn't it?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'd be happy to look at those numbers, if you can provide them to us.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's an email inside your department.

MARTIN GRAHAM: I can assure you that the question of the accuracy of those numbers was considered by Grant Thornton and was subject to a need for improvement.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: The club recorded 19 sessions where people turned up but, in reality, 16 of those were cancelled. What's the cancellation rate that we've had in the last 12 months?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I can take that question on notice, if you like.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There were big discrepancies elsewhere. For example, they say Robert Townson Public School in Campbelltown in Raby on 6 December 2024 claimed 450 attending, but the actual participation number was 67. How can a club be 400 short? You could say they're in the rain and it's night-time. How can you be 400 short of who actually turned up?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There was also a question of reporting of enrolment versus attendance, so that was another thing that's been identified for improvement.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you, on notice, give us an outline of all the areas of improvement that were identified?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, I can do that for you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And what's been done about it.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, certainly.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There are obvious concerns here listed in your department. It would be good for this Committee to see the hard edge of the Grant Thornton report for where the improvements can be made.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Happy to bring something back.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I ask a question about Aurora College, Mr Dizdar. Are you aware that some Aurora College students are being prevented from accessing approximately a quarter of lesson time across both Aurora College and their homeschool due to contradictory policies and procedures governing timetabling between Aurora College and the homeschool? It's not a trick question. It's been raised by a person concerned. I don't wish to disclose their details. I'm happy to do that with you, if you're happy to take that offline in confidence.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I am.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You are aware of it?

MURAT DIZDAR: I know Aurora College really well. It's an important provision. It's synchronous delivery, so that's in real-time delivery, and I know of the timetable challenges that that can pose. What you're doing is a number of schools across the State and their students are tapping into the program. You need to try to align the timetable. We've made improvements across the years, but I'm happy to stay back at the break and maybe you can give me that detail, and I'm happy to chase.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, thank you. That would be helpful. It's just that we are aware of some students in a situation, so I appreciate the opportunity to provide that, given they can't seem to get the timetabling right between Aurora and the homeschool.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take that confidentially.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'd just like to understand what measures the department has to ensure a school listed as an Aurora College partner can't use an incompatible timetable to functionally block rather than facilitate a regional student's access to the selective program with Aurora.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Ward, we've done a lot of work in this area to make sure we can support all of the sites and their timetable. Let me stay back at the break. I'm happy to take that from you and come back to you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are they Socratic?

MURAT DIZDAR: The EduChat tool is, not for the teachers but for the students.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Imagine being a philosopher 3,000 years ago and in New South Wales budget estimates your approach to education still gets quoted by the secretary. Imagine that. We're just drops in the ocean, aren't we.

MURAT DIZDAR: Some things stand the test of time, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They do. Sorry.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No trouble. We're just concerned about why the situation is allowed to exist where those homeschools could potentially be disrupting or deliberately preventing students accessing those lesson times with Aurora, given the department's current focus on the high potential and gifted education program. I understand you've agreed to take that offline.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me assure you—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We're worried about access for some of them.

MURAT DIZDAR: I want to follow up on the specifics of what you've got there, but can I just assure you that we work with so many sites year in, year out to make sure that opportunity's there. We've helped many a school in our system with its timetabling to make sure that no-one's blocked out. But I'm happy to follow up on that.

The CHAIR: That brings us to our afternoon tea break.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We are back. Can I ask you, Mr Dizdar—I'm not sure if this will be to you or perhaps to Ms Harrington. Box Hill Public School and Box Hill High School—is it true that they are still operating on a diesel generator?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Harrington might have that detail.

LISA HARRINGTON: I can double-check. I don't believe so, but I'll double-check for you.

The CHAIR: I thought they were new schools.

LISA HARRINGTON: We've got them in temporary facilities while we build the permanent.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're building new schools for them.

The CHAIR: If you could let me know if there's any diesel generator—thanks. Is there any work being done by the department on designing programs to support students with disability to transition from school to open employment or further study and training?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we do quite a bit of work. Mr Graham might have detail. When I and Ms Summerhayes visited SSPs in particular and support class structures, the staff engage with the careers adviser, the transition adviser and the Educational Pathways Program team to have job-ready skills, workforce skills. I'm not sure if Mr Graham has got any specifics.

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's right. I think there's also a specific program that funds schools to help students transition post-school.

The CHAIR: How long has that program been running for?

CORRECTED

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'd have to check on that, but it's certainly—it was in my division. I believe it's now in another division, but it has certainly been around for a while.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, I put in some questions on notice about the department suspension policy, including how the department calculates suspension rates using the new FTE methodology, as well as asking for disaggregated data. But the answers I got back didn't really tell me what I was after. Can you tell me now how the department calculates suspension rates using that new FTE methodology that was introduced in 2024?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm just looking at Mr Kurucz and if he's got that detail that we work with our CESE colleagues on. I'm not sure if he has that.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, Ms Boyd. I could talk generally to you. We look at the average full-time equivalent student population in a year and then divide that by the reports that we get from schools around suspensions and expulsions.

The CHAIR: Why was the decision made to change that method of reporting?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'm not aware of the specific method of reporting you're referencing, Ms Boyd. I can check with the team and take that on notice, but I'm not sure of the specific methodological change you're referring to.

The CHAIR: My understanding is that the department switched to using the FTE method in 2024 to report suspensions instead of using raw student numbers, which is what they were doing previously.

JEREMY KURUCZ: On that, Ms Boyd, it would have been—FTE is a better reflection of the actual student cohort, because we have students that, for instance, might attend our schools part time. Using FTE is actually a better denominator of the actual kids that are in your school environment for you to be able to then divide your suspension rate by.

MURAT DIZDAR: It captures a better baseline because you're looking at proportionality, Ms Boyd, around suspension rate compared to the total student population you're serving. The FTE, like Mr Kurucz says, captures that better.

The CHAIR: Why has the department begun only publishing a full-year fact sheet for suspensions?

MURAT DIZDAR: Do you want to speak to that as well, Mr Kurucz?

JEREMY KURUCZ: We haven't necessarily changed the frequency of that, Ms Boyd. I'll double-check about the release timings of those. My understanding was we generally publish that—I believe it was a number of years ago we were doing twice a year and we've recently moved to once a year that has all that information contained in it. But I'll take it on notice in terms of the frequency and what period the most recent report covers as well.

The CHAIR: I've been asking these questions around this disaggregated data around suspensions and expulsions—and details around numbers of children within the numbers of those who have been expelled or suspended that are children with disability and/or First Nations children. I've been asking this since 2019. I used to get quite good data. Over the last few years it has become a bit more tricky to get that information. Are you able to provide disaggregated data on those? Has something changed internally? Why am I no longer getting that information when I ask for it?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's go back on our fact sheet and let's see what we've got to come back to you with.

The CHAIR: I think what I looked at before was the department's fact sheet. Then I asked for that data that was being published to then be disaggregated by region and also by whether or not students were students with disability or First Nations students.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to provide what we have. Let's go back and see for you, Ms Boyd.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. Can I ask a couple of questions around kids with disabilities in schools, particularly around adjustments. Are New South Wales public schools required to conduct individualised risk assessments for students with disabilities before they get excluded from excursions?

MURAT DIZDAR: We have to have an individual learning plan and we have to do all we can to not cut that student out of any learning opportunity, which would include an excursion or an incursion. We'd have to look at what adjustments we would need to make and exhaust all those adjustments to make sure that student could participate in the excursion.

The CHAIR: Would parental attendance with their child be a reasonable adjustment to enable participation in an excursion?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: It could be. I wouldn't rule it out.

The CHAIR: Is there any guidance that the department issues around that for schools?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to see if Mr Graham has got specifics around it.

MARTIN GRAHAM: We can have a look at that. But the issue with those would be it can be so individual. We'll have a look and see what the guidance is around that. We may have samples that perhaps show that as an adjustment. We'll have a look and see what we've got.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Boyd, we'd have to exhaust, like I said, the full range of adjustments. I couldn't jump as principal to the parent must attend for the child to attend. I must look at all I could do and put in place. But I wouldn't rule that out as a possible adjustment if I've exhausted everything.

The CHAIR: That's the question. If you've got to the point where there's no other reasonable adjustment that can get you to the point where having the child on the excursion was seen as being feasible but then there was a possible adjustment which would be having a parent there, would you expect that that adjustment be made before the child was just excluded?

MURAT DIZDAR: I would want us to do everything possible to not exclude that child, including possibly requesting that the parent attend. I know I've seen parents on many excursions. Obviously, they're volunteering their time—disability or a mainstream student. But our expectation would be exhaust all possible options. Generally that's my experience as well.

The CHAIR: What action has the department taken to create clear and direct guidelines for schools to ensure compliance with statutory obligations to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disability?

