



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2018-2019**

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2018-2019 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2018-2019](#))

**Members:**

**MR A WALL (Chair)**  
**MS T CHEYNE (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS C LE COUTEUR**  
**MS E LEE**  
**MS S ORR**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 25 JUNE 2018**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mrs N Kosseck (Ph 620 50435)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

## APPEARANCES

<b>ACT Electoral Commission .....</b>	<b>691</b>
<b>ACT Teacher Quality Institute.....</b>	<b>619</b>
<b>Education Directorate .....</b>	<b>619</b>

## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.31am.**

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation

Education Directorate

Howson, Ms Natalie, Director-General  
Brighton, Ms Meg, Deputy Director-General  
Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform  
Matthews, Mr David, Executive Director, Business Services Division  
Daly, Ms Lynette, Chief Finance Officer, Strategic Finance  
Moysey, Mr Sean, Director, Early Childhood Policy and Regulation  
McAlister, Ms Coralie, Director, Strategic Policy  
Gotts, Mr Robert, Director, Planning and Analytics  
McMahon, Ms Kate, Director, Learning and Teaching  
Seton, Ms Sam, Director, Student Engagement  
Norton, Ms Sue, Director, School Improvement  
Prowse, Mr Wayne, Director, School Improvement, South/Weston Network  
Bray, Mr Rodney, Director, Infrastructure and Capital Works  
Stewart, Ms Margaret, Director, Governance and Community Liaison Branch

ACT Teacher Quality Institute

Ellis, Ms Anne, Chief Executive Officer

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to day 7 of public hearings of the select committee on estimates. Today we are looking at the Education Directorate, budget statement F, and finishing off the day with the Electoral Commissioner.

If you are taking any questions on notice today, can you clearly state, “I will take that question on notice,” so that Hansard and the secretary can keep track of them. Before we kick off, can everyone please acknowledge the privilege statement on the pink sheet in front of them, that they are aware of it and its implications. Yes? Beautiful. Minister, did you have an opening statement?

**Ms Berry:** I have not prepared an opening statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent.

**Ms Berry:** I thought we were given instructions not to provide opening statements.

**THE CHAIR:** It was the request.

**MS CHEYNE:** Just checking.

**Ms Berry:** I can make one if you like.

**MS CHEYNE:** We have a bet on, minister, about who is going to be the first one.

**Ms Berry:** Okay; here we go.

**MS CHEYNE:** Please don't.

**Ms Berry:** I have just changed my mind.

**THE CHAIR:** I thought that might do the trick. I will kick off with budget paper 5, page 5, strategic indicator 1, promotion of greater equity in learning outcomes in the future of education initiative, which is \$9.2 million over the four years, \$781,000 in this year. What is the objective of that funding?

**Ms Berry:** This is very important funding going towards future work on what we have been finding out from the future of education conversations that we have been having so far. There will be significant work as we look towards building a strategy for education in the ACT that focuses primarily on equity for students to get the best quality equal access to education. The conversations so far have led us in a direction where we think we are all on the same path. We have now started a conversation with the teaching profession in all our schools, and are very happy to have the independent and Catholic schools engaged in that conversation as well.

I might ask Natalie Howson, director-general, to give you a bit more detail on the actual numbers.

**Ms Howson:** Chair, do you mind if I just clarify the second part of your question? Are you referring to the future of education initiative in particular?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** Thank you for the question. This is particularly about establishing some foundations for the future of education into the future, as the minister has just outlined. The emphasis is very much on an investment in the teaching workforce. The research that we have been focused on this year, as well as the consultation that we have had with the community, underlines the importance of investing in quality teaching. The best thing we can do to impact on student performance is to support our teachers to be the best practitioners they can be.

The elements of this particular initiative go to providing, in the outyears, opportunity for coaching and support for teachers to develop new teaching methodologies and to collaborate and share best practice in the way in which they are delivering teaching, with a focus on literacy and numeracy in particular.

We are also forming a strategic partnership with the University of Canberra. This will focus on the development of our initial teacher education experience, so that beginning teachers have strong relationships with our schools and are working in with our schools before they graduate. Part of that program will also see into the outyears the evolution of some more research and development focus in our affiliated schools as part of that process so that it supports our teachers to become action researchers in

the classroom.

The other part of this particular initiative is one of the election commitments in relation to providing support for beginning teachers and training our school leaders and executive team to provide the appropriate mentoring that they need to provide for our beginning teachers.

That is, in a general sense, what the elements of this particular initiative are about. It will also provide some funding for us to do some more detailed design on some of the elements of the future of education strategy as that unfolds this year.

**THE CHAIR:** The blurb under strategic objective 1 states that the future of education reaffirms the government's commitment to equity in the public education system. What does that equity look like? Is it equity in opportunity, equity in resourcing or facilities, equity in outcome? What is the key part that you are looking for equity in?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, all of those things. Equity in making sure that every child, regardless of their background or their circumstances, gets access to a quality education. That is the focus of the future of education's work, and it is certainly what we have been hearing back from the community about what they want to ensure: that everybody starts at the same place when they start kindergarten.

With kids who are starting from behind—because of different things going on in their lives, because they learn differently, or because they have come from a background which has not allowed them to have the same kinds of chances as other kids—we get them to a point in kindergarten where they start at the same place and they have equal access to tools in education, including a professional workforce. That was directly what the provision of Chromebooks was for: to ensure that every child had access to technology-based education through the provision of those Chromebooks.

The focus of all of this, as I said, has always been about equity: that every child starts at an equal place.

**THE CHAIR:** But clearly not every child does start at an equal place, particularly when they are coming to kindergarten.

**Ms Berry:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that there are resources and additional support for those students that are starting below their peers, but what resources are put behind those in the class who are starting either at a proficient standard for where you would want to see kids entering kindergarten and those who are achieving above. Are they just left to wait for their classmates to catch up or are they offered some form of extension?

**Ms Berry:** There are considerable supports provided to children right now, but don't forget that we are also working on an early childhood strategy, which will work closely with the future of education strategy, about how we support our young people before they get into kindergarten. That will go to exactly those things that you are talking about: if a child is starting from behind, how are they supported in all kinds of different ways, whether that is through different supports from community service

organisations or others, making sure that children have access to preschool, and expanding—

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that. The question was specifically, though: what is offered then to those children who are achieving at the standard, or slightly above, in kindergarten whilst there is additional work put in to see those who are below standard catching up?

**Ms Berry:** That is a good question, and I will get some more advice for you in just a moment before Meg talks with you a bit about that sort of support. But this is about every child, broadening every child's horizon, no matter what their background. If you have a child who is particularly gifted or is way ahead of other children in their classroom and they need extra support, that support is provided as well, making sure that our schools are as inclusive as possible, regardless of where your child is on their learning journey.

**Ms Brighton:** Mr Wall, I will talk to a number of those things, but with the committee's permission, I will get one of our school leaders to come and join me at the table so that he can give you some practical examples of what it looks like in classrooms.

As the minister said, the focus of this is every child accessing high quality education with passionate teachers and great teaching in the classroom. That means that no matter what point the child is at in their learning journey, they will be able to be supported by well-equipped teachers to succeed, to strengthen and to gain in the classroom.

Going to the work that we have been doing in Canberra, we are a high-achieving system already. We know that, but we also know that there is a lot more work that can be done. We have been investing quite heavily in the capability of the teaching workforce in areas of literacy, numeracy and future skills in order that those teachers are not only well equipped in content and knowledge but well equipped in helping students traverse into the contemporary skills they are going to need in the workplace.

It does not matter whether you have started behind at kindy or you have had great success, the minute you walk in the door, we will be able to service every child in the classroom. And our gifted and talented policy position requires that each school has supports and extensions offered to students in the classroom.

Mr Prowse has joined us at the table. He will give you some practical examples of what it looks like in the classroom.

**Mr Prowse:** I am the director of school improvement for the south Weston area, which is south of the lake and north of Tuggeranong. It is a good question. It is a really important question for us: how do we identify where students' learning is at at a particular time? How do we go about that? In the early years, we start with some early intervention practices for three-year-olds and four-year-olds; families are involved in that learning as well. So high quality preschool experience is the beginning of identification of students' needs.

If I was able to use students' literacy skills as an example, it is really important that students have a range of language and words, words being the fuel of thinking and how the mind works. So oral language plays a really large role.

When we start on the literacy journey with our students, which is as early as we have contact with them, the first step is to identify. If we are aware of where a student is at at the moment, at any particular point, we can use a range of available commercial tools. The one that I will talk about is the PM reading benchmarks. When a student enters school, and there is a reading challenge or a reading deficit in some way, or if we think they are reading at the expected level or are already quite competent at a certain level of reading, we need to know precisely where they are at with that reading so that we can identify and collaboratively plan and program for tomorrow's learning.

Similarly, with number, we have practices that can inform where a student is at with number. There is a practice called "count me in too".

They are the elementary steps that we take. We identify. We plan. In any class in the ACT in a public school, we know we are planning for at least three groups of students: those who are not yet at the preferred level; those that are at the preferred level; and those who need extension. I could provide specific examples if you would like.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that is sufficient for me.

**MS LEE:** Ms Howson, you talked about investment in teachers and that underpinning the strategic direction and the future of education, as the minister has announced. Can you provide a bit more information on the detail about that investment? What initiatives are being introduced by the government to equip teachers with better numeracy and literacy and a better pedagogical foundation?

**Ms Howson:** I will ask my deputy to take that question in the first instance and also invite Ms Norton to comment. She is leading our early years literacy program to give you some very practical examples of exactly what we are doing in the classroom.

**MS LEE:** Especially in terms of the mentoring and the role of TQI.

**Ms Brighton:** We are taking a multi-pronged approach to this. We know school leadership is a really critical component of great schools and students achieving every day, so we have a body of work focusing on school leadership. We have another area focusing on building the profession itself.

**MS LEE:** As in more teachers?

**Ms Brighton:** As in building the capability of the teachers we have, and as our system continues to grow recruiting more teachers. There is then a third tier about making sure we are directing resources in the right space.

In terms of our leadership strategy, we are focusing on leaders at all levels. When I use that language I am talking about principals, deputies and our executive teachers. The focus of that work is equipping them to be instructional leaders in their schools.



In a moment I will pass to Ms Norton and she will break that down to what that looks like practically.

In terms of building the profession, I mentioned earlier we have been doing a range of work around literacy and numeracy, and that extends into the early years literacy. We have had some key Australian experts working with a number of schools across the ACT to grow in-class teacher capability in strengthening children's literacy in the early years of school. So teachers have a session with this leading educator. The educator then goes into the classroom, models it in front of a group of students with those teachers, and those teachers then take the opportunity to model it further with their own classes, and get feedback from their school leaders as well as the education expert we have brought in to assist us.

**MS LEE:** Is this being rolled out throughout the entire ACT government school sector?

**Ms Brighton:** Yes. We have been focusing one body of work on primary schools, and we have another tier of work on strengthening writing in high school. So we look at what the metadata is saying overall, and then we target our strategies based on the story that data is telling us.

I will pass to Ms Norton and she can unpack what the leadership development looks like, including the mentoring and the mentoring of our early career principals.

**Ms Norton:** As Ms Brighton suggested, we have tiers of building capability in our educators throughout the ACT. Our leadership strategy focuses on several different areas. We are rolling out some professional learning around our leaders being instructional leaders, that is, developing the capacity of all of our staff to be the best classroom teachers they can be. This links back to the equity question; equity is all about the best practice in the classrooms.

We are differentiating our approach. We have an early career principal. One-third of our principals in the ACT are in their first three years of being a principal, so we have a really targeted approach to building instructional leadership understanding. We meet with the early career principals twice a term and we look into what makes the best instructional leader to be able to coach and mentor all their leaders and to build capacity in their own leadership team in their school right down to the classroom practice.

We are also differentiating with our deputy principals to build capacity in the future of our ACT schools and also our executive teachers, our third level of leadership. We are building our coaching capacity because we know the real difference will be with our executive teachers. They are the ones who lead our teachers on a day-to-day basis and who are often in the classrooms alongside them.

In addition, as Ms Brighton suggested, we have literacy consultants coming in, but working in a team. We do not have the consultant come in and deliver the professional learning and then nothing happens; we have a really strong phase to ensure the implementation of the new or deepened or strengthened knowledge and skills. We also use an inquiry cycle so that classroom teachers are continuing to

research into what new or strengthened practices they might be using in the classroom to measure the impact of the growth or the progress of their students.

A component of this is around collecting the right data or evidence. We are rolling out significant professional learning to help our teachers in the classroom, and our leaders at all levels to be able to collect the small data, that is, the data that drives the improvement in the classroom to be able to see those significant gains in student outcomes through our more national data of NAPLAN.

**Ms Berry:** Ms Norton, it might be useful if you could give the example of the work happening at Kingsford Smith School?

**Ms Norton:** Kingsford Smith School came on board with us at the beginning of last year, so they have been on a journey with us for 18 months. Their data and staff profile were telling us they had early career teachers, so we brought the literacy consultant to the ACT. They were one of first six schools that we took on board.