MURAT DIZDAR: This might also be of interest to you, Ms Boyd. Day one, term 2—back to Mr Latham's earlier questioning. We've mandated disability and neurodiversity training for the 95,000 teachers in our system. That is being delivered day one, term 2, like I said. We've been putting all the material and resources together in Mr Graham's area. He can unpack that for you. I've actually made it available to schools so they can start preparing for that professional learning day. Why we've taken that step too, Ms Boyd—I said earlier that the vast number of students are in the mainstream that require an adjustment. They could be in my economics class and my geography class, not in my support class or SSP. So we want to make sure we're all investing in the skilling of the entire workforce to be able to make the necessary adjustments.

The CHAIR: I agree. Is there then a specific guidance document that the department issues to schools saying, "These are your obligations in relation to providing a reasonable adjustment", so that both teachers and principals, and parents, can look at it and go through it to work out—

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Graham to comment. I know we've got learning and wellbeing experts who go into networks of schools and our schools and give that guidance and expertise. Mr Graham?

MARTIN GRAHAM: All teachers are aware of their mandatory responsibilities to provide reasonable adjustment. We have a special course for leaders, a mandatory course, so that they understand at the high level. But then, when it comes to 231,000 students with a disability, the kind of adjustment they need is very different. The adjustments are built into all of our materials. So the school development day is 17 different modules and a lot of them are about "For a student who's experiencing this, this is the adjustment that they might require. Here's how to think about adjustments." It's very much built into all the support we provide. There's not something that says, "Oh, here are the adjustments." It's absolutely built into all of our professional learning, all of the materials, all of the supports we provide to schools.

The CHAIR: But nothing that a parent or guardian could look at to go, "You haven't done this" or "You have done this"?

MARTIN GRAHAM: Well, certainly, at the level of adjustment. But there's 231,000 students, and from K-12 and different KLAS, the adjustment they need might be different, so it's difficult to have a personalised statement on the department's website for each parent to say, "We need an adjustment."

The CHAIR: That's not what I'm asking. Sorry, my time has run out. So that you can maybe take it on notice, I'm asking about what the—where the statutory rights are so that parents understand as well.

MARTIN GRAHAM: Yes, I understand.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I refer to another question on the *Notice Paper*, only partially answered—4951 on 23 February—where there were 11 site visits with the Macarthur Bulls Football Club looking at this Football in Schools program, Mr Graham. They've given me the dates and the schools, but I did ask—and this wasn't answered—for the number of students participating compared to the promised number, as this supposedly

CORRECTED

random audit was undertaken of the program in practice. Were you involved in the drafting of this answer to question on notice 4951?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I would have been if it was in my area of responsibility.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You would have been? Can you tell me why I never received the obvious, most important part of the answer? There was a site visit in March 2025, for example, at Nott Oval in Narellan. It doesn't say which school. It doesn't give me how many students were participating compared to what the Bulls recorded as their claimed number of participants, which, according to the earlier email I cited, there are massive discrepancies. Why weren't those numbers provided in the answer?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm happy to look at that question again and the answer that was provided.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are those figures available in the Grant Thornton audit? Did that audit look at these discrepancies? Because 70 per cent of the students are phantoms. They're missing.

MARTIN GRAHAM: They did look at the participation data and the enrolment data and what they actually found was that in some cases there was an undercounting of the students as well. They certainly did look at the data, but I don't have the exact data that you've got in front of you and the exact data that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On what basis did they find that? What was their auditing system for each of these sessions?

MARTIN GRAHAM: They would have followed a standard auditing process. I'm happy to take that on notice and give you some information about how the audit was conducted.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It says here in the answer you drafted that there were 11 site visits since the beginning of 2025. So that would have been the basis that Grant Thornton reached that conclusion? These are the 11 that they'd rely on?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There are two elements: one is the audit process that was undertaken by Grant Thornton and the second is the work that the department also undertakes with the clubs, which was separate to the audit process. They're in addition to what was undertaken with the audit.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why weren't those vital numbers provided in the answer—the number of students participating compared to the promised number? As an MP you start to get suspicious that they weren't provided because they don't reflect very well on the program. Is that right?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have that question or answer in front of me.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But on notice you're going to come back—

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm happy to take it on notice and see what we can provide.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —with the exact numbers for each of those 11, which range from Oran Park Public School, Robert Townson—we mentioned them earlier on—a couple at Nott Oval. Can you give me the school that was at Nott Oval, Narellan? Is that Narellan public or one of the schools in Narellan Vale, perhaps?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm not aware of the schools. I'm happy to have a look at that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There's one in Chipping Norton, and Gregory Hills, and on it goes. They're mostly growth areas. Did Grant Thornton or—to your knowledge, is there any data on the average cost of each coaching session that's undertaken by the program?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There are agreed rates that were agreed in the legal agreement between the department and the Macarthur Bulls.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are they being fulfilled, though? In practice, what is the average cost of each of these coaching sessions?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There's an agreed price that the department paid for that, and that's the price that we're paying.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In the data that I've looked at, the program appears to be costing \$50,000 per week for one coaching session per week. Given schools have their own PE and soccer coaching staff, it doesn't appear to be very good value for money. I'm sure every MP in this place could tell you a better way of spending \$50,000 a week in public education.

CORRECTED

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have those calculations in front of me, and it doesn't accord with what we would see from the program. Given the number of students and the overall cost, that wouldn't seem to accord with what we have.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If it doesn't accord, what is the exact number?

MURAT DIZDAR: Our records, Mr Latham, have 181 schools participating. That's across Macarthur Bulls and Western Sydney. For Macarthur Bulls, there are 112 schools participating, government and non-government, and across the program, in Western Sydney Wanderers, there's been 69 government schools participating.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, but that doesn't tell me the cost of each session, because some of these sessions are phantom sessions. The club claims them, but they were actually cancelled in practice because of weather conditions or lack of coaching staff or lack of interest.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's go back and look at what we agreed by way of session costs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And also, perhaps, a number per student?

MARTIN GRAHAM: That's not part of our agreement. But we can certainly do the overall—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, you've got the student participation number.

MARTIN GRAHAM: —you know, the program costs this much, it's got 40,000 students, \$2 million a year. It's not quite as simple as that, but it gives you an idea that it's not the kind of numbers that perhaps you have in front of you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: This answer says, "The Program is on track to deliver the student participation goals," so you must have a number for how many students are actually participating? This is for 2025-26. And you know the money that's being spent, and hopefully—

MURAT DIZDAR: The Macarthur Bulls program is at 40,000 participants across the 112 schools.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is that their claim or is that the actual number? That's their claim?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's the audited process, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is it possible to provide the Committee with the full Grant Thornton audit, given it's got all this data that's relevant to my questioning?

MURAT DIZDAR: We committed to go back and see what we can provide, yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If I could just come back to Ms Summerhayes with homeschooling. How many homeschool students have been reclassified as Department of Education distance education students since you've taken over? I think it was in May.

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I'd need to take that on notice to give you the precise number, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But has there been some reclassification?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: There have been some students who've moved into distance ed, but it is a space that I would like to give you better numbers on.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There's a suggestion that perhaps the homeschooling numbers are understated and public education enrolments are overstated by that process of reclassifying them and they started homeschool. How does that work? If they start homeschooling are you able to direct them into distance education?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: No. What I have learnt with our new homeschooling stakeholders is that sometimes they're not always aware of what options are available to them, and so there are some families who chose to homeschool and then may decide distance ed might suit them better—or vice versa, to be honest. So it's a conversation based on families and individual students.

MURAT DIZDAR: I know you know this really well. It's an annual renewal process, as well, for the family. Sometimes families, like Ms Summerhayes says, change their position on homeschooling.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Sure. What, at the moment, is the average registration period that a family puts their hand up to say we want to go to homeschooling, we're leaving this government school? What's the average registration period and transition time that we know of in the, what, nearly 10 months that you've been handling homeschooling?

CORRECTED

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: We find that we have a lot of applications at the beginning of the year, Mr Latham. At the moment we're working well within the 12-week turnaround for getting the process going. At different times of the year it looks a little bit different, but at the moment we are well under the requirements to bring families into homeschooling.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is that your target, a 12-week transition period?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: That's the space—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's a long while, isn't it?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: It is, but that's the space that we inherited and we are still working through what that will look like moving forward.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That was the NESA standard was it, Mr Martin, that you transition them within 12 weeks?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, from memory. I'd have to go back and find notes. But a lot of that was to make sure that the homeschooling environment was appropriate for a student, both in terms of educational provision and child safety.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And what does that take? You just send an inspector out, don't you, to have a look at the house?