During that professional learning we have strengthened early career teachers' knowledge and skills in phonics, phonological awareness, letter-sound relationships, engagement and motivation. There are 10 essential literacy practices we have been strengthening across the ACT, in particular at Kingsford Smith.

**MS LEE:** Was Kingsford Smith or any of the other schools chosen for a particular reason?

**Ms Norton:** Yes, we have been using data across the ACT. It is not just about NAPLAN or PIPS results, which is a kindergarten assessment; it is a range of data including, as I mentioned, early career teachers.

**MS LEE:** Because there was a high proportion of early career teachers?

**Ms Norton:** We look at the pro rata at each school. There was a greater number of early career teachers at Kingsford Smith, as there was at a range of other schools. So we can expedite that deep knowledge and skill, this was a perfect opportunity for us.

Consistency of practice is really important for our schools as well. Once we have teachers in classrooms talking the same language, having a common understanding and using a similar approach—we know that every classroom will be slightly different—it is far easier for students to transition within schools if they have a common language from class to class.

**MS LEE:** I have some other supplementary questions. Minister, you mentioned early childhood education. I know you have also mentioned before that you think it is important. Mr Prowse also obviously gave good examples of why it is important. Why is the target lower than what was actually achieved last year? There is a note in budget paper F, page 14, that says it is only a projection. It suggests it is not compulsory.

It is not quite clear to me. The rhetoric that is coming from the government talks about how important early childhood education is. At the same time, it seems to be a case of, "Oh, well, it is only a projection; it is not compulsory. We will make our target much

lower than we actually achieved.” How does that match up with what the government is saying in terms of its being a very important part of education?

**Ms Berry:** Just before Ms Howson goes into a little more detail, are you talking about the actual difference in those figures? Is that the bit you are talking about?

**MS LEE:** Yes, if you look at page 14, what you have is the estimated outcome for this year being 4,677. Then you have the target for next year being 4,650. I also put a question on notice, which you have answered. You say that it is not compulsory.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, that is right; it is not compulsory at the moment. But, of course, for early childhood education, there have been reports—I do not know how many—that talk about those early years being so vital in a child’s learning journey, particularly from three. How much a child learns between three and eight is quite incredible, but from three to five, before they actually start school, that is the most important part of a child’s learning to bring them to a point in kindergarten where they are ready to start the next 13 years of their formal education. Yes, whilst it is not compulsory, all the reports say this. Early childhood educators have been saying it for decades; everybody knows it and so that is why—

**MS LEE:** I think we are in furious agreement at the moment, but what I am getting at is that if that is the case, and you have now reiterated that, why is the ACT government setting a target that is lower than the estimated outcome last year?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, but committees are also opportunities to say—

**MS LEE:** Again.

**Ms Berry:** all of these things again. So I will take the chance when I can. I did not get to make a statement at the start.

**MS CHEYNE:** To be fair, it is 27 students lower than the estimated outcome.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, but that is okay. We can explain. It is easy to explain, yes.

**MS LEE:** It is still lower.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Obviously we are into round numbers as well.

**Ms Berry:** So we can explain; it is really easy.

**Ms Howson:** Ms Lee, thank you for that question. It is important to clarify some of this. You are right. Rather than a target, it is a projection. It is based on our projections around the public education population of students. What we achieve in any one year can be influenced by the attendance of students in other sectors as well as the New South Wales population that use our preschools. We set our projections again around the known. It is not compulsory to attend but, of course, we accommodate students from not only within the ACT but from within the region. Do you want to add to that?

**Ms Efthymiades:** I think Mr Gotts might be the right one to bring some detail, because it is about the non-government and government shares of the sector.

**Mr Gotts:** Just to pick up the points that Ms Howson was making, this is down as a projection because it is dealing with several parts that are all moving at the same time. One of those parts is that a number of non-government schools are increasing their provision of preschool services. As Ms Howson said, there are students who come across the border from New South Wales to the ACT.

Of course, each year a different number of children is born; so to declare a target and to say specifically that we think this number of children will come to a government preschool is a bit artificial. It is now focusing on a projection, looking at those changing factors, the different balances. Then we project that this is likely to be the number that will come. Of course, as Ms Howson said, regardless of the actual number that comes, we will take all of them.

**MS LEE:** That is good. I can let my constituents know. Thank you for confirming that. Minister, in terms of equity and Chromebooks, you talked about the policy around Chromebooks being central to, or very important to, equity, making sure that all the children have access to the same Chromebooks. Did your directorate undertake research to suggest that children who did not have Chromebooks were falling behind?

**Ms Berry:** The first part of the approach to this is around equity so that every child has access to a Chromebook. In addition to that, it provides the chance for teachers and school leavers to have an understanding and to be specialists across one domain, rather than multiple domains when children have multiple devices.

That is not to say that children cannot bring their own devices. Of course they still can. There is still a bring your own device policy in existence. But by providing Chromebooks, every child has the same. Every child has an equal start. It frees up teachers' time to be able to do what they want to do, which is to teach children and not have to troubleshoot across a number of different devices.

We engaged an expert panel to advise us on the actual device and whether a Chromebook was the most suitable device. I will ask Ms Brighton to give you some more information about the advice that came out of that group.

**Ms Brighton:** Thank you, minister. As the minister said, she established a school education advisory committee. The purpose of that committee was to provide the minister with advice, having regard to the evidence, the research and the best practice relating to the implementation of devices in schools, particularly the devices in schools in order to enhance learning.

That education committee included students and educators, as well as academic experts and education administrators. That collective group of individuals looked at all the research that was available. They looked at the issues of cyber safety; they looked at the issues of equity; and they provided some advice back to the government as to what the construct of that would look like.

The Chromebook, as a device itself, is readily accessible. It is a good cost price. It is a

pretty robust device. The public education system works on a Google platform. We are a cloud-based service for our students. The beauty of the Chromebook device is that students can access their learning anytime, anywhere, using our comprehensive suite of products that we offer through the digital backpack.

As the minister said, those who prefer to have their own device can continue to bring it and use their own device. But for the Chromebooks, it also means that the teacher is doing far less problem-solving in the classroom because the majority of students are working off the same device. The teachers are familiar with that device and can very quickly troubleshoot in the event that this is required, which is not very common.

**MS LEE:** I think we all agree that obviously there are good uses of technology and all of that. I guess my question was narrower in scope. If it is about equity, and we are talking access to education no matter where they start from, was there specific advice from that group, or anywhere else, that said, “Hey let’s get Chromebooks for everybody. This is going to be the thing that is going to make equity for all students a reality”?

**Ms Berry:** Before you keep going, with regard to parents of children, particularly those from low income families, who are entering high school and who get the list of items they need to purchase before they start high school, there is a financial burden and a lack of expertise for most parents on what actual device to purchase to get their children started on that sort of technological learning experience in high school. This takes these pressures away from parents.

I know this from anecdotal evidence, from conversations I have had with parents and children. But also all the advice around the world is that if everybody has the same equal chance, there are likely to be more equitable outcomes for everybody. I think that is fairly clear in all the information reports around equity more generally.

But we are also continually reviewing the Chromebooks and how they support our children, teachers and parents, particularly around academic outcomes, with that strong focus on making it a little easier for everyone.

**Ms Brighton:** To add to what the minister said, there are clearly two dimensions to this. It is about not letting the technology be a barrier to learning. The provision of the Chromebooks enables the students to collaborate and to get really fast feedback on the quality of their work from their teachers. It also puts them in a position to be ready for the future state, to be ready for the world of work that does not exist today. Devices are a core part of all our lives. Access to the Chromebooks is a facilitator of that.

The other dimension to this is that it is a device. Really, what is happening in the classroom is the important thing in the pedagogy; the teaching and learning exercise in the classroom. Every term we have professional learning for our staff in the use of digital technologies and how that can enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a question on Chromebooks. Continuing on the equity theme, there are some kids who do not have access to the internet at home. Do you have any support for children who are in that situation?

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**Ms Brighton:** The committee looked at that on behalf of the minister. That was certainly one of the issues that they discussed, and that was a concern for them. In their analysis, they found a couple of different dimensions.

First, when the students are at school and in public libraries they have access to not only the school-based wi-fi but the Canberra public wi-fi. And, by and large, with even the most disadvantaged of our school students, we are finding that they are getting access to mobile phones through their parents. The committee found that, while we started in the position of being concerned about the equity of access when we have a wi-fi based device, the prevalence of technology and the availability of free wi-fi have put quite a different dimension on it for our students. It is not a barrier to students' learning.

**Ms Howson:** However, if there was a family that was struggling and had some difficulty, there are a range of financial equity programs that exist through schools. That would be considered on a case-by-case basis and supported. If a family could not access and it was essential for the way in which their young person was learning, there are financial programs available to schools.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That is good. What happens to the Chromebook when the young person leaves school? Are you anticipating that they are going to be given back to the school? Will they stay with the young person?

**Ms Berry:** Everyone should consider a Chromebook to be just like a textbook, really, a textbook that is owned by the Education Directorate and is being used and signed out by the student. It is like a library book. They have a three-year life; like most devices, sadly, they do not have as long-term lives as perhaps they will in the future. At the moment they have a three-year term; then they will be appropriately recycled and replaced through future governments' decisions around whether or not the provision of Chromebooks will continue. So the individual student will take the Chromebook with them for the three years. Do you want to go into more detail about that?

**Ms Brighton:** No, minister. You have covered that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** So at the end of three years they will go back to the schools?

**Ms Berry:** We will recycle them.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Rather than leaving them with the students, who may still find them of use?

**Ms Brighton:** We are working on a three-year life cycle, because that is the advice that we have around the life term of the device. The devices only work on our network. While the student is enrolled in public education and enrolled as one of our students, they can continue to use their device. Subject to decisions of future governments, the proposal would be that those devices would be on a rolling refresh cycle, just as corporate entities refresh the devices that they provide to staff. So when a student

leaves public education, the device would not work if they took it with them, because it is only configured to be on our system.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That I did not realise. So if they go on holidays and they cannot access the ACT government wi-fi, they cannot use them?

**Ms Berry:** They can.

**Ms Brighton:** They can. When I say it works on our system, it means that the student login, user ID and password are what they need to access the system. Suppose I am enrolled in our system as Meg Brighton, student at Dickson College. I log in with my name and user ID. Once I leave Dickson College and I go to TAFE, I will not be able to access that device because I will no longer be enrolled in the public education system. Sorry for that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** But if you went away for the weekend for the holidays with your parents, you could do your homework?

**Ms Brighton:** You could still access it. Absolutely.

**Ms Berry:** That would be a sad thing: to go on holidays and have to do your homework.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I guess this is possibly something you have not yet really thought about, but with a three-year turnover, you are going to have a lot of e-waste. Speaking as an ex-IT manager, I can say that we in the IT world have been pushing out the time lines longer. At home I have an iPad which must be at least six years old and is still going fine. I hope and strongly suggest that you do some work around trying to push that lifetime out. There is an awful lot of potentially very valuable or very polluting waste within these sorts of devices. That is enough from me. I will stop preaching.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to go back to the preschool enrolment numbers. Mr Gotts has kindly stayed at the table. I want to go to the numbers in the accountability indicator for public school education, and I will talk about public preschools. What sort of capture do we have across the territory on children in that four-year age group enrolled in a preschool in a childcare setting, non-government or government?

**Mr Gotts:** I can break it down for you a bit. In the public system, there is the number that—

**THE CHAIR:** This year we are looking at the 4,677?

**Mr Gotts:** Yes. The numbers I have here are for the 2018 year, so this is for a different period.

**Ms Berry:** The future.

**THE CHAIR:** That is for 2017?

**Mr Gotts:** What I have for the independent schools is 774 in preschool. For Catholic systemic schools, I have 593 in preschool. For the public system, I have 4,597.

**THE CHAIR:** Obviously you cannot use this year's numbers because you do not know what the enrolment for next year looks like, but looking at the 2017 enrolment numbers, what percentage of children who enrolled in kindergarten this year attended some form of preschool program last year? Do you capture that?

**Mr Gotts:** Yes; it is just whether I have got it.

**Mr Matthews:** Mr Wall, I can help address some of that. That information is contained in the census material that is released every year, so there is some historical information on school enrolment data. That is publicly available as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Whilst you have that at hand, Mr Matthews, what was that number?

**Mr Matthews:** Which number are you looking for, Mr Wall?

**THE CHAIR:** The number of children enrolled in kindergarten who attended some form of preschool.

**Ms Howson:** We will see if we can get you that figure before the end of the day. What we do report on is the proportion of the ACT population of preschool-aged children that are enrolled in preschool. The number is a bit meaningless. It works from, I think, Australian Bureau of Statistics work that they do in this area. It is over 100 per cent, and that is because those enrolled in our preschools include New South Wales residents. So it is a slightly misleading figure.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that a question that is asked when a child enrolls into kindergarten?