PAUL MARTIN: An authorised person and they sight the child and they look at the educational programs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Ms Summerhayes, as per the Auditor-General's recommendation, have you got a target for bringing that 12-week number down to something that's a bit faster in getting these kids back into a form of schooling?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: We're certainly working towards that, Mr Latham. We're also looking at our authorised persons and the number of authorised persons and how they can go out and look at environments to ensure that they are suitable.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Given the growing population of homeschooling—I would have thought it was just a COVID event, but there seems to be a recurring and constant trend of increased numbers of homeschooling.

MURAT DIZDAR: We are recruiting, Mr Latham—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You need to recruit more, don't you, to make sure it happens faster?

MURAT DIZDAR: We are recruiting for more authorised persons to do those visitations.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: As per the Auditor-General's recommendation, what sort of extra support are you providing? Some of these parents are wonderfully diligent and do a great job. Others struggle. What support and resources are in place for homeschoolers as per the Auditor-General's findings?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: As soon as the homeschooling families came across in May, Mr Latham, they had access to a number of teaching and learning resources on our website that our families have access to. We are continuing to speak with our stakeholders about what other sorts of opportunities may exist moving forward. So we're very conscious of how we might best support our families and our students in the homeschooling environment moving forward.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What potential would AI have in that regard in schooling the homeschooler in the use of these new technologies to make it a lot easier?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Yes, it's certainly something that has been discussed. I'm not the expert on EduChat or AI, Mr Latham, unsurprisingly, but I know that Mr Graham is certainly considering all of our students in all of our settings for this space.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Including homeschooling?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: Homeschooling now belongs to us, Mr Latham, so every decision we make about our students includes them.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Dizdar, how are we going on our number of student enrolments?

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, Ms Ward, I can give you some numbers. Let me just find it. Our 2025 enrolment figure was 773,377. I said it was approximately 780, so I wanted to correct that for the record. It's 773,377, and for modelling purposes we use a plus or minus 1 per cent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Your forecast for enrolments for the 2026 year?

MURAT DIZDAR: Like I said, we use a plus or minus 1 per cent and we'll know the actual figure in August/September this year.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We can go back and forth on this, so what's the number that you have presently as we sit here today at budget estimates?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's 773,377 for 2025 and the modelling that we do says that could increase by plus 1 per cent or it could decrease by minus 1 per cent.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I go back to the ACECQA annual service fee. Did the department or the NSW Early Learning Commission propose this sliding scale model that the Deputy Premier referred to to increase the fees which the other jurisdictions didn't apply?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get the commissioner to talk to that. I just want to correct something. There was a number of jurisdictions that did apply the same, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which?

DARYL CURRIE: At the moment, both New South Wales and Victoria are applying that, which means that the majority of services across the country will be having that regime of fees, 61 per cent roughly.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, but my question was did you, Commissioner, or the department propose that sliding scale model?

DARYL CURRIE: I'd have to take that on notice but I would say—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't know, as the commissioner, whether you proposed it or not?

DARYL CURRIE: I'm not saying yes or no. I'm saying it's actually a national announcement of EMM that that was an agreed upon process across the different jurisdictions. But it was agreed the different jurisdictions would apply different fee structures.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That may well be the agreement at the Ministers meeting, but what advice or modelling or document was relied on or proposed by you in your recommendation?

DARYL CURRIE: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You don't know as the commissioner sitting here at budget estimates today what you proposed?

DARYL CURRIE: I know that we contributed, whether we proposed—but I would say that I will take that on notice and bring it back to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What's to take on notice? Surely you as the commissioner know whether you proposed this model or not?

DARYL CURRIE: I think the word "proposed" is something that—I would not say that we proposed. Did we contribute to the construction of those fees? Yes. Did we propose it? Once again, I will take it on notice to say whether—there's a differentiation there of language that I think is really important.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Then who proposed the model?

DARYL CURRIE: I said I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it you or is it someone else? It's not something, with respect—

DARYL CURRIE: I am entitled to take something on notice. I can take it on notice and come back with an answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that. You've said that repeatedly. But I'm just wondering—

DARYL CURRIE: It's not about just saying it. It's within my entitlement to actually take it.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If I can finish? Actually, I was spoken over on that occasion.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: I will hear the point of order.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: The point of order is that Mr Currie has actually said that he will take something on notice, which is within his rights to do.

The CHAIR: I do understand that the member was about to ask a slightly different question.

DARYL CURRIE: I can report some other things that I took on notice earlier that you asked—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That's okay. You can do that Government time if you don't mind.

DARYL CURRIE: I've got other things that you asked me to take on notice, so I'm offering to give them to you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have very limited time, as you'd appreciate, so we can do that in Government time. I'd be very grateful for that information at that time but I'd like to use this time, if I may, to move on to other things, if that's all right with you?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're happy to take other questions, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Terrific. In relation to the model, you are not able to advise this Committee today whether you proposed it or not. Were there other reports or advice or modelling or documents that were relied upon?

DARYL CURRIE: It's my understanding that the modelling that was looked at came to the conclusion that the required fee was a very modest contribution to the overall regulatory framework and contribution to the regulation of both Victoria and New South Wales.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: New South Wales has joined the national child safety reforms the National Quality Framework, which has cross-partisan support, so it's a national rollout, as you've said, of all jurisdictions. Can you itemise the funding structure for these in New South Wales, including the proportion funded by services, families versus that provided by government funding through the budget?

DARYL CURRIE: I can take that on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: The commission has been afforded \$55 million extra across four years. I can speak to the budget transfer that occurred with the movement of the commission.

DARYL CURRIE: I can talk to that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In relation to these fees specifically, or just in relation to the commission's funding?

DARYL CURRIE: You asked about the fees?

MURAT DIZDAR: That was the commission's funding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I didn't ask about that though.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, you were going to say something?

DARYL CURRIE: No, I was just going to say I can talk about the budget of the commission that was taken over. In terms of the question that you asked, I'd take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you can take on notice how much the proportion was that was funded, I'd be grateful for each age group, so between the services, families and government funding. That would be helpful. The Deputy Premier has said that the department is in constant contact with those providers. Which stakeholders in early learning were consulted by the department prior to the fee rise decision?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can get Mr Barraket, our Deputy Secretary for Early Childhood Outcomes in the department, to talk to the stakeholders we engage with.

MARK BARRAKET: More broadly, Early Childhood Outcomes does engage with a range of stakeholders. The commission is often present in some of these forums but not all. It may have its own forums where it engages with stakeholders. We do have the early childhood advisory group, which is made up of a number of peak organisations that represent the sector. We have Gudjagang Gulgul, which is our Aboriginal advisory group, and we also consult with the AECG. We also run a range of sessions called ECE Connect, where we work with service providers directly around a range of topics.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to provide a list of those? I don't want, with respect, to know broadly. I am asking specifically which stakeholders were asked prior to this fee increase and whether the sector or families have the capacity to pay.

MARK BARRAKET: I'll take that on notice, because I don't attend all of these sessions. The commission might also want to provide advice on where they consulted in respect to fees.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can you name particular stakeholders given the Deputy Premier said today that you engage with stakeholders and they were consulted? She said on the record under oath that that's what happened. Surely, somebody can tell me who was consulted?

DARYL CURRIE: We'll take that on notice. There's quite a web of meetings. We meet with different stakeholders within the sector from both the commission—and even though we're only doing it independently as of 1 December, that web entails a lot of communication with the sector. We'll take it on notice so we can have the full answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There are a few cobwebs going around today. Can we move on to the cost increases? We'll get to the modelling—you're just going to take that on notice as well. Can we go to the public preschools infrastructure? The probity report into public preschools mentioned that there's a list of reserve schools where government would consider public preschools. Can you provide that list of schools not recommended?

MARK BARRAKET: A list of schools that was not recommended?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MARK BARRAKET: It was some time ago that we submitted the list to the Government for consideration around the site selection for the 100 public preschools. The reserve list was intended to be activated should any of the sites, for whatever reason, not be deemed suitable. I'll have to take on notice those sites that we did put on the reserve list.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm not after the reasoning. I'm just after the list of sites.

MARK BARRAKET: I'll take that on notice and see what we can provide for you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to provide that information specifically on notice, the sites that were proposed?

MARK BARRAKET: Yes, I can see what I can get for you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. And can we have the full list? Will you undertake to provide that to the Committee?

MARK BARRAKET: The full list—that's on the reserve?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

MARK BARRAKET: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you very much. That would be very helpful. The Deputy Premier has said publicly a postcode shouldn't determine access. Why are 38 per cent of the electorates in metropolitan Sydney elected Liberal Party electorates only allocated 0.5 per cent of the public preschools?

MARK BARRAKET: There was an extensive process undertaken to determine the sites for the public preschools. That selection process included supply and demand data, developmental outcomes for children, socio-economic status of children and the suitability of sites to be able to build a public preschool. Those factors were taken into where these preschools would be built. In many cases across the State there is existing supply, other providers that are already in the market, so this was intended to build supply in areas where the market was not responding.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might get some more on that later. Can I turn to St Leonards and the precinct there? A new preschool to year 12 education precinct was talked about for St Leonards and \$23 million was allocated in the 2024-25 budget towards progressing stage one of that, a primary school. At budget estimates in March 2025 I think you informed this Committee that the school had been put on ice and the project was removed as a separate line item in the 2025-26 budget. It seems that with the Cammeraygal High School exceeding capacity, the Lower North Shore enrolment zone had to change. I understand that a new school in St Leonards would serve that catchment area and be able to take up that slack. The school—or that area—will be subject to the Government's accelerated transport oriented development precinct. In August 2025, I think, at estimates you said:

CORRECTED

We are still looking at it—

that is, a new school at St Leonards—

Obviously, we've got the Crows Nest metro there, so it isn't an area that we are dismissing. It's just that, at this stage, it doesn't make sense to put an additional school there because we can deal with the demand with the existing schools. But we are still monitoring it, recognising that it is a TOD. It is an area that is going to have additional growth, so we need to continue to monitor.

Is that still the Government's position?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Ms Harrington to comment, but we have to, in our role, maximise the existing footprint.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that, but I want to understand the position on that specifically. Is it still the case?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't think we've got plans at this stage to build in St Leonards. But I'll get Ms Harrington to comment on that.

LISA HARRINGTON: That advice still stands. We are still comfortable with the existing schools. There is capacity in existing schools. There's been a lot of upgrades in that area of primary schools. When the business case was done for St Leonards, it was quite different. After COVID, the population did change there, so we are comfortable at the moment we can meet demand with the existing schools. I do recognise, as you say, Crows Nest TOD, so it is an area that we're watching.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: When you say "watching", what does that mean? Is there any opportunity to come back and review that at any stage?

LISA HARRINGTON: It means we are constantly—as you've seen in the enrolment growth audit, there are a lot of areas where we are really monitoring very closely to see growth and to make sure that we're able to meet that growth.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is Cammeraygal High School still over capacity?

LISA HARRINGTON: Cammeraygal and Mosman, at the moment, we are balancing. As the secretary said, it's important that we make sure that we fill up the existing schools that we have. So at the moment, students, I believe, have the ability to attend Cammeraygal or Mosman.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Is it still over capacity, though?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can double-check, but I understand we're still taking enrolments at Cammeraygal.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given that the Government was forced to create the Lower North Shore enrolment zone, Mr Dizdar, to deal with Cammeraygal High School exceeding capacity, how can you say that there is not a clear need for an additional school there?

MURAT DIZDAR: We don't think there's a need at the moment, but we'll continue to monitor. They're two schools I've visited—fantastic schools. Mosman High has had a recent significant capital upgrade and we'd like to grow that school even further with the good work they're doing. And part of my responsibility is to maximise the footprint I have.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given that it seems that Cammeraygal is already exceeding capacity and certainly will with the TOD coming—that's a no-brainer: If there's going to be more housing, there's going to be more students—

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: How does the department's enrolment forecast account for the significant densification of the Lower North Shore, in particular that St Leonards-Crows Nest area? How are you going to deal with that?

MURAT DIZDAR: We don't need it, as we speak at the moment, but we'll continue to monitor and, if it's required, then we'll make appropriate representations to government for planning purposes. We're doing that right across the State.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What would you need to press the trigger on that? The TOD precinct is now in place.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: We use planning data, like we have to with government, and that gives us dwellings and potential student population. We've got to build a business case, put that before government and get approval to build a school.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The community is very concerned about this, given the densification that is certainly coming for St Leonards and Crows Nest. Are you waiting for Mosman High to reach capacity?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll be trying to work to maximise our footprint and keep monitoring the situation, like we are across the State, and then, within our capital planning unit, put forward any business case that's required.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Speaking of capacity and TODs, with the tier 2 TODs, we talked about Bradfield. Can I go to Rydalmere? Has a site been selected for a new school to support the housing that the Government wants to build around the old Macquarie Boys high school site?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Harrington might have detail around Rydalmere.

LISA HARRINGTON: We are currently undertaking or planning for upgrades and, actually, we're committed to the upgrades in that area. There are various upgrades that we're doing of the primary schools: Rydalmere Primary School, Rydalmere East and Ermington West. At the moment that's where the demand is, in terms of the primary schools, so they're the projects that we're pursuing.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can we go to what was called OOSH, outside school hours care? How many parent-run OSHC providers have been lost due to the tender process in place by the Minns Government?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to come back on notice with the breakdown of P&C, not-for-profit and commercial entities. They're the three OOSH categories.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The OSHC providers?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, so there's three types of providers.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I know, thank you. I understand that. I'm just asking how many parent-run ones have been lost due to the tender process.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the figures.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are you able to provide that information?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm happy to come back on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: One example is Glenfield Public School in Macquarie Fields. They lost their long-time OSHC provider, with no parent consultation and no warning. The successful provider then faced public scrutiny following the arrest of a staff member on child sexual abuse charges—devastating for the parents. What are you doing to ensure that parents are involved in decisions relating to their children's care in OSHC?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to look at the specifics. We encourage P&Cs to run OOSHs. We value P&Cs. They're, of course, exempt from the tender process to operate an OOSH or to receive a licence renewal. But it's a volunteer operation, so it can become complex at times. There's a range of scenarios where they may want us to go to tender. We work with parents in the first instance.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given your concern about it and this particular example, what are you doing to ensure that children in OSHC are safe through this tender process, in light of the Glenfield Public School example?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to look at the specifics with Glenfield but, in the broader, the OSHC service is a very important provision and—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I understand that, but I just want to know what you're specifically doing.

MURAT DIZDAR: —one that I still benefit from as a parent in the public education system. The OSHC that I attend, alongside all OSHCs, are oversighted by the Early Learning Commission. They're the regulator for OSHCs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm aware. I'm concerned about that particular one because the parents are obviously very concerned and they've asked me to ask you. They haven't asked me to ask about your children or your OSHC. They've asked about theirs, and they're very concerned about what the department's doing.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: I know. You asked about safety, broader, and I gave you an answer that covers the entire operation, broader. But, Ms Ward, I'm more than happy to go and look at the specifics of Glenfield that have been raised.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can we go to student attendance and the attendance rate under the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding*. It has agreed to improvement measures for increasing the student attendance rate for all students and priority cohorts. Is New South Wales on track to meet those targets?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Ward, I'm pleased to report to the Committee that New South Wales is the leading jurisdiction for government school attendance in 2025.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you've got that number to hand?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm proud of it because we've done a lot of work.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What new interventions are occurring to meet those targets?

MURAT DIZDAR: We stand at 88.2 per cent in 2025—like I said, the leading State in the country. We continue to work assiduously to lift attendance.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think I asked what new interventions are occurring. You might come back to me on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: We've had sustained interventions. I'm happy to unpack those for you.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I just want to follow up with the Port Macquarie Tacking Point Public School. I wrote a letter and addressed it to everybody I could talking about how important it was and asking for some urgent attention on behalf of the community and the parents of the kids at the school. Can I table this? It's from the Department of Education's social media. It's a picture of a little koala in the school and the koala in the tree. Then it's all about the program that that you run. "Aussie Kids Growing Koala Food Trees program a success in Port Macquarie" was a little media release you put out in 2024. The trees were all removed and the school is being built, as I understand it, as complying development. Has anybody really checked whether that's lawful or not? I wrote a letter to the acting deputy secretary, Ms Harrington, and the Minister at the time, asking for somebody to urgently look at what was happening. It just does not fit the complying. Are you aware of it? Have you looked at it? Are you concerned about it?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I'm aware of the concerns raised about Tacking Point.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: And the specific allegations that the construction may actually be taking place unlawfully, and the environmental destruction, and all those koala trees that have just been destroyed and removed forever? There were 20. All of those different varieties of trees were removed, right there where the kiddies had grown the koala food trees. The koala actually even goes—have you reviewed it or looked at it in terms of the legality?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure you were here—you may not have had a response, but the Deputy Premier tabled that there had been a response given by the Parliamentary Secretary. I don't have any advice that we've done anything unlawful or outside of the planning requirements. I'm across the concerns in the community that were raised around the loss of play space and the impact on koala habitats and traffic movement. They're valid concerns the community has raised. We've done our mightiest to try and—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Who is the approval body to approve the development pathway you took? It's you, isn't it? The department proposes the development. The department approves the development. If there's anything happening unlawfully, who do you go to and who checks all of that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't believe there was anything unlawful. I'm happy for Ms Harrington—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Clearly not. I understand that you've taken the complying development pathway and you've received a letter alleging that it's not lawful, and nobody has explained how it is lawful.