**Ms Howson:** No; that is in terms of enrolment of the population. In terms of the number of students who then transition into enrolment into kindergarten, we would have to look at it and see if we can get you that number before the end of the day. But, of course, because it is not compulsory to attend preschool and the enrolment in primary school is a new enrolment, essentially we may not have that translated.

**THE CHAIR:** On enrolling into a kindergarten, is the question asked as to whether or not the child attended preschool?

**Mr Gotts:** The enrolment form asks what the child was doing prior to enrolling in school. If the student has enrolled at preschool, at four-year-old preschool, we know about them and have them enrolled then. If they enrol as a kindergarten student and that is our first record of them, we still want to know what they were doing prior to that, and that goes back as far as what they were doing for early childhood. So prior to preschool, three years old, and less. We ask that as well.

As Ms Howson said, we will get a precise number, but in 2018 the number of students who enrolled in kindergarten for whom we did not have a record as preschoolers was approximately 600. I will have to get that more precisely, but it is that order of number.



**THE CHAIR:** Minister, you said in your comments earlier that attending preschool is not yet compulsory. Is that something the government has given thought to?

**Ms Berry:** I do not think I said “yet”. Did I say “yet”?

**THE CHAIR:** You did say “yet”.

**Ms Berry:** I take it back then.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ms Berry:** I do not think I said “yet”. It is not compulsory.

**THE CHAIR:** You said “not yet”. I was just asking: is the mandating of some form of early education something the government is considering?

**Ms Berry:** No. If I said it, it was a miscommunication. I do not recall saying “yet”.

**MS CHEYNE:** I have a totally different line of questioning. Minister, I note this morning a media release came out about the roof replacement program, which is \$18 million in this budget. That will be for Alfred Deakin, Calwell, Campbell, Dickson, North Ainslie and Telopea. I want to get an understanding of what this roof replacement program will achieve, apart from some obvious things. Why were these schools prioritised, and other schools in the mix as well, coming up through the prioritisation over the future years?

**Ms Berry:** That is right. The ACT Education Directorate is responsible for 87 schools at the moment but soon 88-89. Some of those schools are getting quite old—50 and 60 years old—and their roofs are needing to be replaced. There is not only the replacement but also more work on how those roof spaces can be used to provide more environmentally sustainable infrastructure at some of our older schools. I will get Mr Bray to talk in a little more detail about each of the roof replacements and some of the benefits, and how we triage, if you like, those kinds of upgrades in our schools.

**Mr Bray:** The minister has covered a lot of the reasons for the upgrades. Initially the driver was around roof leakage: very old roofs, very poor condition; just end-of-life. The work that we have been budgeted to do follows other works that we have already completed at six other schools already: Melrose High School, Curtin Primary School, Chapman Primary School, Southern Cross Early Childhood School, Wanniasa School Senior Campus and Canberra High School.

This program funded in the current budget will help us go forward and do another six schools. Obviously, the first targeted reason for the upgrades is to overcome the roof leakages that have been occurring. These result in damage internally to the schools. When we do that work, we use a new material that increases the thermal insulation of the roof. It saves energy in winter and reduces heat load in summer.

We are also looking at increasing the solar panels on those roofs. Because they are

new roofs we can look at putting those in. We will be looking at installing up to 100 kilowatts or expanding their existing solar panel system up to 100 kilowatts, which is the limit for a small scale power provider. Doing all those things provides a much more comfortable learning environment for students and for teachers.

**MS CHEYNE:** How many schools currently have solar panels on their roofs?

**Mr Bray:** Every school.

**MS CHEYNE:** Every school?

**Mr Bray:** Every school has solar panels. When we started that program about seven years ago, we targeted primary schools to have at least 10 kilowatts, high schools 20 kilowatts and colleges 30 kilowatts. Every new school that we build has 100 kilowatts, which comes as part of the project. Some schools over the time have chosen to do additional funding. We usually do a joint funded arrangement. Many schools have actually increased their kilowatt panels beyond what we initially installed.

**MS CHEYNE:** How many schools have identified roof leaks?

**Mr Bray:** We currently have a program of the six that have been funded in the budget. Probably, just off the top of my head, we have about another six or eight that we will hopefully roll into a following program that will come after that. This program will go for many years. Many of our schools are well over 40 years of age. Basically, whenever a school has any leaks, we obviously go in straight away and we rectify the leaks as best we can to prevent water infiltration. Now we sort of triage just how quickly we need to bring in a new roof installation.

But the work we have done to date and this program will put us in a really good position in addressing those schools that have been our biggest worry for a number of years. A school roof replacement can cost up to \$3 million. It is a significant cost. It is a big impact on our normal capital upgrades program.

**MS CHEYNE:** Is this \$18 million part of—maybe it was last year's budget—the \$85 million for broader infrastructure investments or is it separate?

**Mr Bray:** No, it is on top of that. In the past we have done one roof replacement each year. That would have been our proposal to the senior executive and the minister. Under that \$85 million, we would have had a roof each year. But this appropriation now allows us not to spend those funds from the public school infrastructure program, the \$85 million. That will now be targeted at further upgrade works. What we would have spent—\$3 million from that program each year would have been allocated—will now be funded by this new appropriation.

**MS CHEYNE:** That is good.

**Ms Berry:** When all of the upgrades and expansions are considered, that is 180 million for public school infrastructure. It is a significant investment in our schools.

**MS CHEYNE:** While we are on infrastructure, I recall last year—I think it was in the summary for the Belconnen budget—talking about that \$85 million. Part of that was going to go towards some upgrades at Lake Ginninderra College, Aranda and Melba Copland. I think I recall at the estimates hearing last year that there was still some discussion with the schools about exactly where that would be invested. Has that work taken place? What has happened at those schools?

**Mr Bray:** Yes. To the best of my knowledge, those projects have all been completed.

**MS CHEYNE:** Okay. Do you have the detail?

**Ms Berry:** There is the future work at Lake Ginninderra College around the future skills academy, which is connected with the Centre for Innovation and Learning at Caroline Chisholm School. There will be a south side and a north side campus, if you like, of a global interactive community where students learn from all schools about science, technology, engineering and maths, but in different and really exciting and cool ways.

The commitment in this budget was for that continued work at Lake Ginninderra College to build on an actual physical hub space. But of course a lot of this learning happens through the air. Students from all over the city will be able to access the Caroline Chisholm School site, as well as the Lake Ginninderra College site, once that program of works is completed. I am not sure where it is up to.

**MS CHEYNE:** Do we have detail about that investment in the classroom and facilities upgrades in the budget for last year and the ones that you said have been completed?

**Mr Bray:** From memory, the Aranda Primary School question was related to the transportable building. That was obviously installed and commissioned. Operations started this year. The Lake Tuggeranong project related to the—

**MS CHEYNE:** Lake Ginninderra College, it was.

**Mr Bray:** I would have to go back and check.

**MS CHEYNE:** Okay.

**Ms Howson:** We could get that information for you before the end of the hearing.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, that would be lovely.

**Ms Howson:** There was a range of upgrades in relation to learning area improvements, toilet upgrades, heating and cooling in multiple schools. We can provide the answers to those particular questions before the end of the day.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, I am keen to know the full picture. Thank you.

**MS LEE:** On the future skills academy that you talked about, minister, you said that

students from all over the territory would be able to access that. Is there a selection criterion for attending the future skills academy?

**Ms Howson:** I am not sure how it is managed.

**Ms Brighton:** The future skills academy is a great investment of this government into preparing our students for a future generation of learning, of work. The north side and south side hubs of those academies will be such that all students can attend, learn and grow at those sites. But we are also planning to deploy a group of skilled individuals from each of those sites out into schools as well. It is not just about you coming in from your local primary or high school or college into Lake Ginninderra Senior Secondary College or into Caroline Chisholm school but actually it is about our teachers going out from those sites and working side-by-side with the primary school teachers, the high school teachers, the college teachers on the curriculum implementation at those sites. It works both sides.

The focus of that academy, that future skills academy, will be on both the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and maths but also about those skills of collaboration, inquiry, creativity, all those problem-solving skills that everyone is telling us we will need 100 per cent more of the time in 15, 20 years time than what we are using today.

When we spoke earlier we talked about the early years literacy work. Sometimes when we talk about science, technology, engineering, maths, we are thinking, “Where is the arts? Where is literacy?” Literacy is a really important skill about making meaning in the world and without that skill we cannot succeed and enable students into that future space with science, technology, engineering and maths. The way we are approaching, and the way the government has approached it with the future skills academy, is very much focused on the skills our students need to be active, engaged citizens in the world and participants in community.

**MS LEE:** And why were those two schools chosen? Was there a particular reason for those two schools being chosen as the sites?

**Ms Brighton:** They are both in really excellent, easily accessible locations. On the north side; there is certainly proximity to the University of Canberra, it is anchored in a college, a college that was already doing really interesting work in this domain.

In the south side hub it was not dissimilar. There was an opportunity to build on site there. We had a school that was already starting to explore areas in the STEM domain and it was nestled among a cluster of schools that had already embarked on a pretty strong journey of looking at makerspaces and engagement in students’ learning in quite different, creative ways.

**MS LEE:** And is there a limitation on students physically going there? I understand what you said about individuals being deployed.

**Ms Berry:** Physical space.

**MS LEE:** Is there a limitation on students and, if so, what is the number?

**Ms Brighton:** Caroline Chisholm opened earlier this year, and since it opened early this year we have had 6,000 students go through those doors to experience different learning and teaching opportunities. With some of those, that might be a repeat class but just in over a term and a half, to have that many students, that suggests that the capacity is really one of our own ability to service the need and to support the students and the teachers. This investment the government has provided will over time mean nine additional staff, and that is nine additional teaching and learning staff, to support the execution of this work.

**MS LEE:** When you say 6,000, obviously the students do not go full time to this academy?

**Ms Brighton:** No.

**Ms Berry:** No.

**MS LEE:** It is a program, is that right?

**Ms Brighton:** Yes.

**Ms Berry:** Yes. They can have multiple visits if they are working on a particular project.

**MS LEE:** It is project based?

**Ms Brighton:** Yes. One of our leaders will go into the local school and will work with the school on what is their part of that inquiry that that school is currently working on, and then they will design a specific offering at the centre for the students to come in. That class might come back a number of times over a period of weeks to work on individual projects or group projects.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I went to the Institute of Architects awards on Saturday night and one of the buildings was a new STEM building. Was I looking at one of these?

**Ms Brighton:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** It is the one in Tuggeranong.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** They did not give a location for it, just that it was a very good building under a tight budget. And it looked great. Thank you for elucidating that it is project based because I was thinking that maybe kids enrolled in the academy.

**Ms Howson:** No. I think the other thing that is—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I was really not understanding it.

**Ms Howson:** I am glad we could provide that clarification. I would also mention though that it is a demonstration of the sorts of modern learning environments which promote the type of pedagogy that enables collaborative learning and for students to

lead their own learning.

One of the other huge benefits that we are seeing already with Caroline Chisholm is the impact on the professional development of the teachers who are attending or attending particularly for their own professional learning. One day I was out there a group of preschool teachers was participating in PL. It is available and is supporting teachers in all sectors of our public education system.

**Ms Berry:** What is also unique about the place is that Paula, who is the scientist-in-residence, if you like, at the Caroline Chisholm centre, develops all these different kinds of programs that are really exciting and innovative for kids to engage in. Kids who might not ordinarily have engaged in any of this kind of activity before get the chance to try out some new things and find their passion for what it is that they want to do with their life and where they want to go with their learning. Paula is pretty amazing at mentoring the teachers who go out there to learn as well, particularly about making it a really exciting and fun learning environment for young people.

**MS ORR:** Have you been working much with industry in lining up these programs and, if you are, what do they think of it?

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**Mr Brighton:** With the minister's agreement we took this election commitment to industry and worked with industry and academics, our students and our workforce to design a proposal for government that would meet the government's objectives of this future focus-ready opportunity for students to participate in.

You might recall the construct of this election commitment was quite specific. Through the input of industry and academics as well as our students, it evolved into the future skills academy. As the service delivery plan for the academy is settled, we will continue to partner with industry on the offerings out of that. That might mean over time we have some of the great entrepreneurs based in Canberra do guest lectures for students, offer cadetships and enable a really good connection with the local industry as well as the local universities.

We are a strong user of the CSIRO program STEM professionals in schools where CSIRO identify skilled individuals to come into schools and work with classroom teachers on specific parts of the science curriculum.

**MS ORR:** To have students ready when they leave school to be orientated towards those future industries, have I understood correctly that it is partnering with industry and making sure the opportunities are there? Have I missed anything in what this program is doing to make sure students are equipped for future workplaces?

**Ms Berry:** This is one part of what is happening in our schools. It is very exciting, great, awesome and fantastic that it was nominated for its development and its architecture. Its popularity and the opportunities that will come at Lake Ginninderra college are fantastic, but it is not the only thing happening in our schools. A range of different projects engage with industry in different and unique ways, depending on the school community's needs. We have talked about the one with CSIRO and the

universities, and those special partnerships and relationships give kids who would not ordinarily get the chance the opportunity to discover what they are passionate about. That happens because of dedicated lecturers and professors and others at the Australian National University, the University of Canberra and also CSIRO.

**Ms Brighton:** This program will augment the existing practice in each of our schooling sectors. We talk about the skills we all need for the future: collaboration, creativity, innovation and problem-solving. I will take the example of Macquarie Primary School: they partnered with a local design entity which worked with the students to facilitate problem-solving around car parking and the traffic flow at that school. So what problem were they trying to solve? That peak period for 15 minutes at the end of the day when people were driving through the car park to pick up children.

Those students problem-solved and came up with a great solution that has been recognised internationally with a design award for problem-solving. The impact of that continues to this day where Macquarie primary has now a very smooth after-school pick-up time all thanks to the work the students have done with the local entity.

**MS ORR:** Do you know what the solution was?

**Ms Brighton:** The initial solution from the community was an engineering solution, and we know that engineering works in car parks not only cost a lot of money but do not change the culture of how people drive when they are around schools. The solution the kids came up with was anchored culture. They did some tactical engineering works about the flow of traffic, but the biggest issue was around culture and how people behave when they are in car parks.

**MS ORR:** We have heard quite a bit about what the future skills academy will do for students and their future education. How will this support the teachers and the progression of teachers within the industry?

**Ms Berry:** The really cool part about this is that it is not just a classroom for students; it is a great opportunity for teachers to learn different action research projects to implement in their classrooms.

**Ms Brighton:** The partnerships are about not only the student but, as the minister said, also the teacher learning. The partnerships are not just with CSIRO but also with the ANU. Melrose high has the ACE science mentors program where scientists mostly from ANU work closely with high school students on specific projects. Some of our technology students are working with some of the big commonwealth agencies on real-world problem-solving around cyber security and undertaking ethical hacking.

We have quite strong connections into both business and the academic institutions at all levels of our schooling that will support not only our teachers to grow their capability and give them exposure to contemporary issues but also the students. We see those things as hand-in-glove. It is not just bringing in external experts to deliver; it is working in partnership with our workforce.

Our close connection with the University of Canberra through their research centre means we have been doing a really strong piece of work around spatial reasoning in the early years of school. We know spatial reasoning—the ability to see objects and orientate yourself in the world and in a map—is a key skill for engineering, architecture, art and design. Those programs all together are enabling us to provide a rich learning experience for students. I could talk for days and days about all the things we have, but that is a sense of the breadth and the depth.

**Ms Howson:** We would be happy to talk more about what we have. An extensive program of professional learning sits around our STEM strategy. Some very good examples are the work we are doing with the computer science, education, research group at the University of Adelaide. It is important to understand that while these centres of future skills learning are focal points, they have a ripple impact through our system on a day-to-day basis.

**Ms McMahon:** Students cannot come to the CIL to do a learning package unless the director of the CIL has been to the school and has worked with the classroom teachers in designing that learning so the teacher is able to provide that level of coaching with the teachers from the school. Students then come in with their teachers. The coach at the CIL is there to guide and support, but it is the teachers doing the teaching in those subject areas. That is really building the capacity of those teachers to take the program to their own schools and work there.

**Ms Berry:** We feel pretty positive about the direction the Education Directorate and schools are heading around science, technology, engineering and maths, particularly when the Chief Scientist gives us a nod, and a tick of approval. Of course there is always more work to do, and how we communicate this in a way that makes sense to people is always the challenge: what jobs are we talking about and how do we make it more attractive for women and girls?

**MS ORR:** Do you have any ideas how to make it more attractive for women and girls?

**Ms Berry:** Lots of things are happening, but an example is the chance to try it out at Caroline Chisholm. I met a young student who had not found the thing that was driving her and what her education was going to head towards. She started participating in one of the programs, which was building a Meccano robot car and then participating in the robotics competition RoboCup. She had never thought that was something she would be interested in and she had never had the chance to engage in anything like that until her teacher said, “Hey, do you want to have a crack at this?”

She found that was the thing she really enjoyed, problem-solving, putting together the robo-Meccano car, reading the instructions, working as part of a team and being involved in the RoboCup activity once the robot car was developed.

One part of it is what language we are using to describe science, technology, engineering and maths and another is the kinds of jobs that come from that work and learning. It is not automatically going, “Oh, it’ll just be the boys who want to build Meccano cars.” We have to make sure that girls get the same kind of chance because maybe that is their thing.



**Ms Brighton:** We know one of the elements with girls in STEM is about mentoring and giving them an opportunity to see females working in these sectors and providing opportunities. We have a scholarship program where we are fully funding female students to participate in a particular program that CIT are offering, STEM sells. We are really privileged in the ACT government, we have a lot of senior women with science and engineering backgrounds. They have offered themselves to speak, and we are organising a series of engagements for them to speak at some of our high schools.

I spoke at a STEM conference recently where I shared a similar story to one of the other speakers. Both of us did STEM subjects in year 12—science, double maths, physics, chemistry—but neither of us knew any females who worked in that sector so we both went down the arts degree road. It is about giving girls an opportunity to connect with people they can see working in those fields.

We do not know what jobs are going to exist; 15 years ago the notion of an app developer did not even exist. It is about helping people and parents, in particular, relax into the notion that it is okay that it is a bit unknown. We did not have app developers, we did not have AI—artificial intelligence—developers. Who would have thought we would have autonomous vehicles? It is about giving the students the confidence that they can continue to work in the ambiguity and grow their skill set because at the end of the day the more adaptable they can be, the more positive their futures will be.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am interested in needs-based funding for students with disabilities. I am also on the committee that is looking into the NDIS issues, so I am very aware that there has been substantial change, and that significant numbers of people seem not to be doing as well as they would have been in the past. Certainly, they do not seem to be getting the support they need. Could you talk about what the Education Directorate is doing to support young people who are not being supported, or in many cases it would seem only partially supported, by the NDIS scheme?

**Ms Seton:** All of our schools work to the disability standards for education, which set out that, regardless of the needs of the student, our schools look at where they are at and what they need, and they provide that support.

In terms of how we work with the NDIS, we do that in a couple of ways. For our young people coming into preschool and kindergarten, we have a team of people called our support at preschool team. They link in with the current NDIS providers, ensure that we have collected all of that information, and that we transition that information into schools, so that when they do come into the preschool setting or the kindy setting, we know as much as we can about that student, and we are ready to support them from that point on.

We do know that for some families, they are not accessing that early, or they are unaware. Sometimes, particularly for a first child, the parents miss that speech is not quite where it should be. Sometimes the first time that is noticed is when they hit the preschool sector. We manage that in a couple of ways. We have our own speech therapist. In the first instance the preschool might call our speech therapist in. We will have a look and see whether it is something that we can just support the preschool teacher with, to further develop it, or whether we have a few more concerns. We will

then support that family in accessing the NDIS EACH provider.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** What happens if the NDIS says, “No, this child is not disabled enough”?

**Ms Seton:** There is the child development service, which is separate to NDIS, and they can refer to there. Alternatively, our speech therapists work really closely with our preschoolers. We have a range of PL; we can come into the classroom and do some joint things with that teacher to ensure we are giving that student every opportunity to catch up.

**Ms Berry:** This goes to the work that we have been doing and the conversations we have been having around the future of education, and making sure that we support teachers by having teacher mentors to ensure that our classrooms are as inclusive as possible, regardless of what a child’s learning ability is.

Even if a child has an NDIS package and their abilities are obvious, for people who are not quite at that level of ability but who have other kinds of learning difficulties or challenges in their lives, we make sure that our teachers have the best support through their mentors, which goes to the funding that we have announced as part of this budget. We also ensure that our classrooms are as inclusive as possible. That is what we have been hearing back from students as well. They want their classrooms to be inclusive; they want kids who have different needs to be supported in different kinds of ways.

The other thing that the Education Directorate is working on with the child and family centres is piloting some programs, which I think I have referred to in previous committee hearings: prep for pre and big school ready. They give an opportunity for the Education Directorate and schools to identify, very early on, the kinds of challenges that a child or a family might be going through.

They are referred through their MACH nurse at the child and family centres. The MACH nurse might identify that the young person’s speech, physical or learning ability are not at the standard that they need to be. Through this program, the speech therapists are there; other experts are there to do observations of the child and put the supports in place before they even get to kindergarten. The parents are also supported regarding the kinds of things they can do to support their child, while making sure that the parents understand and can get the support they need to get their child and themselves ready for when their first child starts kindergarten.

**Ms Seton:** One of the really nice things about that program is that it is a five-week program; the students come in and work with our early childhood educators. We have our speechies, our OTs and physios there, and the parents have a concurrent session. Sometimes for the parents, there is the anxiety with thinking, “I think something is not quite right,” and, “How is my child going to survive?” It gives them a chance to learn some strategies, as well as seeing their child being successful without them by their side. It is a really nice, supportive way, and at the end of that program we invite our principals or a leadership member from the school they are attending to meet with the parent, so that the parent already will be able to see a familiar face. If they are a bit uncomfortable or a bit unsure, they know who to go and talk to in the school.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Can I make sure that I am clear about this? The young people will be identified as NDIS participants, in which case that is what happens, CDS will direct them somewhere, or they will be looked after with some speech pathology?

**Ms Seton:** In terms of prep for pre, or more broadly?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Both, really. It seems that some kids are falling through the gaps. The first question is: how do you make sure there is not anyone falling through, particularly at an early age? I am assuming that once they are well and truly in the school system, the work should have been done. It is still an issue, but that will not be so much about falling through the gaps. Who is providing the support for the younger children in particular?

**Ms Seton:** If a student is not eligible for the NDIS, the child development service will work with that family, and they will offer some level of—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Does the child development service actually have therapy? They are not just a referral service?

**Ms Seton:** I would have to take that on notice.

**Ms Howson:** They do. A lot of the work that Therapy ACT did under the Community Services Directorate transitioned into the child development service. Education offers some positions into that service. I think they are occupational therapists and—

**Ms Seton:** We have three psychologists and two early childhood teachers.

**Ms Howson:** The detail of what is happening in the child development service is within the Community Services Directorate.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes, I will talk about it then.

**Ms Howson:** But it certainly does provide therapy.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am really concerned that there seem to be kids who are falling through in a way that they possibly did not in the past, because the ACT government was looking after the lot, whereas now there are the NDIS participants, and a cohort of young people who still clearly have some issues but are not in the NDIS.

**Ms Howson:** Ms Le Couteur, thank you for the question. It is a really important issue. From the point of view of Education and the way in which it engages with young people and children, regardless of what their needs are, it is, if you like, NDIS-blind. It does not matter whether they have an NDIS package or not; our focus would be on the needs of that particular child.

Our engagement commences in its full authority through preschool, in the way that Ms Seton just explained, through the issues raised by parents or teachers around developmental delays or other things, as the minister said, that are going on with that little person. We will use our own allied health professional teams. We call them the

NSET teams. They are a multidisciplinary team. They will support the teachers to provide appropriate referral and/or support in the classroom. That will continue throughout the life of that child's journey with us, right through to year 12.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a question that relates particularly to the young people who are involved with NDIS. I have been told that they tend to have a lot of service providers come to the school in school hours and that this is becoming a burden on the schools to manage, because they actually do not have spaces for a whole range of therapists to come at random times. This is because it is all client-based rather than group-based. They will come at totally different times, potentially for a number of clients who may be at the same school. They do not bunch them, because that is not how they work anymore.

**Ms Howson:** We would be very happy to look at any individual case and work with the school to make that work well for everyone involved, but particularly for the student.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** So that has not been a general problem for you?

**Ms Howson:** I am not sure that—

**Ms Seton:** For our schools it is actually the principal's decision as to whether the therapist does or does not come in. What we encourage our schools to do is to work with the family. The first question we ask is: is this actually of educational benefit? If it is not about education, we are not going to do that in school time, because school time is important.

Then it is up to the principal and the family to talk about what it is that they are hoping to achieve, what times suit and then working around this. Sometimes that is a little bit tricky. For some of our families it is better because then they have more time outside of school hours to do things and sometimes it ties in quite nicely with what is happening in the school.

The therapist might come in and observe the child in the setting, do some work and then observe again to make sure that it is having the right impact. But it is definitely a working relationship between the principal and the family about what is in the best interests of that child and then making sure that that is a good fit.

**Ms Howson:** I was in a classroom last week. A private speech therapist was in the class. It is only a sample of one, but it worked beautifully. In fact, the teacher was telling me that that speech therapist involved the whole class in a range of what are considered to be literacy-based initiatives that supported not only that young person and did not stigmatise them but also that were of benefit to all the students in the class. I think that when there is a cooperative relationship that is focused on learning outcomes it can work well. But if there are particular cases where it seems to be a problem, we can help with that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You are saying that, generally speaking, the education system will pick up the problems. But I assume that if the parents think something is not being picked up, basically they talk to the teachers.

**Ms Howson:** That is exactly what they should do, yes. If any parent has concern, they should raise it with their teachers. If they feel they are not getting heard, they should raise it with the school principal.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** And the school will direct people to NDIS where they feel that is likely to be appropriate?