LISA HARRINGTON: We have issued a lot of communications to the community to address some of the concerns that have been raised. I'll just step through. First of all, in terms of the complying development, we have had an accredited building certifier review that and actually issue the CDC, so it's not us issuing it ourselves. We are really conscious of the koalas in the area. We have a local ecologist that is engaged. If there are any koalas spotted within 50 metres of the work, we stop the work until the koala self-relocates. We've also confirmed with the community that we haven't removed any trees as part of this project. There were some trees last year that the arborist, separate to this project, identified as a safety risk. There was deadwood, and that was quite separate to the project. There are three small trees that we have relocated as part of this project, but we have not removed trees.

CORRECTED

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You've relocated the trees?

LISA HARRINGTON: There were some trees that were removed because the arborist, separate to that—we often need to go in and check schools and make sure that the trees are safe. That was quite separate. There were, as I said, three small trees that were relocated. We are really conscious of the concerns in that community. We are working really hard to address those concerns. In terms of the actual koala habitat, we're not locating the preschool where it is an environmentally sensitive land, and that's both on the council and the SEPP classification. The other thing that we're doing is we're actually using modular construction rather than traditional, so that's got less of an impact in terms of the build.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, what is the total New South Wales Government expenditure on non-government schools in the budget?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me take that on notice. The Commonwealth is the predominant funder, and 20 per cent of the funding comes from the State.

The CHAIR: Yes. Could you take it on notice to provide me the total figure?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The CHAIR: The Not-For-Profit Guidelines for Non-Government Schools state very clearly:

A school operates for profit (without limiting the circumstances in which it does so) if the Minister is satisfied that ... any payment is made by the school to a related entity or other person or body for property, goods or services at more than reasonable market value ...

Do non-government schools have to disclose the salaries of their senior executives and principals in order to demonstrate their not-for-profit status?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll bring in Mr Martin because that responsibility under section 83 C has gone across to NESA from the department.

PAUL MARTIN: When NESA is interrogating a school in relation to not-for-profit guidelines, there is an analysis of commercial rates or appropriate award rates of pay for staff. But there's a limitation to that, because independent schools pay heads and heads of school at different rates than the department et cetera, and they retain the right to be able to do so. But, more broadly, the commensurate amount that a person might earn in a school is part of the process of checking for profit.

The CHAIR: Okay, but if we've got private schools receiving government funding, getting tax concessions and then paying principals up to \$1 million a year, that appears to be a breach of the Act. How are they possibly getting reasonable market value if public school principals are paid somewhere between \$140,000 and \$216,000.

PAUL MARTIN: The pay or the salaries and the packages of the salaries for independent school principals are not seen as breaches of section 83C. I would have to double-check exactly how it's characterised in relation to the Act or the second reading speech, but I know that the salary rates of heads of independent schools do not bring them into section 83C noncompliance.

The CHAIR: It would be rather a perverse result if what we're doing is looking at the market as being just the private school market for salaries and then deciding that this is reasonable. If all of the non-government schools are creating their own super-space market in order to then justify those high fees and not breach the rules, has there been any legal advice given in relation to the application of 83C?

PAUL MARTIN: I'll take the legal advice on notice. There are a range of independent schools that pay a range of amounts for their heads or principals. Some of them would be commensurate with government schools; some of them might be lower; some of course, as you've indicated, are quite generous salaries. They're mostly decided, I think, by the school boards—the independent boards of independent schools. It is my understanding that they are not part of the assessment of breaches of 83C.

The CHAIR: They definitely are included in the *Not-For-Profit Guidelines for Non-Government Schools*, and there is a specific section about how salaries do need to be at a reasonable market value. In what world is a private school principal salary that's five times that of a public school principal salary reasonable market value?

PAUL MARTIN: I couldn't pass judgement on that. It's a matter of the particular independent school and what they believe is an appropriate salary for the person who's fulfilling that—

The CHAIR: It's not, though, is it? I mean, it's a question of—

PAUL MARTIN: That's an opinion that I wouldn't be prepared to—

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: No, but it's a question of, if you're going to call yourself not-for-profit, you cannot be distributing profit. If you are paying services to a principal of \$1 million—which is way above the market rate when you view the school sector as a whole—then that is effectively a distribution of profit to an individual.

PAUL MARTIN: That's an opinion that I'm not necessarily sharing. What I would be arguing is that there are particular schools that sit within different markets, and that comparing a particular independent school with the average of principals across the State is not the intention of that section of 83C.

The CHAIR: But shouldn't it be? I mean, really, if we're looking at—

PAUL MARTIN: Again, that's an opinion I wouldn't—

The CHAIR: Again, we're looking at whether or not a school should be entitled to a whole range of benefits that it gets because it's notionally not for profit, and that entire test is then based on a market that those private schools themselves can push up to make whatever they like, and we're just making a farce of the whole system, aren't we?

PAUL MARTIN: The issue of the packages of the heads of independent schools and its relation to, not only salary, but potential benefits of housing and all sorts of other packages, they're all part of the particular market that they operate in and decided by boards. The for-profit legislation is really about the use of government funds for areas that don't relate to the education of students. I would argue that the use of those funds, irrespective of views about how large those salaries are, are still related specifically and directly to the education of students in those schools.

The CHAIR: That's the point, though, isn't it? It's either for the education of students in schools or it's a distribution of profit in that payment of salary, and so it brings us back to that original point.

PAUL MARTIN: I don't think that that legally fits within section 83C.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm going to go back to some issues that this Committee worked on very hard and thoroughly in the last term of Parliament, starting with a matter where the former Minister, Sarah Mitchell, did a great job in saving Hurlstone Agricultural High School to keep it in Glenfield—the preeminent selective high school in the south-west of Sydney, well known to me and also Mr Currie. Can I ask, Ms Harrington, what's happened there in terms of redevelopment plans? There was a proposal for some housing development—which thankfully hasn't taken place—on the Macquarie hill and to update and modernise the ageing dormitory facilities, what remains of the research facilities in the old ag station on the northern side of Roy Watts Road. Also I'm interested in any other modernisation of what have been some of the ageing school buildings, particularly the middle block spanning the science and English facilities.

LISA HARRINGTON: For Hurlstone Ag?

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes.

LISA HARRINGTON: I was there last year. It's looking really good. The farm facilities are great. The boarding facilities, the students are really happy with them. So it's looking really good. I do believe that project is completed.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And it never had to be funded by housing development of any shape or form on the Macquarie hill?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'll have to come back to you. I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I pass it on the train. There's no housing there. I'm sort of assuming if it has been completed, it has been funded other than by housing development.

MURAT DIZDAR: We funded it as one of our capital projects.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay, good. I think that what had been part of the green space separation of Liverpool and Campbelltown local government areas and, as mayor, back in the day, held up Edmondson Park for 15 years as best I could—that's a lost cause. But the green space at Hurlstone now is the last part of the old green space plan post World War II, so to keep that green is important.

MURAT DIZDAR: As you know, Mr Latham, we still have our three special schools on the hill there as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's well known. Mr Martin, has all that curriculum revision and updating work now been completed from the Masters review?

CORRECTED

PAUL MARTIN: Most of the recommendations of the Masters review that were accepted by government—I think almost all—have been completed. There were some that were noted and some we didn't pursue, as you're aware from previous questions.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Untimed syllabuses.

PAUL MARTIN: Untimed syllabuses being the specific one. There are 105 syllabuses, from memory. I can put all this on notice. I think we're into the 80s of completed syllabuses. I think we released 17 or something at the end of last year. All of the compulsory K to 10 has been done. A significant number of the 11 and 12, the senior secondaries. I know that there is consultation about to begin at some point on Studies of Religion.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yesterday, in one sitting—because it's such a moving, unexpectedly gripping book—Bob Carr's *Bring Back Yesterday*, the memoir of the loss of his wife, also contains very important landmarks in his life that made him a long serving premier and, you'd have to say, a successful MP, leader and citizen in our society. One of them I didn't know—I always wondered where he got that voice from—he had voice training when he left university, thinking it would be an asset. He said, "I didn't look like Clark Gable, so I had to improve my voice to give me a political advantage," which it did in different stages. I never knew he had a voice coach that propelled him forward, but he also paid amazing credit to his English teacher in high school. So I ask you, Mr Martin, is grammar back in the English curriculum because it propelled Bob Carr forward in a way that's fantastic? I was sort of in the hiatus era where grammar was dropping out of the curriculum.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Same.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've struggled a little bit and learnt a bit more from Bob Carr's book yesterday on grammar. Is grammar back as one of the essential civilizational tools of our English language?