**Ms Howson:** That is correct. Sam's team will also support that and can provide more support in a very particular way for that—

**Ms Seton:** Our teams have social workers. Sometimes the family needs that social worker to go with them and hold their hand just to get them started, because it can be a bit daunting.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Absolutely, yes. Thank you.

**MS LEE:** On that same line of questioning about the NDIS and the interaction, can I confirm fiscally how that works? A student may have an NDIS plan that funds them for, say, a speech therapist, or whatever it might be. How does that work in terms of the funding that the ACT government has for special needs within schools? I am asking in a fiscal sense.

**Ms Seton:** The two are separate.

**MS LEE:** Separate, okay.

**Ms Seton:** Education will always meet, as we always have, the needs of the student. The NDIS is for whole of life; so there may be some particular things like speech or like Proloquo2Go. That is whole of life. The NDIS might purchase that and that is used at home and at school, but anything that is about school we provide.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the cost of educating a student with a disability in the mainstream, it says that is going to go up from \$26,434 to \$27,998 by June 2019.

**Ms Howson:** Are you talking about the specific initiative in the budget?

**MS LEE:** Yes, and that is actually the question. Does the amount take into account the \$23 million or is it part of that \$23 million budget and the envelope that has been announced?

**Ms Howson:** This particular amount over the forward estimates reflects the number of students with special needs who are in our school system. It is reflecting the actual population. Sam, is it you that should talk to this?

**MS LEE:** Sorry, the figure that I cited was the cost per student that it is going to. That is going up, is it not?

**Ms Howson:** I might get some advice, but I am pretty sure that that just reflects the indexation arrangement that sits with that particular amount. Meg, do you know what

the average cost per student is?

**Ms Brighton:** I was just about to see if that one—

**Ms Howson:** We will get that answer for you, but I am pretty sure it is reflecting the indexation that is built into that base throughout those forward estimates.

**MS LEE:** Sure, okay.

**Ms Brighton:** Yes, which is the combination of the total investment made and the number of students who are identified as students with a disability.

**MS LEE:** Okay, which has gone up quite a bit in the past couple of years from my understanding from the census data. That is right, is it not?

**Ms Howson:** Yes. It is a growing system. Yes, we would expect there to be more students with a disability in our system. Is that the question you—

**MS LEE:** Is it just as a percentage or is it that the percentage itself has not gone up? The raw numbers would have gone up because there are more students in, but—

**Ms Howson:** Yes, I understand what you are saying. Has the proportion of the students with a disability—

**MS LEE:** Yes, as a proportion of students; is that the trend? Is that going up?

**Ms Howson:** It is pretty stable, is my understanding.

**Ms Seton:** Yes, it is.

**MS LEE:** What is the new budget initiative, the \$23 million over the next four years, going to be funding specifically? Is that for more support staff, more expertise, more equipment? What are some of the specifics?

**Ms Howson:** It is all of the above. That particular amount reflects the additional costs of supporting a student with special needs. That includes students in special ed settings as well as students in our mainstream setting.

**Ms Berry:** It can include things like more inclusive access into classrooms; some infrastructure work such as ramps.

**Ms Howson:** Learning support assistance.

**Ms Berry:** Learning support assistance, actual professionals in the classroom, maybe devices or things that students might need to help them with their learning.

**MS LEE:** Have you details of the cost breakdown of those different categories?

**Ms Howson:** Yes, we can provide that.

**MS LEE:** Yes, on notice?

**Ms Howson:** You are talking specifically about—let us make sure that we are clear—

**MS LEE:** Can you say, for example, “This is going to fund 50 LSAs”?

**Ms Brighton:** No.

**Ms Howson:** No.

**MS LEE:** You do not have any of that?

**Ms Brighton:** No.

**Ms Howson:** What we can give you is what the actual per student amount reflects in terms of what it might take into account. In term of the figure that relates to the new initiative, we can talk to you about the number of students that that reflects.

**MS LEE:** Is that because, obviously, there are so many different needs per student? Is that why the number breakdown is not based on this number of LSAs, this number of devices? Is my understanding correct?

**Ms Berry:** It is based on a child’s need.

**Ms Howson:** It is about a forward projection and it is based on a formulaic approach, the cost.

**Ms Efthymiades:** I just add a small thing; it is the money that is distributed to schools under our student resource allocation process. Then the schools use that to make adjustments to meet the needs of students.

**MS LEE:** Thank you very much.

**Ms Efthymiades:** So the adjustments vary depending on the student’s need.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, we will suspend at this point for 15 minutes for morning tea.

**Hearing suspended from 11.00 to 11.16 am.**

**Ms Berry:** With the committee’s indulgence, Rodney Bray has some more detail on the questions that Ms Cheyne was asking about, about those particular infrastructure projects.

**Mr Bray:** In reply to your question, we have the additional information. Aranda Primary School was the transportable building, as I mentioned. Melba Copland was a science lab upgrade, which has been completed. And at Lake Ginninderra there was a sensory space, which has been completed. The second project related to a security upgrade; the consultation phase on that is nearly completed and the works will be completed by the end of October this year.

**MS CHEYNE:** What is a sensory space?

**Mr Bray:** It is in response to children who may have behaviour problems. It is a space which assists in calming them down. Teachers can work with those students in those quieter spaces.

**Ms Berry:** Chair, we can provide more explanation on funding for children with disabilities which I think might be useful for the committee and everyone to understand. Do you want that information now?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Ms Howson:** Ms Lee, let me kick off by trying to declutter that confusing answer I gave you earlier. On page 15, you were referring to the average cost per student. This particular figure represents a fairly basic division of number of students into amount allocated. It does reflect CPI, as I said earlier. However, the question I think you were interested in was: how do we determine the cost of supporting a student with a disability? That is designed under our student resource allocation model. The student resource allocation model is something I am going to ask Ms McAlister to outline for you.

**Ms McAlister:** At the heart of this is a fairer allocation of funding to schools based on student need and reflecting the make-up of students at that school. SRA, the school resource allocation model, is the operationalising of Gonski in the ACT. It is almost at its conclusion. It has been a three-stage change journey since 2016, when we developed a core loading for schools.

One of the four required loadings was that relating to low socioeconomic status. In 2017 we developed the loading for students with English as an additional language and dialect. We also created a school operational allocation, the old SBM. In 2016-17 our schools were resourced with 83 per cent of that resourcing, reflecting a needs-based funding model. We are continuing the work in 2018 with the allocation of the loading related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is our strong policy position about meeting the needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The remaining element of the model is the allocation for students with disability. We are working with Victoria University to review the data, the research.

We have also had a significant consultation with the community about developing that model, which is our current focus, and thereby transitioning all schools in a staged and sequenced approach to a full student needs-based allocation model.

**MS ORR:** With the student resource allocation, you mention there is a consultation going on. Can you give an update as to where that consultation is up to and what you expect next?

**Ms Berry:** I can say that from last Friday I understand that the review that is going into the student resource allocation and the SES funding model will be presented to the federal minister by the end of this month, the end of this week. Mr Birmingham said that he would be available for states and territories swiftly after he was presented



with it. I am unsure how swift that will be, but hopefully by the end of July state and territory ministers will be able to have an understanding of where the review has gone on that student resource allocation review.

**Ms McAlister:** Minister, you are talking about the SES review?

**Ms Berry:** Both, yes. They are connected. You were asking about—

**MS ORR:** The student resource allocation, the students with a disability consultation.

**Ms Berry:** That is continuing.

**Ms McAlister:** We are still investigating a number of options for that modelling. But I will be clear in saying that the community is saying that it is looking for something new in terms of how we support students with a disability. We are also hearing that very much from our input, over the past 12 months, with the future of education consultation. Truly inclusive schools are something that the community is wanting of us. We have a great opportunity, through the finalisation of this loading, to achieve that.

**MS ORR:** Needs-based funding is one way to support students with complex health needs. What other programs or supports do we have within the school to make sure that students with quite complex health needs are being supported, given that inclusive is the direction it is going?

**Ms Berry:** Obviously, it is very specific to individual students, but there are cohorts within schools that can have different kind of supports through programs that are developed by the schools or shared between schools. Do you want to talk a bit more about that?

**Ms Seton:** Can I just clarify? Your question is regarding students with healthcare needs?

**MS ORR:** Probably complex health needs.

**Ms Seton:** Within our system we have a three-tier approach to supporting students. The students you are talking about would be our LT1, so our HAS students, health access at school students. We are working in partnership with Health on that.

In the first instance, the school, the nurse and the family sit together to identify what the student's needs are. We make sure we have a good understanding. We then look at what needs to happen in the school setting. The nurse works with usually up to three identified staff in the school, to train them up and make sure everything is happening. They come in and out. They eventually get to a point where they will sign the school off to say, "Yes, we feel as though you are competent now." However, that nurse is always available. If something is not quite right, the school rings the nurse and they will talk them through it, or the nurse can come out to the school.

It is also great when we have athletics carnivals and students with diabetes. The nurse and the family will come out and talk about what will need to be different on that day

and how they will manage that.

**MS ORR:** Is there a healthcare access at school program?

**Ms Seton:** Yes.

**MS ORR:** How does that work?

**Ms Seton:** That is the one I have just described to you.

**MS ORR:** Are there any other examples about nurses and health professionals involved in that scheme? You gave the example of a school carnival, but is there something on a more day-to-day basis as well as particular events?

**Ms Seton:** Sure. As I was explaining, the nurse will be there initially, working with the school to make sure everything is fine. There is not a time limit on that. If it is really clear and easy and the student is on top of it at the start, great; the nurse will be out. Sometimes we find that with our type 1 students with diabetes, the nurse will have to stay around a bit longer because the levels might be going up and down and within the school setting we are trying to figure out whether it is because of the PE or whether it is something they are eating. The nurse will be with us working that out until we are confident that we have got that in hand.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the way the budget papers have reported some of the strategic indicators, especially on NAPLAN—this is on page 6 of budget paper F and going on to page 7—it is quite different to the way that it was reported last year, as I understand. I note that there is a slight explanation why that has changed. But can you please explain how this table works? I am just trying to get my head around it, because it has got unpublished data. And you have only published certain results. I am just wondering what the purpose of this data is.

**Ms Howson:** I might just say in general that in this particular budget paper we have articulated three new strategic objectives and different ways of reporting. This is off the back of, of course, the consultation around the future of education. A very strong theme that has come through future of education is that we should be reporting on what really matters to the community around education outcomes.

This particular objective that you are referring to is looking quite specifically at a measure of an indicator, if you like, of quality teaching outcomes for students. And its focus is quite specifically on learning gain and moves us away from just a snapshot moment-in-time, mean-based score. As Ms Brighton mentioned earlier, we are a high-achieving system and we maintain that position from a national perspective. But what is important for us to really focus on, if we are particularly going to address issues of closing any equity gap, is the learning gain that students experience. Mr Gotts will be able to explain what the new targets represent.

In the annual report that we produce at the end of this financial year we will be reporting on actual performance around learning gain. This was an issue that was also raised with us by the Auditor-General when the Auditor-General conducted a review of the performance of the ACT education system. It is, again, moving us towards an

indicator of the way in which each individual student's growth in learning is occurring across year levels.

**Mr Gotts:** As Ms Howson said, it is a shift from mean scores to growth. At all levels the sort of growth that we anticipate is a year's growth for a year's learning. That is the concept that we are working with here. What this reflects and what the indicators show between year three and year five or between years seven and nine is this: is the growth that we are getting across the system reflective of a year's growth for a year's learning? The targets relate to that.

Given the way that the growth curve works, then growth at lower levels of school, in primary school, tend to be higher than in high school. For example, 40 points a year, give or take, is a good level of growth at primary school and 20 points per year at high school is a good level of growth. The targets reflect that concept. You will see that for reading between years three and five the target for gain is 79 points.

**MS LEE:** If that is the case, there seem to be some gaps in terms of this data. I am wondering why these specific sets of data were included and some were not? For example, you have got reading and numeracy for years 3 to 5 but not spelling, grammar and writing. Has the future of education concept indicated that that is not important, or why have those sets of like data not been included?

**Mr Gotts:** Across the country the national representation in jurisdictions tends to focus on reading and numeracy as the two principal ones. Sometimes writing might be included. The others tend not to be, and it is not—

**MS LEE:** Do you know why that is?

**Mr Gotts:** It is just convention. There is no underlying reason. I have not seen other jurisdictions publish more than reading and numeracy and occasionally writing. It is just a convention.

**Ms Howson:** If I might add too, it is a measure as an indicator. It is a good indicator of literacy. The other indicators, of course, and the other results will always be available publicly.

**MS LEE:** I notice that you have got the years three and five, then you have got the years seven and nine but not the years five and seven. Is there a reason for that?

**Mr Gotts:** The reason for that is that one of the things we are looking at is growth within the schools, and children are usually in the same school between years three and five, and the same school between years seven and nine. Between years five and seven they are crossing over to different schools, and what it is telling you is a bit different because they have done part of their time in one school and part of their time in another school. It is a reflection at the strategic level; then it is more valuable to do years three and five, and years seven and nine. Again, that is a similar convention across other jurisdictions as well.

**MS LEE:** This data is only from government schools; is that right?

**Mr Gotts:** This is, yes.

**MS LEE:** It is not covering non-government schools?

**Mr Gotts:** That is right.

**MS LEE:** Surely it would be in the government's best interest to try to make sure that it is consistent. As we talked about earlier this morning, even if they do change from one government school to another government school, it should not impact their growth.

**Ms Berry:** That is the question, though. It is where they go to school and which—

**MS LEE:** For example, if they were going to non-government schools or something?

**Mr Gotts:** There is other data that is published nationally in various places that does look at the whole of the ACT, the whole jurisdiction, whether it is children who attend government schools or non-government schools. In this document the focus is on government schools.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Just to add to that, this is a national definition of how NAPLAN gain is measured. It is measured so that it matches students within the same school because there are too many variables when you have got students coming in and out, you have got schools changing. That is the nationally agreed definition. All the national data that is published, again in my school for example, is on that definitional basis. So we have used that.

**MS LEE:** So it is consistent with—

**Ms Efthymiades:** Correct.

**MS LEE:** And you have got in the table the score referring to ACT Education Directorate unpublished data. What does that mean and where did it come from?

**Ms Efthymiades:** It essentially comes down to that issue. These data are available school by school on my school each time my school is released but we have to aggregate those data sets. There is no other place that they are published. This is the only place where we can match the students, match the schools and publish that information.

There is not yet a national gain measure. That is something I was going to say when Ms Howson said the future of education is driving us to measure what matters. This is also a national conversation. In David Gonski's recent panel report, gain was a very important feature. That is now leading to, in a national agreement likely, that work on a national measure. These data will be published nationally. They are just not there yet. It takes much longer to bring those things to life nationally than we can do locally.

**MS LEE:** The directorate has taken it on to do it for the ACT. That is my understanding.

**Ms Efthymiades:** That is right. We have drawn what we can from the definitions used in my school to make ACT public school numbers and then ultimately, though, we are pretty confident that the national gain work will reflect this. If it does not, we would tweak ours so that we line up.

**MS LEE:** Do the numbers that are published here include every single ACT government school?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Correct.

**MS LEE:** It is not like select schools or—

**Ms Efthymiades:** No. Where you have got the matched students and the matched schools, all of those are in every—

**MS LEE:** In its entirety?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Correct.

**MS LEE:** Minister, I think this is more a question for you. I understand that on Friday there was a discussion about the review into the my school website rather than NAPLAN, but can you give us an update and from the ACT's perspective when that is going to start to roll out and how that will work?

**Ms Berry:** It was just last Friday. Today we have reflected on the council meeting and the not too different views from across the country; some of the different outcomes that people had wanted to get out of education council and that perhaps did not meet everybody's needs. But there was agreement.

There is now a paper which gives scope to have a look at how NAPLAN data is used, the inconsistencies around its use and whether there is a benefit on how it is being used at the moment and whether we are providing the right, useful information to schools, parents, teachers and students as well. It gives us a chance to look at the harmful elements of NAPLAN as we have seen it through the conversations we have been having in the ACT, supported by council, that is, every state and territory and the federal minister. It is an opportunity for us to take stock of whether or not the reporting of NAPLAN meets the original principles it was set up for.

**MS LEE:** Is there a time frame for that, as in when the ministers are coming back to see where it is at?

**Ms Berry:** I cannot recall.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Update in December.

**Ms Berry:** December 2018, an update, yes. The review will be conducted by a body or a group yet to be decided and approved on by council. We are doing this small bit at the start, particularly given NAPLAN has moved online and it is going to evolve and change as well over the next couple of years as every state and territory gets the chance to move online. Not everybody is there yet. We certainly are within our public

schools and across most of the independent and Catholic schools as well. We are in a really good position to lead this work and also then look at how NAPLAN will evolve as it goes online and how it could be improved to provide more up-to-date data to students, teachers and parents.

**MS LEE:** I think it was on Friday but there was a quote from you in the media that some of the unfair impacts arising out of the reporting and the culture of NAPLAN are “particularly at fault in lower income communities”. Where does that evidence come from?

**Ms Berry:** There was a particular incident here in the ACT with regard to one of our schools where league tables were published, and that particular school community was deeply affected by the reporting here in the ACT, so much so that students were deeply upset and crying in the playground. Teachers and parents were equally upset about the way that the results of NAPLAN had been reported to suggest that this school was somehow not a good enough school for everyone when it was quite the contrary.

Fortunately, that school was able to tell the story of that school, not just a moment-in-time test story which was published as a result of the NAPLAN data being placed online. You can easily Google that and find that school in the ACT. That school has had low socioeconomic families in the past and probably still has quite a high percentage of families from low income backgrounds. It was absolutely deeply affected by the reporting of NAPLAN.

It was one example here in the ACT but there are others across the country. We have heard from Rob Stokes, the New South Wales minister, as well about how different schools are affected but particularly those schools who have higher levels of disadvantage. Does anyone want to add to that?

**Mr Gotts:** No. You covered it.

**MS LEE:** When was that?

**Ms Berry:** In 2013 or 2014?

**Ms Howson:** I think we see some insights into this every year with NAPLAN reporting around a league table approach by the media, and it is a very unsophisticated and quite misrepresentative way of talking about what is happening in that school. A school could be working with some of our most disadvantaged or vulnerable students in the community and be offering enormous benefits to those students, and those students could be growing in their learning. Just because their mean-base score comes out at a lower level than others where there is a lot of privilege and support does not reflect accurately what is happening at that school. I applaud the minister for the work that she is doing in bringing this to national attention and having it changed.

**Ms Berry:** I should say every time you mention the word “NAPLAN” it is academics and experts at 20 paces and various people grandstanding and trying to get a front page in the media. But for me it has always been about making sure that our kids get the best education, that it is a fair education and that there is equality at the core of it.

NAPLAN identifies those schools that are doing exceptional stuff, as has been described, but that is not the story that is told.

**MS LEE:** There have been a couple of public calls to scrap NAPLAN. I know that the New South Wales education minister at one point toyed with it, and the Education Union has. How do you respond to that?

**Ms Berry:** As I have said a number of times and even just now, today, NAPLAN is going to evolve into something else now that it has moved online. We are hearing very clearly from our community here in the ACT that students, teachers and parents want to know where a child starts a year and how they are progressing through the year on the things that matter to them.

We have heard that—and it is consistent across the country what people want to get out of their child’s learning, what they want to know, what they want to understand and how they can support their child in their learning—and for us in ACT government schools and other schools it is about how we support students who are not getting the same kind of equal start, which goes to the questions that Ms Le Couteur was asking earlier.

If you are coming from a different background and even if you are coming from a privileged background and something happens in your life or your family’s life that puts you back a couple of years or a year, we need to be able to wrap supports around students. A moment-in-time test is not going to tell us what is happening with that student or their family or in that school and the great culture that is being developed through the teaching profession and the support for teachers to make sure that every kid has the best learning environment.

I expect NAPLAN or something like it will continue but it will evolve as we move online. And the expectation will be that it will provide useful diagnoses tools for teachers to be able to support students better in the classroom across a range of subjects, not just limited to two.

**MS LEE:** As ACT education minister you are not calling for it to be scrapped, in a sense?

**Ms Berry:** No. I just think it is going to evolve into something else.

**MS ORR:** I want to focus a bit more on the future of education strategy. Could you give the committee an update on where that piece of work is up to?

**Ms Berry:** I can, and Ms McAlister will give you a little more detail. We are continuing that conversation. A couple of weeks ago we started the conversation with the teaching profession—talking with the teaching profession about the kinds of supports they need to make sure that they get the best out of their professional learning to be able to support each other and the profession, and provide the best outcomes for students.

Already, there has been considerable engagement in that space, and, prior to that, with parents and students in particular. Importantly, throughout this conversation, I want to

make sure that we hear from young people, particularly young people from low income families and disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can tell us their story and what they see could be an improvement for others that come along after them, once they have finished their education. At the heart of it has been equality and equity for students in their learning, an inclusive school environment and how much respect they have for teachers, making sure that teachers are well supported as well.

Ms McAlister can give you an update on what has been happening so far with that, and about teacher engagement. I know the conversation with teachers has only been going on for a couple of weeks, but I am sure they have all started putting their views forward.

**Ms McAlister:** Yes, they have. There are three broad phases. We are in the final phase now. In the first phase we heard from 4,673 individuals. We heard from them using traditional ways of consulting and we also introduced some innovative ways.

The minister was very clear that she wanted to hear the voices of people who were not normally involved in such conversations, so we supported our school board chairs to lead their communities through this conversation. We had a special focus on it in the minister's student congress. We also established a video booth and went out into communities, to fetes, to school front offices and so on.

Forty-four per cent of the feedback in that first phase was from young people, which was really pleasing. They have some really clear ideas about what they want the future of education to have. We distilled 10 big themes from that first phase and put them back out again in the community. We did some more targeted consultation in the second phase, in March this year. We invited 150 people across seven stakeholder groups to talk about four possible foundations that the strategy might have, and to start suggesting some actions.

All the while we have been doing this, we have been advised by a small group of academic and community experts. We have also employed a very capable year 12 graduate student in the future of ed team to digitally capture this consultation and make sure that we are always thinking about what we are doing from the point of view of young people.

Prior to developing and finalising the strategy, it has been important to go out and talk to our workforce in a more targeted way; so a discussion paper was published. We have had 710 teachers complete a small survey and validate what we have heard about this morning in terms of the value they bestow on professional learning, in partnerships with their colleagues, and the importance of strong partnerships with families and communities as well.

**Ms Howson:** Those teachers are from all sectors.

**Ms McAlister:** They are from all sectors: about 400 teachers from government sectors and around 150 teachers, or a bit higher, from our independent and Catholic sectors.

With the actions in the strategy, while they are still being finalised, they will very



much place the student at the centre of their learning. Also, the community is really talking about the importance of student wellbeing on learning and the importance of partnerships between teachers and teachers, teachers and families, and teachers and other agencies, to help young people really focus on their learning.

We are finalising the strategy now for the minister's endorsement. It has been a very organic but structured and sequential conversation.

**MS ORR:** I was going to ask what the strategy will focus on, but I think we have heard about that. In budget paper 3, at page 102, there is a funding commitment for the future of education. Given that the strategy is still coming, how will the funding commitment and the delivery of the strategy go together?

**Ms Berry:** What we have already heard, which is what I described for you very briefly earlier, was the importance of having well-respected and well-resourced teaching professionals within our schools. For the start of the strategy, we have talked with the workforce, with school leaders, and we have engaged with the Teacher Quality Institute about how we can support teachers better. This funding in the budget goes directly to that. We were talking a little bit about this earlier, the relationship with the University of Canberra for beginning teachers, and how we mentor beginning teachers within the classroom.

It is not just for beginning teachers. This is to make sure that every teacher is well resourced, and has the very best, up-to-date, contemporary supports for delivering education in their classroom, using all kinds of different methods and action research, and other different types of educational tools.

This funding is specifically around the mentoring program, around the relationship and partnership with the University of Canberra, and making sure that within our partner schools with the University of Canberra there is that shared networking around professional learning for teachers, to make sure that we have the best-resourced profession, and that teachers are getting the support they need through mentoring.

What we have heard consistently from beginning teachers is about having more support for them, over a longer period of time, learning different methods, adding to what they have learned at university before they start in the classroom, and sharing information with each other across schools and networks. Rather than just working in an isolated, one-school moment in time, it is about actually broadening that out and having clusters of schools and school leaders working together and sharing resources. This was touched on before around the literacy work that has been happening across the schools.

I might ask Anne Ellis from the Teacher Quality Institute to talk a bit more about the engagement of schoolteachers from all schools in the ACT in professional learning and how important that is. She can give us the story so far on the Teacher Quality Institute, because it is now in its seventh year. Time flies! I understand that Queensland have just adopted a similar model to what we are doing, so that must be because we are doing something right.

**Ms Ellis:** One of the highlights for us at the moment is that we have worked not only with Queensland but with Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania. The focus of the Teacher Quality Institute is on ways that regulation can provide support, so that professional standards can apply to everyone. When you look at the government's priority being on things like equity, our role is to work across everyone—all schools, all sectors, Australian Catholic University and University of Canberra—and we help tie in the government's priorities so that there is equity for all students. We are as equally involved with casual teachers as we are with school leaders and people who are in administrative roles.

What is really important for us at the moment is that the mantra for our work is continuing learning, reflective practice and professional growth. When I listened to my colleagues this morning, all the priorities they have talked about are underpinned by the need for ACT students to be supported by high quality teachers. Whether it is in preparation for the profession through the universities, whether it is at the beginning of the profession as they come out as early career teachers or whether it is the ongoing learning, we have to provide support across all ACT schools.