PAUL MARTIN: I think former Premier Carr used to say that words were the poor boy's arsenal, excusing that—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Saul Bellow said that. He stole that from Saul Bellow.

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, he did. But, yes, grammar is back. It goes from K to 10. There is quite a lot of detail. There was grammar in previous syllabuses—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Not much.

PAUL MARTIN: —but it was seen as to be taught at point of need. I agree with you, Mr Latham, and others. I didn't learn grammar at school. I was in that dark period and had to learn it subsequently.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: To year 6, that's all. Then it ended.

PAUL MARTIN: There is significant grammar in the syllabuses, and we're making sure that we not only teach it—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: It's back.

PAUL MARTIN: —but the teachers who missed out on grammar themselves are able to.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Summerhayes, as a former English teacher, tells me she's delighted.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's fantastic. Can I also say, in your different reading competitions and curriculum, can you grab hold of Bob Carr's book? I've read a lot of books over the years. Reading has become a lost habit and vocation, but it's one of the most remarkable books and I think should be featured in our schools. For someone who was very dedicated to public education, Secretary, you promote the virtues of us products of public education. Bad grammar, excuse me.

MURAT DIZDAR: I do, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But I think this book is a stand-out and should be promoted by the department wide and far. In that regard, what are we doing to promote reading among boys? Because I know with my two great sons, memes are now more important than reading. Reading is being lost as one of the essential civilisational tools of our English language. Are we doing anything to get young men in particular back to the habits of reading books?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're also zooming in on writing—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And writing, yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: —because of the skills required, particularly to navigate the HSC. That's becoming a national challenge. We're investing a lot in writing programs. Mr Graham?

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the thinking, though, on getting young men to read books, not just memes and funny crap?

MARTIN GRAHAM: No, there's a large number of very passionate educators that are very keen on this and, as Mr Dizdar said, the tide of writing. Should we look at HSC results. The results from Balgowlah Boys and Ashfield Boys in particular stand out, and we've talked to those principals. It is built on this foundation of reading and actually finding time within the curriculum for proper reading across the whole curriculum, and then that translates to writing as well. We're certainly looking at the department. We've got strong writing programs. We have new syllabuses which, as you say, give us the foundations of grammar but also give us writing across the syllabuses. We really want to do more work—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Is there any sign of success—

MARTIN GRAHAM: There is. New South Wales—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —that a 15-year-old in a working-class area is picking up books and taking them from the library, taking them home, bringing them back, having devoured them, Bob Carr style, in the 1950s?

MARTIN GRAHAM: There are two things. One, it's very difficult for young people to outperform their parents, so parents' reading is also very critical. We're interested in society-wide improvement. The second thing is I was at in Marrickville High School the other day; very interested in this topic, like you, absolutely what's happening here. English class year 7, kids had just come in. They're a few weeks in and they're absolutely timetabling a reading program. Excellent teacher-librarian there, with the head teacher of English, trying to find a proper book that would actually engage that child and get them to read the first 50 pages, so they then get motivated. It's the beginning of a journey. We're absolutely excited and as committed as you are in making sure that boys, in particular, have access to that kind of social capital they get through reading.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I should correct myself. My youngest son still reads books, and he gives me books on festival days like birthdays and all that. I've been a bit unfair on him. The older one is a beautiful writer, but he decided at age 15 that it sort of wasn't fashionable. Maybe there was a bit of peer group pressure.

MARTIN GRAHAM: They can come back.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why are you writing these fiction stories?

MARTIN GRAHAM: They come back.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They come back?

MARTIN GRAHAM: They come back. As someone with a son without his record *Rainbow Six Siege* score, they do come back.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I thought I'd read the new Dickens but, anyway, you reckon he'll come back. That's good to know.

MURAT DIZDAR: And the backing in of phonics to make sure we've got the scaffolds there with the improving results. I know I'm stating the obvious to you, but to navigate the HSC with extended responses, we need to double down on writing.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But it is more a boys issue, reading books, isn't it, than girls? That's true?

MURAT DIZDAR: The writing challenge is a national one.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I know, but it is a bit gendered, to use the language of other people.

MURAT DIZDAR: It is true that we've got to lift boys' writing, yes. It is true.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I ask about one of the things I'm curious about. Former Premier Perrottet had an experiment about flexible hours. I always thought it was a bit daft myself, but whatever came of it, and was anything learnt about it? Instead of a school day of nine until three, you could pick your kids up at five or something.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might get Mr French to dive in here.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You ran an experiment. What happened?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. This was to make sure we could grow the extra outside-hours opportunities for students, and we took those learnings from that pilot and we've been sharing them with schools. I'm not sure if you've got more details, Mr French.

CORRECTED

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I suppose if you've got as many kids as Perrottet, you need some sort of relief—and he's still going. Mr French?

DANIEL FRENCH: That was a pilot that was conducted. There was subsequently an evaluation off the back of that pilot where a number of findings from that pilot were then applied into the way that schools run extracurricular activities and provide tutoring support for students as well.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's the conclusion of the evaluation report? It's not practical to scale up?

DANIEL FRENCH: Yes, it was an expensive model.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What was the extra expense generated—extra staffing?

DANIEL FRENCH: Staffing outside of hours, and much of the staffing was done by externals.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Unaffordable in scaling up.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, you may recall I raised with you at a previous estimates hearing legal issue bulletin 55, relating to transgender issues in schools. At the time, I was informed the bulletin was under review and you were expecting it to be released in term 1, 2025. Was that deadline met?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I understand the revised bulletin LIB55 was finally released just a few days before this hearing.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, it's been updated and released.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is there any reason for such a delay and the timing of the release of the revised bulletin, two days prior to the estimates hearing?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, apart from operational reasons I made where the school year kick-off is a very busy time where we welcome new families, new staff, timetables, settle into the operating with another school. I made the decision to go mid-term, having completed week six.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, if I could just remind you, at the last estimates hearing you told me released term 1, 2025. This bulletin was released two days ago.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I think at the last estimates I said I hope I can achieve it term 4.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I've got the record here. I'm happy to share it, but that's why I have put that to you.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. My recollection of the last estimates hearing in August or September last year was I was hoping to achieve it by term 4. I decided not to release it given the end of the school year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, on reading the bulletin, I note that the bulletin states that transgender students should not be required to use toilets and change rooms used by persons of their biological sex. What this now means is biological males identifying as females will be using the girls toilets and change rooms.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just correct something, Ms Merton? The correct terminology is not "transgender students"; it's "gender diverse students". That's in line with a legislative change. I had to do that updating as well, and I have covered toileting and change room facilities. As you know, our schools have boys toilets, girls toilets. We have single-cubical staff toilets, and our principals and our teachers do an excellent job in embracing every single learner. If we have a gender diverse student, we make sure that we can also meet their toileting requirements, and we work with schools and families so that that's appropriate. That might be the use of single-cubical facilities.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, I also read in the bulletin the learning and support team will address students that have an issue or concerns with these new arrangements. Parents are concerned where you've got six-year-old girls sharing a bathroom facility with biological males, often boys up to year 6.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just say to any of our gender diverse students and their families who may be watching: We're here to support you in our context. Public education is without race, colour, creed distinction. We will make sure we're there to support you in your educational journey. We'll never deviate from that. If there's a family that might have a concern around that, please approach your principal. We stand by to support you.

CORRECTED

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The reference is in relation to legal issues bulletin LIB55, which was released two days ago.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, I ask you a second question relating to sport. The bulletin outlines the arrangements that lead me to understand a student under this policy, that the children play school sport as their identified gender. I put to you biological male students, identifying as female, will be able to, say, compete in a girls rugby league competition.

MURAT DIZDAR: In fairness, Ms Merton, you haven't read the entire section. You've quoted the first two sentences. School sport is a mandatory part of the curriculum, and we want all our students to participate. When it gets to competitive levels, we follow the national Ausport guidelines of that sport. For the PE lesson, when we are doing dance as part of PE, we want everyone to participate. If that's touch football, we want everyone to participate. It's a 40- to 50-minute activity, but if you're going to represent the State or the country in rugby league, we'll follow the national guidelines given by that sporting code.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, how does the department deal with its duty of care to girls playing rugby league or any of these sports with biological males in the team?

MURAT DIZDAR: Part of the participation goes to the risk assessment around safety. I'm a massive fan of NRLW. I hope the West Tigers go really well this year.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You've given up on the blokes.

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I'm behind them too. I think they're top eight material this year. But what we do is, if it's going to be at the elite representative level, we follow the national guideline.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Secretary, how do you intend to inform parents of these arrangements? Surely you have a duty to inform them of these arrangements.