What has happened for us within the national framework is that the ACT approach is being seen as one that makes a difference. It is not just about rules. It is not just about being a fit and proper person. It is about professional standards and the way that teachers can continue to grow.

I am very proud to say that recently four high-level executives from the Tasmanian Department of Education came up to our certification assessor training. They said, "You guys have got this right, because you're about integrating what we need to do in a way that works for teacher employers."

What is really important for the minister's future of education work is that we have to look at the entire career life cycle as a teacher. The budget allocation that has come through the University of Canberra is very important, because again we lead the nation in the way that affiliate schools will be able to help all our principals, all our schools, to understand the readiness to teach of ACT teachers.

On 7 May this year, the minister launched what is called the ACT professional experience framework. It has articulated the principles that go together, so that whether you are undertaking a professional experience from Australian Catholic University—ACU—or the University of Canberra, whether you are going to a Catholic school, an independent school or a public school, you are going to work with school leaders who understand the important professional role that you undertake in the school.

In terms of some of the things that we do, what has happened just in the past week identified a few of the priorities. We have had a casual teacher network. Casual teachers who work in Catholic, independent and public schools came out to TQI to get PD on differentiated learning. It was a way to show them that they were valued as important professionals.

We had a mentoring network. One of the public sector principals, Lana Read, gave a presentation on mentoring for leadership. On Friday we met with the University of

Canberra about the way we could support an innovative approach to certification as part of a cross-border approach with our New South Wales colleagues. So across the time and development of TQI, we have prioritised professional learning, growth, partnership and equity of all teachers.

**MS ORR:** It sounds like we are doing some really good work there.

**Ms Ellis:** Yes, we are.

**MS LEE:** I want to ask a bit more about the mentoring—we have obviously talked about teacher training—for graduate teachers. Minister, I know that in the pre-budget announcement you talked about that being one of the initiatives. Can you give me a bit more information about that? Is it going to be available to all graduate teachers or just some? If so, how are they selected?

**Ms Berry:** We can give you some detail.

**Ms Brighton:** Yes. Thank you for the question. Certainly we know that the growth for all students that we talked about before is anchored in leadership. Importantly, part of that is our teacher capability, both their deep knowledge of the curriculum as well as their strong pedagogy. The mentoring program will augment what students learn when they are at university and when they come into the workforce.

We are in the phase of scoping that work at the moment. We have had a number of different approaches to mentoring operating in our system. Under this future of education initiative we will look to see how we can scale up and systematise a thorough and consistent approach to mentoring across our system so that all of our beginning teachers, no matter what school they are part of, get a consistent experience about the support they get offered and the growth they experience in their professional expertise.

We are still in the early stages. The budget has just come down. We will scale that up and work with the universities on what that might look like, to make sure that we have a good understanding of contemporary research and what that is saying about the best methodologies.

**MS LEE:** The budget reflects the scaling up, in terms of dollars, if you like. What part of the, I think, \$781,000 budgeted for this financial year, will take into consideration the mentoring aspect for graduate teachers?

**Ms Brighton:** That \$781,000 includes a number of different streams. There is the future of education work. The teacher mentoring component is just one element of that. That will involve looking at the use of professional learning communities, how we can strengthen collaboration in schools, what our induction programs look like, and then how that mentoring runs across the system.

The first lot of investment in that will be a combination of not only staff to do the work on it but also investment and work with other partners to ensure that the program design is going to be effective and implemented well. We know that the most important part of all of this is consistent and coherent implementation across the

system.

**MS LEE:** But in terms of scaling up, is it your intention that every graduate teacher eventually be able to access some mentoring once it has been crystallised?

**Ms Howson:** I think it is important to say that they can now. It is a commitment that every beginning teacher have access to a mentor. This program is just about improving the quality of the nature of that mentor program.

**Ms Berry:** It is teaching mentors how to mentor. All of us might have had a mentor at some point in our life: “Here is your mentor, off you go.” The teaching profession, whilst it is about providing the skills for mentors to be really good in supporting the teacher, and relationships as well—it is important that there is a good, positive relationship between beginning teachers and mentors—is also about the mentor learning and being kept up-to-date with all the contemporary methods to be applied in classrooms and being able to share that information, not just with the beginning teacher but also within the school community.

**MS ORR:** I have a few more questions just before you run away. I think the minister mentioned that Queensland was interested in some of your initiatives. You mentioned that Tasmania had come up. Can I just check whether any other states or territories have shown an interest in the work that we are doing?

**Ms Ellis:** The New South Wales budget that came down last week put in a priority for people called “teacher quality mentors”. It is exactly the model that we have implemented since the beginning of TQI. It is really significant. What we have been arguing for over a number of years is that, although we have a small jurisdiction, the way that we are doing things, the priorities that we are putting into place, can be scaled up.

I just wanted to add, in terms of mentoring, that there is a national conference tomorrow at Old Parliament House on the teacher education ministerial advisory group work around initial teacher education. We were asked to provide three pre-service teachers. Two are coming from the University of Canberra, one is coming from the Australian Catholic University, and there will be three teacher mentors who work with them. You met the pre-service teachers at the launch.

We have a deputy principal from a Catholic school, an executive teacher from a public school and an executive teacher from an independent school coming to talk to the federal minister about the approach of working together with mentoring being a way of using things like professional standards. There will be discussion around priorities not only to support what happens with the mentee but also so that the mentors themselves get support.

**Ms Howson:** I can also attest to the fact that, it does not matter where I go, thought leaders in this area point out that the model we have here in the ACT for teacher registration is best practice. It is something that other states and territories are all aspiring to. That is particularly the case when I am meeting with members of the Australian teacher standards institute board. They often refer to the fact that the work that Anne and her colleagues do in the TQI is best practice in Australia.

**MS ORR:** Just to clarify for the record: we are the first jurisdiction to undertake that approach. Have I understood that correctly?

**Ms Ellis:** What we did in our jurisdiction was, importantly, to look at a partnership approach. Everyone else had teacher registration. But when the ACT government brought the TQI act into place, it was about saying, “What does another body who focuses on professional standards need to do to support employees, not duplicate what they are doing?” We do not do disciplinary investigations because the employer does. Our focus was to be around how you integrate professional standards into the daily work of teachers.

**MS ORR:** Future of education strategy is one component, but there is also work on the early childhood strategy. Is it possible to get an update? Where is it up to? Is there any initial thought on what that will focus on?

**Ms Berry:** What everybody knows—I spoke to this before—is that the research is very clear on the importance of the early years in a child’s learning. But before they start kindergarten is where the journey needs to start. The early childhood strategy is about having a really good look at how children learn. We have been hearing from the academics and experts over a number of years—and the educators in the sector have been telling us for decades—about making sure that there is a quality early childhood education and care sector with qualified professionals delivering early childhood education and care, so that children, once they start kindergarten, are ready to start school, ready to start that 13 years of their formal education.

**Mr Moysey:** As the minister said, the evidence on access, equity and engagement with early childhood is very strong and leads into the conversation around future of education as well. The minister formed an early childhood advisory council last year. We have had some really deep conversations on the council around the minister’s discussion paper. The minister’s discussion paper focused on access, equity and affordability, workforce and qualifications, and transitions from early childhood into school. It looked at maximising what we already spend as a territory and what the Australian government spends—all of those sources of funding. It looked at opportunities for partnerships and how can we work together a lot better.

Since the *Lifting our Game* report was released, that has gone into the mix of the conversation as well. It has been quite a deep conversation. If we step back and think about it, we see that in this conversation we are not necessarily responding to something; we are really looking at all of the elements that involve early childhood with a view to increasing access and equity of children’s engagement and how we can really think about how everything works from zero to 18. That deep conversation led to a one-day workshop. The council has given some advice to the minister about those key themes.

The next step will be to do some deeper consultation obviously with the sector and the community around that, and form an interdepartmental committee around early childhood. If we think about all the evidence on early childhood and all the work that Health and Community Services Directorate are doing, we see it all comes together around that evidence. We can do a lot by working together in a deeper way.

**MS ORR:** Can you see any impacts, particularly in the early childhood space, on ACT children in early childhood education and care, coming from the federal government's decision to leave the national quality agenda partnership?

**Ms Berry:** The federal government has now removed the funding to states and territories. The impact is that we have had to pick up the cost of regulating the sector. Previously it was partially funded by the federal government. That affects the whole story of early childhood education around ensuring that children and families have access to a quality early childhood service.

So, yes, there is an impact. That is an impact that every state and territory now have to face. We are all now having to figure out how we make sure that we regulate a system only partially regulated by state and territory governments anyway. It is that kind of all care and no responsibility reaction from the federal government when they take away funding in this respect, but still require us to regulate the sector without the funding support that is needed in there.

**MS ORR:** That is fine, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I will talk about asset management: managing the buildings and infrastructure. How often is the entire education property portfolio assessed for maintenance requirements?

**Mr Bray:** A condition assessment report is prepared for each of the 87 schools every three years.

**THE CHAIR:** Are all of them done in one year or is it done on a rolling basis?

**Mr Bray:** A rolling basis.

**Ms Howson:** Having said that, though, any school can raise an issue to be addressed with us at any point.

**THE CHAIR:** The maintenance assessment report looks at maintaining facilities at the current level? What is the objective?

**Mr Bray:** Repairs and maintenance, in a simple way, is about maintaining the assets in a condition that meets the current regulatory and safety requirements. We then have the public-school infrastructure upgrades where, in essence, we upgrade facilities to modern facilities. We have about \$16.4 million in repairs and maintenance, and the public school infrastructure upgrade program has approximately \$20.6 million a year.

**THE CHAIR:** That is largely unspecified maintenance or scheduled maintenance?

**Mr Bray:** It is scheduled maintenance. The \$16.4 million that was spent in 2017-18 was all scheduled maintenance.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the budget each year for unscheduled maintenance?

**Mr Bray:** The total budget is \$16.4 million. We break it up into various components. The headings include unscheduled work, so urgent unforeseen work such as plant breaking down or the removal of asbestos-containing materials that might be discovered during any works or maintenance.

Scheduled works relate to heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, auto doors, and the fire detection and protection systems. Those scheduled works happen through contractors each year, and then other works occur as they are discovered or required. Having done it for so many years we have been able to fine-tune the allocation of those amounts of money.

**THE CHAIR:** There is a continuing rollover from the 2016-17 budget for modernising Belconnen High School. That has been a long running upgrade. What have been the delays?

**Ms Berry:** Upgrading that school has been a particular challenge because of the design of the school itself. Yes, it has been a long project, but it is coming along now. The change that has already occurred is incredible with the funding so far.

**Mr Bray:** This is the first major redevelopment of a fully operational school that we have done. The only previous comparator was the Taylor Primary School in Kambah, but we actually vacated that school and the school was shut. Belconnen High School is fully operational. We have learnt a good lot of lessons from it: we would not do it the way we are doing it now; there would be easier ways to reduce the impact on the school. For instance, we would probably bring in a large number of transportable buildings and vacate the space completely so that students and staff are not being constantly interrupted with losses of power or water and so on.

We are about to do Campbell Primary School and Narrabundah College, and as you are probably aware, we have brought in transportables. The students are basically being transferred out of the affected buildings so it is a much easier environment for students and teachers.

**THE CHAIR:** There is about \$750,000 for modernising Narrabundah College. How does that budget line item fit in with the appropriated funds to replace the asbestos-contaminated buildings?

**Mr Bray:** The \$750,000 is to carry out quite an extensive consultation phase and then prepare a master plan to go forward. Narrabundah is a unique facility and the redevelopment will be very extensive. Therefore, we need to work with the community about what they would like to see in the finished facility. We are giving plenty of time and resources to go through that process. Later in this calendar year that will result in hopefully an agreed site development plan that will form the basis for preparing a business case for the 2019-20 budget to commence the design and construction phase of whatever is decided as the new facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** So the new facilities are in addition to the buildings that are being removed due to asbestos?

**Mr Bray:** That is right.

**Ms Howson:** There is a reference in budget paper F on page 20. You will see the second appropriation outlined the funding for the transportables and demolition costs.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the \$18.1 million over four years?

**Ms Howson:** Yes, that is correct. That is the cost of the transportables and the demolition associated with this work.

**THE CHAIR:** So the planning and consultation works are in addition to that line item?

**Ms Howson:** That is right, and that will lead into the next budget cycle and our business case around the replacement, after we have concluded our consultation with the community.

**Mr Bray:** You were asking about whether the works will be beyond just replacing the three buildings. It is our belief that that will be the case. The buildings are quite old, as you can imagine. It is a very old college, so we are looking at having a master plan that lifts the whole college into a modern learning environment. That will address other buildings that already exist at the school.

**THE CHAIR:** Why was the decision taken to commit capital to the replacement of the three buildings and then in parallel have a consultation around a master plan for the college? Would it not make sense to do the master plan and then do one round of the construction works as opposed to protracting this process? As you said, it is still an operational college.