MURAT DIZDAR: The first duty I have is to the gender diverse student and their family—to make sure I meet their needs appropriately. I've got to respect their privacy and their individuality around that. Schools do a fine job in this space, Ms Merton.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, if you'd like to take it on notice, what is the department's communication plan to the school community as to how gender issues such as this one are being managed?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm not sure I need to take that on notice. There's no real change here in the update to the policy, apart from the changes to the births, deaths, marriages responsibility around gender with enrolment and the terminology around gender diverse as opposed to transgender. I'm not sure I need to communicate, but I need to make sure I can support those students and families well, and I'm committed to doing so.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, in light of what you've just said there, how do single-sex schools operate in this environment?

MURAT DIZDAR: Single-sex schools are a fantastic provision. They do an important job. One of the Government's commitments was for myself as secretary to make sure that every single-sex provision had a co-educational option and consultation. You'd be across Randwick, for example, where there was a merger with Randwick Girls and Randwick Boys. You'd be across the consultation that happened with Moorefield Girls and James Cook Boys, which has become a co-ed provision.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, I'm not asking about the merger of single-sex schools. It's the single-sex school in operation relating to the gender issues that are identified in your bulletin—in terms of identified gender and how that operates in a single-sex school.

MURAT DIZDAR: Just like it operates in every other school—we support those students and we support that community.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at literacy and numeracy, regarding the year 1 phonics screening check, which reports basically no improvement in 2024, where 95 per cent of students met the expected achievement level in 2023 and 60 per cent met it in 2024. Mr Dizdar, are you or the department concerned about the lack of improvement?

MURAT DIZDAR: Not at all. I'm glad you've asked this question because, when we started the phonics screening competency check in 2020, only 40 per cent of students were phonemically competent. I look forward to releasing the 2025 results because you just quoted the 2024 results and they continue to improve. We're well above 60 per cent and we're well on track to continue to increase that further. This is one of the measures that

CORRECTED

gives me a lot of confidence in the growth of student outcomes in public ed. Off the back of that, we're leading the country, Ms Merton, in rolling out the numeracy check. We're the first jurisdiction in this country to roll out comprehensively—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This was literacy, but I recognise the work on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: You've got to do both.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: When will the 2025 phonics screening check results be released?

MURAT DIZDAR: Hopefully soon. It's positive. It's affirming. It continues an—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We're thinking a substantial improvement in 2025?

MURAT DIZDAR: When you consider, Ms Merton, that we were at 40 per cent in 2020, we've got ourselves to 60 per cent in five years—and I want us to continue to climb. I know it's a continuing upward trajectory. I'm really heartened by our work there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could move to the issue of civics, which we may be aware of in the current environment we're in—the Rule of Law Education Centre, for example, have recommended a review of the New South Wales curriculum in light of Bondi to ensure sufficient compulsory standalone civics components within the New South Wales curriculum, ensuring all students receive formal and explicit instruction in democratic values, freedoms and the rule of law. Mr Dizdar, will this be adopted?

MURAT DIZDAR: Civics education is an important feature of NESA's syllabus rollout that Mr Martin was talking about. I'll get him to talk to it, because it's a key feature of the K-6 HSIE syllabus, 7-10 history, 7-10 geography, in Aboriginal studies 7-10, in commerce 7-10, in the geography elective 7-10, in the history elective 7-10. It has been strengthened in this syllabus rollout. I might get Mr Martin to comment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could just stress that the question was around compulsory standalone civics components—you mentioned the embedding of civics.

MURAT DIZDAR: It has been strengthened from where the syllabus stood across all of those syllabuses. I would argue, as a former high school teacher and principal, you're getting a much stronger dose of civics and citizenship education.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So we're ruling out a standalone civics component?

MURAT DIZDAR: These are compulsory subjects from year 7 to year 10.

PAUL MARTIN: What Mr Dizdar is describing is accurate. It's the content in the Australian curriculum and the content in the New South Wales syllabuses that is the most important thing. They can be standalone, but in fact they're probably much better—and the decision has been made in New South Wales to integrate them appropriately at age and stage and in other syllabuses. But the information is all there: bicameral parliaments, parliamentary democracy, Magna Carta, referenda, all of the sorts of things that people want to see. I'll openly admit that they weren't there prior to the syllabus renewal. But the question that you're asking is is it a standalone subject. No, we've integrated them into all other KLAs.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of consultation that led to this decision, did that take place?

PAUL MARTIN: We consulted broadly with every syllabus that has been delivered so far. As I said, there are 80-something. We did speak to the people from the Rule of Law. I spoke to them personally. They were happy at that time with the significant additional content in the syllabuses. I think they do prefer the standalone subject model, but I think that the main issue is are students learning the content. Now they will be.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are those submissions publicly available?

PAUL MARTIN: We produce a consultation report after every syllabus, so there would be elements of consultation—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But not in full?

PAUL MARTIN: Sometimes the amount of consultation is so significant—larger consultation around these syllabuses than ever before. But we produce a consultation report and I'm happy to take those on notice and also identify which parts of civics and citizenship education people were asked about or commented on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's turn to mobile preschool services, Mr Dizdar. Mobile preschool services are concerned about the current rising fuel prices and supply risks. They say if prices continue to rise, they'll have to pull resources out. If fuel ends up being rationed, they've said they won't be able to operate as they are and they'll have to move online—the mobile preschools that obviously go around to those regional

CORRECTED

communities. That would have a major impact on those regional communities, I'm sure you'd agree. Has the department got any contingency plans in place?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Barraket to talk to mobile preschools. I concur with you. They're a very critical provision. Yes, it would concern me. I hope the fuel situation doesn't play out.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Let's get to the contingency.

MARK BARRAKET: That concern has not been raised with me. I'll check to see if it has been raised with the team. We would be concerned about that provision if that situation were to play out. We will look to see what support might be available for that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I'm raising it with you now. I'm very concerned—and thank you for your interest. What are the contingency plans? Are there any in place as of today or is that something you might—

MARK BARRAKET: We would work with any service that has difficulty in maintaining its provision. But, as I indicated, this concern has not been raised directly with the department to the best of my knowledge. But now that we're aware that there is this concern, we'll of course take that on board and take a look at it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That'd be very helpful because they're very concerned. Contingencies would be very helpful. Can I go to the Thriving Kids program? Has the Premier signed the Thriving Kids agreement?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't believe we've signed the agreement in New South Wales. Mr Graham—that was the last I knew. Are you across it?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm in the—that's a question for the Cabinet Office and the Premier's Department.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, it's not being led by Education.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure, I understand, but it has an impact. Does anyone know if it's been signed or not?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We can look into that but, yes, it's not something in our portfolio.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: All right, but can I suggest to you that it may well be? Can you provide the disability community with an update on the preparedness of the Department of Education to provide the appropriate therapies and supports in early childhood learning and public schools for children that are being moved out of the NDIS and into Education?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm happy to answer that. The Department of Communities and Justice has been undertaking public consultation on what the model might look like, and they'll also be leading the development of the program and the communication. Schools might be areas in which some of these services are delivered, but they'll be driven by a consistent model from DCJ and Health as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Have the programs been costed? Can you give an undertaking that there'll be a seamless transition for these kids who are presently in the NDIS to the State, to provide those State-provided intellectual disability programs for children under nine?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The Department of Communities and Justice has the lead on that, so it's not a Department of Education program.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So you've had no engagement with DCJ?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We have certainly engaged with the department, as we might be a possible site for delivery of services.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, there might be?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We might be a possible site for the delivery of services.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I would have thought so.

MARTIN GRAHAM: It might be that a room in a school is used to deliver those services, so we've certainly been engaged in that discussion.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: From the start I think the Premier said he won't write a blank cheque on this, but there's obviously community concern out there about who will be leading Thriving Kids in each State. Education is thought to be the program manager, because the programs commence in ECL.

CORRECTED

MARTIN GRAHAM: I think it's been very clear in New South Wales that Education is not the prime program manager, and the Department of Communities and Justice have been publicly consulting on the model as the leaders of that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What provisions do you have in place for those children who are not able to be placed in State public schools, that are coming from the NDIS?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The program won't be run by the department. We might be a location, but there might be community health centres, there might be other places where the program's run. We're not enrolling people. We're not taking lists. That's not done by the Department of Education.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I ask about the Cherrybrook precinct new schools. The Government's recently announced a proposal, another TOD, for an additional 9,300 homes to be constructed near the Cherrybrook metro station. The existing schools, Cherrybrook Technology High and Tangara High are already over capacity. What steps is the Government taking to secure land for the construction of new schools to meet the needs of the growing population surrounding the Cherrybrook metro?

LISA HARRINGTON: I don't know that I've got too much more to add than previously with Ms Merton. We recognise there's a lot of growth in that area, also with the metro, so it is an area that we're really closely looking at in terms of future school provision.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Okay, but there are no plans as we stand here today to identify a site, to secure land, to take construction steps?

LISA HARRINGTON: No further plans to announce, no.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I just wanted to clarify that. What, if any, plans are in place to increase the number of places available for students in New South Wales in schools for specific purposes? Oh, that's been done.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just quickly, if I could raise with you regional schools, Mr Dizdar, five regional schools are currently in recess, being Penrose, Lomandra, Goolma, Black Springs and Capertee. I'm very familiar with the last school there in the Central West. Mr Dizdar, parents are very concerned. They feel like consultation has been highly inadequate. The schools are not operating in this recess period. What is the future of these schools in regional communities?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've got established protocols, Ms Merton, that we follow. Local consultation is part of that. Parents, carers and community can then have a say in that process. I mean, these aren't easy decisions to make. When you're putting a school into recess, it's often because there's been a significant drop in enrolments over time, unsustainable enrolments. But why we place it into recess is because if enrolments were to re-emerge, we're able to take it out of recess and reopen the school. So we monitor, once that's happened, on an annual basis.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Just to confirm, Mr Dizdar, during this recess period, the schools are not operating?

MURAT DIZDAR: During recess, the school's physically there. We haven't done anything to the school.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Empty?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, it's empty. It's not operating. But it has the possibility of reopening, should there be enough students, enough population in the area of school-aged children, to reopen. So we don't go, Ms Merton, straight to closure. We go and put it in recess, we monitor over time and we may then reopen the school, if there were school-aged children.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Mr Dizdar, you talk of protocol, of consultation. Perhaps you could provide me with details relating to each of the schools as to the consultation, as to the timing, who was involved and how that was managed?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy to take you through the protocols and what's required with that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I ask about Penrose Public School? You did that, sorry. I need a coffee, obviously. Can I ask about Drama Stage 6 course prescriptions and assessment documentation to understand the syllabus? When will the course prescriptions and assessment documentation be released for Drama Stage 6?

PAUL MARTIN: The course prescription documentation and the examination-specific specifications will be released before the middle of the year, is my understanding. It's the normal process that happens with all subjects, including English prescriptions. They're never normally released at the same time as the syllabus. The

CORRECTED

syllabus isn't taught until 2027 and it's not assessed as HSC until term 4 of 2027, so there's sufficient time for drama teachers to not only become acclimatised to the syllabus, but to see the specifications and the exam specs—prescriptions and assessments.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That may be so, but a number of them are concerned about the timeline. They've asked me to raise it specifically because they are concerned. They don't see it as that far off.

PAUL MARTIN: I think there has been concern. The drama and—yes, particularly the drama community, were unhappy with the first draft of the syllabuses, the consultation draft.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. I might just ask the question, if I may, and feel free to add anything else on notice. They are concerned. Are those documents currently completed? They say they can't prepare for year 11 in 2027. That directly impacts their preparation for HSC teaching programs.

PAUL MARTIN: I'd question whether the amount of time we're providing is inadequate. We provide the exam specs and the prescriptions at the same time this time as we have in previous times.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Are the documents prepared?

PAUL MARTIN: They're in the process of being put together through various committees that our stakeholders are represented on, in the same way they are with other subjects.

The CHAIR: Just a quick one from me, a NSW Teachers Federation survey of nearly 20,000 teachers found only 15 per cent have enough time for lesson planning. Fewer than one in 10 can collaborate with colleagues and just 7 per cent have adequate time for curriculum programming. The Federation's "More Than Thanks" campaign is calling for two additional hours of release time per week. What is the department doing to increase release time for teachers?

MURAT DIZDAR: We continue to work on teacher workload initiatives. I need no convincing that time for a teacher is really important. To earlier questions, we have eight school development days compared to five. We've just heard about the syllabus rollout and we've given four of those days as teacher-directed so that we can make sure teachers have time to engage with the syllabus. We've been able to revamp mandatory training from a 21-hour requirement to a one-hour requirement. We've had EduChat for our teachers, an assistive tool to help them in administrative tasks.

We have put in additional SASS staff in 700 schools across the State to help with administrative work that can be taken off our teachers. I'm not claiming that there's not more we can do. We're going to continue to focus here, but we're not in a position with the workforce challenge that we're just breaking the back of to get to a 12-year low on teacher vacancies. We've still got to reduce that number, and so we're not in a position to add to that workforce shortage at this point in time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Just following up some of the questions that were raised by the Hon. Rachel Merton. Are the number of parental complaints under controversial issues in schools increasing or decreasing?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the data with me.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Will you take that on notice? If it's at all available and collated system-wide? And so too, are the number of transgender or gender diverse students increasing or decreasing? I ask that because at the parliamentary inquiry we had in the last term, one of the suggestions was that, while for some students it's a very genuine development, for others it's part of—for want of a better term—a fad, like emos or sharpies in schools. You know, there is a bit of peer group pressure; everyone's doing it. So are those numbers increasing or decreasing? My anecdotal feeling is that they are decreasing. The number of parents raising the concerned issues about it seems to have fallen away.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me see what we have, Mr Latham, and come back to you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I ask a question about male behaviour, which is often focused in the political system and generally in society. Teaching is a very feminised workforce. Some young men growing up in disadvantaged areas have got no male role models in their life at all and it's important to try and have good men working in schools for obvious reasons. Is that a particular recruitment push, particularly in primary schools, where we don't have as many men?

MURAT DIZDAR: Every teacher, I want them to be an upstanding role model. Where I need to do stronger and better is in the primary context, not as much in the secondary context. It is one of the things that we are looking at actively now recruiting as well.

CORRECTED

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I just wanted to give the witnesses the opportunity to provide any further information they would like to add. I know there were some answers where there wasn't time.

DARYL CURRIE: I had a question on notice from Ms Ward regarding the two centres that were cancelled. They were both Lycée Condorcet and Fun2Learn. The questions that you asked were how long have they been in breach. When we actually went out and saw them over the last little bit, Lycée Condorcet had seven compliance actions and 42 breaches since 2024 but was actually "working towards" since 2017. They were actually cancelled as a result of supervision issues, especially medical issues. The other part of the question was how many families. There are 102 children attending Lycée Condorcet. The other one, Fun2Learn, similarly had several compliance issues they'd been "working towards" since 2012 and they had 37 children attending.

But one of the things that I think's really important, because you asked about what do we—we work very closely with the centres. We work closely with the Early Childhood Outcomes to try and find alternative placement for children and families who may need their enrolment in a service. The other thing, and I've been saying this a lot, when the commission is given the choice between short-term inconvenience and possible long-term trauma for children, we will always take short-term inconvenience and then helping parents to find a place. The other thing for Lycée Condorcet, we actually gave 30 days notice before the closure in order to assist families to find alternative arrangements. With Fun2Learn though, there was an imminent threat to the children's safety and so we shut it.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, can I also put a very important correction on record, please. There was an allegation made this morning in the hearing relating to a Sydney primary school that requires correction for *Hansard* and the record and for the benefit of that school and the school community. There was unfounded speculation that was reported on as fact, which can be very damaging to that school.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: This is Granville South. It's in the media.

MURAT DIZDAR: And to its leadership and its community. I think there's been an update to the media article that I've seen. I'm advised that there was an isolated incident that involved one very young primary school student who made a totally inappropriate comment. One very young primary school student. That individual was counselled and the matter was dealt with appropriately by the school principal with the support of that child's parent. To characterise that situation this morning as a whole class celebrating the awful events at Bondi is simply incorrect and I wanted to put that on record.

The CHAIR: I'm glad you clarified that. Do you have voluntary contributions data for me, or will I keep waiting for that one?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't, Chair, but I'll come back on notice.

LISA HARRINGTON: I've got some information on Jannali. The Sydney asset management unit doesn't have any record of any funds being transferred from Jannali for the furniture; however, the asset management team has agreed to cover the cost of the furniture. They received an order for the furniture that was in the order of about \$52,000 and an order has been raised for furniture for the library of \$52,000. I can also confirm that the library refurbishment is going ahead. A planned maintenance project has now been awarded to the value of \$147,000 and that will cover carpet and paint to all areas of the library inclusive of breakout and seminar rooms. So it's 14 rooms in total.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Will the P&C get their money returned from Education?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'm saying that Education is funding not just the \$21,000 that you mentioned but actually \$52,000 for the furniture and we are also funding the library refurbishment of \$147,000.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If they have further questions about that process, is that all right if I follow up on those?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm happy for you to come through myself.

The CHAIR: That does conclude us for today. To the extent there are supplementary questions and questions on notice, the Committee secretariat will be in touch. Thank you all for your attendance and for all the work you do.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.