**Ms Howson:** The allocation for the new building is not in the budget at this point.

**THE CHAIR:** No it is not. It was made in the second appropriation for the current financial year.

**Ms Howson:** That is the cost of the transportables and the demolition, not the new buildings.

**THE CHAIR:** So the \$18 million is just the transportables and the demolition?

**Ms Howson:** That is correct.

**Ms Berry:** The transportables required for Narrabundah are not ordinary classrooms; they will be science classrooms with Bunsen burners and art spaces, et cetera. So they are not the transportable classrooms similar to those you see around some other schools; these are specialised classrooms.

In addition, students are at the college for only two years compared with students at a primary school, for example, where they are there for a longer time and you can get it over and done with and carry on. In the college where the students are there for only two years, if we can do it in chunks their learning will not be disrupted too much along the way, so that is our preference.



**Ms Howson:** It may not be well understood but there are 22 classrooms in transportables at Narrabundah. Is that correct, Mr Bray?

**Mr Bray:** There are more than that. There are 22 transportable buildings, but some of the buildings have two classrooms in them. As the minister said, a number of the buildings are specialist spaces in order to deliver the curriculum. Roughly 55 per cent of students at the college occupy one or more spaces within the three buildings to be developed. We are basically replacing academic learning areas that affect 55 per cent of the students. There are about 1,050 students, so the impact is quite significant. We had to be very careful not to affect their academic performance because, as you know, during those two years they are constantly being assessed and tested.

**THE CHAIR:** The transportables, the territory has purchased those and owns them?

**Mr Bray:** Yes, we do.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the stated use of the transportables post the upgrade of Narrabundah Colleges?

**Mr Bray:** We are already looking at post their usage. We intend to use them at other sites, particularly as we do more redevelopment of our older schools. For example, through urban intensification in north central Canberra we are expecting to use those transportables quite frequently. The best example in the short term is Campbell Primary School where we put in five transportable buildings. By having them we can build the replacement building, move the students into that when it is finished and then decant out of the existing buildings into the transportables while we refurbish the other learning spaces.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you plan on doing some long-term business case management and scheduling of where they are now, where they will go next and so on over the coming years? Has that been carried out or is that work still being done?

**Mr Bray:** No. We will be doing exactly that. As the planning and analytics branch can clearly identify the growth in particular schools, we will be putting up the business cases of doing expansion or modernisation works. That is when we will be able to move what will become a flexible fleet of transportable buildings to those schools as we do those works.

**THE CHAIR:** What was the business case for purchasing the transportables as opposed to leasing them?

**Mr Bray:** We looked at it over the whole-of-life cycle of the transportable buildings, which is generally up to about 20 years. We compared that to the leasing costs, and the payback period was definitely favourable to purchasing.

**THE CHAIR:** Was the development of that business case done in house or was an external source brought in?

**Mr Bray:** I think it was done externally, but I would have to check on that.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you take it on notice?

**Mr Bray:** Yes certainly.

**MS CHEYNE:** I want to talk about a different topic, mental health in schools. Given that we are in budget estimates, it makes sense to start with the delivery of that election commitment. I understand that in last year's budget it was up to five psychologists of the 20 committed. This year is the 20 up to 2020?

And I was just wondering if someone could talk me through the line item in the budget papers about how that money is expended in the forward years. I note that this year it is 726,000, but that increases. Is that because we are bringing on more like this? You can tell me instead of me just guessing.

**Ms Seton:** As you noted, we employed five additional school psychologists this year. We will employ 10 more to start next year and then an additional five after that. That is where the spend is.

**MS CHEYNE:** Will this be an ongoing item in the budget as we continue forward because they need to keep getting paid?

**Ms Seton:** Obviously when we get to the point, we will maintain that number, so that is where the dollars will sit. It is important to note that we are currently reviewing our school psychology service to make sure that—

**MS CHEYNE:** What does that mean?

**Ms Seton:** We are having a really good look at what we are doing and how we are doing it. With the increase of 20 psychologists, are we getting the service that our schools require? We want to make sure we are not just employing more people to do the same thing. And we know that we need to target our early intervention, which we have not been getting to. So it is ensuring that we are catching things early in the life of the problem. If we are identifying not just our young people but young adolescents who may be looking a bit wobbly, what are we doing early to prevent that problem becoming something that requires significant treatment?

**Ms Howson:** The other dimension to that is that we have not formally reviewed the service since its establishment. It is an appropriate time, particularly with the government's commitment to a range of other mental health services for young people that are now available, that we are looking at how schools can integrate more effectively with community-based services.

**MS CHEYNE:** How do schools and school psychologists fit within the work of the office for mental health? Or do they not?

**Ms Berry:** No. They are employed by the ACT Education Directorate. That is the work that Ms Howson has referred to: how do we make sure that there is a good close relationship between schools and mental health services and others outside of the school community so that we are getting very nice streamlined supports for students

regardless of where they are?

The sorts of things that the review is looking at as well include the work that has been conducted by psychologists, whether it is working across our school system in a way that supports students. We are hearing very loudly from our young people that they want to be sure that there are supports there for their peers when they are going through some trouble in their lives as a young person. Sometimes it is not necessarily the psychologists, but the psychologists can be there to back somebody else whom the student has a relationship with if that is required.

The role of the psychologist is not just diagnosis anymore. It is much the same as a teacher's role. We have very high expectations of our school communities about what we expect them to deliver, particularly in their supports for young people, and young people's families as well. It is becoming a really complex and complicated space. The review is timely, but it is also making sure that we do not just operate in silos and that we have really good relationships with the office for mental health and other different services to support kids before it gets chronic.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Will a psychologist be available in both high schools and primary schools?

**Ms Seton:** Correct, and they are. Currently all of our schools have access to a school psychologist.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Clearly, given that there are more schools than 20 and there will be 20 psychologists, there will be travelling psychologists? How is that going to work?

**Ms Seton:** Most of our schools do not have a psychologist on site five days a week. They may have three days a week and then that school psychologist would operate on another site for the remainder of the week. We also have some psychologists who are part time.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I know you mentioned that a young person could be having support from someone else they trusted, which could be a very good thing, but if they are talking to a psychologist, will they have a relationship with a single stable psychologist?

**Ms Seton:** Correct.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Or will it be the person whose turn it is.

**Ms Seton:** The psychologist for that school is the same person. That is who the student would see. They would have that relationship with the psychologist. The psychologist would note, too, when it gets to a point where they think the student requires support broader than the school system. Then they would be working with the family to ensure that they are referred out to an appropriate service.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Would the psychologist potentially have involvement with members of the family if that would appear to be relevant to the young person's

issues?

**Ms Seton:** Correct. It depends on what is happening for the student, but the psychologist seeks approval from the family in the first instance to work with the young person. Then, it would depend on what is happening in that family. It may be that they are having regular check-ups with the family or it might be something that is more school based where the student is happier just chatting to the psych and there is just an informal chat with the family.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** But the psychologist can refer them to other things if required?

**Ms Seton:** Correct.

**THE CHAIR:** I am sensing that there are going to be further questions on school psychologists. Given that it is 12.30, we might go to the scheduled lunch break and pick up with Ms Cheyne continuing her substantive question at 2 o'clock.

**Hearing suspended from 12.28 to 1.58 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will resume the proceedings.

**Ms Berry:** There were a couple of questions that we were going to get answers for. They were on the transportables, kindergartens and attending preschool. Do you want to do those first?

**THE CHAIR:** We can do those now, or do you want to wrap up at the end in case there are more?

**Ms Berry:** We can do it now; it will not take long.

**Mr Matthews:** I can confirm that the cost comparison between leasing and purchasing transportable buildings was done internally by infrastructure finance and capital works, our own team, in partnership with our strategic finance area.

**Ms Howson:** The other question, Mr Wall, was in relation to the number of students that attended preschool before kindergarten. We need to explain that the data we are about to provide does not account for children that may have attended a preschool setting in a long day care service.

**Mr Gotts:** I have the number for both government and non-government schools. In 2018 we have 634 students in government kindergartens for whom we have no record of their attending a government or any other preschool. There were 594 students in kindergarten for whom we have no record of their attending either a government preschool or any other form of school, noting the comment that they could be at a long day care centre.

**MS CHEYNE:** I know that psychiatrists and psychologists are different, but we have heard in the health space and the mental health space that recruiting psychiatrists is particularly difficult nationwide, including in the ACT. Are we anticipating any problems in recruiting psychologists?

**Ms Seton:** At this point, we do not. The education section for psychologists is quite an attractive area.

**MS CHEYNE:** Good. Why is that?

**Ms Seton:** For starters, you work in schools, which is the best place to be.

**MS CHEYNE:** Of course.

**Ms Seton:** Look, it is good conditions. We have a really strong team. Our staff like where they are working. To date, we have not had those issues. Having said that, we are trying to work in with the universities around how we ensure that we are doing some of that pre-service work in our settings so that people can come and have a look at what it is like to work in a school.

**MS CHEYNE:** I think an important piece of the puzzle, or a factor in supporting the mental health of children, is also supporting parents and carers in that space. How do we do that in our schools at the moment? Does it fall to those psychologists in that role? I know that our teachers obviously are not just teaching but do many roles. Is there a formal way that we support parents and carers?

**Ms Seton:** I think it is different depending on the circumstances and certainly different depending on the age group. In our primary school settings and our early childhood settings, schools will often refer to our child and family centres, who will support families with some of those questions that they may have around parenting, and what is happening for their child.

In the high school setting, parents will often come in and talk to the school psychologist but also the executive team and the student welfare team. In the case that the school is starting to feel like the family needs more support, they can refer to our network student engagement teams. We have social workers who can come in and work closely with the family. They, too, can then refer out to service providers if they think that is in the best interests of the family.

**MS CHEYNE:** With support for students, are we finding that the need is increasing every year? Are we finding more instances of students needing more support? If so, what are the attributing factors?

**Ms Seton:** If we are talking about the mental health space—

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes.

**Ms Seton:** we would be similar to what is happening nationally. We are seeing an increase and we are also seeing a younger presentation. Nationally, when we are looking at it, trying to pinpoint exactly what it is, certainly with social media there is a little bit of a question mark around what is happening in that space, some of it in the anxiety space. Again, that is a case of working with the family to determine where the anxiety has come from. If you have very anxious parents at home, sometimes a student can then start to display that. There are multiple reasons, but it is consistent

with what is happening nationally.

**MS CHEYNE:** It is not great to know that it is trending up nationally, but at least the ACT is not an outlier.

**Ms Howson:** I think it is a broader societal issue, in terms of your question about what the drivers are for this presentation. I ask that question often. There are a lot of hypotheses, but I think it is something that we are dealing with across society in general and across communities in general. As the minister said earlier, it has come out as a very strong theme in the future of education. It is leading us to think about how schools actually support a holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of the students that are in our schools, and their families.

**MS CHEYNE:** I asked this last year but it had been out for only a little while; *13 Reasons Why* has had its second season. Have we had any more anecdotal reports of it having an effect on students?

**Ms Seton:** Not centrally, although we have provided information to schools and certainly to our school psychologists about how they can support any students who perhaps have concerns about that particular show.

**Ms Berry:** The Education Directorate website has some really good information for parents around e-safety and bullying behaviour and what parents can do to support a child who may have experienced bullying at school, on social media or otherwise. There are also supports for the student and the parents and how the parents can support the student during those circumstances.

**Ms Seton:** They are great resources. Our staff in schools access them too. We have a fairly consistent approach, but it is really about ensuring that students have somewhere or someone to go to if they have concerns they would like to raise, whether that is at home with their family or at school, and that everyone in their circle knows how to support, the sorts of questions to ask and where to go to for support.

**Ms Berry:** Actually, at the ministers council we had a presentation from the eSafety Commissioner. She talked about this being an issue across the country. They have a pretty good relationship with the social media platforms. They are able to take down not very good behaviour when they need to, if it is reported to them and they can find it through their relationships with the social media platforms. They say that across Australia over the last year they took down 850 incidents of inappropriate footage of all sorts of different descriptions.

**MS CHEYNE:** That is nationally?

**Ms Berry:** Nationally, which does not seem like enough when you think about it. But that has been through their relationship with all the different social media platforms. She also gave a presentation on children's perceptions—what they see and experience across social media, but also from music, TV, videos, games, all of that. That plays into their own behaviour online and in person as well. We have as a community—all of us—a big issue to address together.

**MS LEE:** The budget for school psychologists last year showed an amount in the forward estimates and there is an amount in this year's budget. Those figures are different. Can you explain how those figures are different when the target seems not to have changed?

**Ms Brighton:** Thank you for the question. I do not have last year's budget papers in front of me, but last year the government funded, as an election commitment, the first five psychologists. They came on board in January 2018. Then this budget, the 2018-19 budget, funds 10 psychologists, starting in January 2019, and another five in January 2020. That will complete the 20 new psychologists on top of the 68 FTE that we already have in our system.

**MS LEE:** I understand that. Just in terms of moving forward, in last year's budget, for example, it actually had a budget set aside of \$663,000. But this year, for the same year period, it is greater. Then it is continuing that trend for the forward estimates. The target does not seem to have changed, so why—

**Ms Berry:** What is the additional—

**MS LEE:** Yes, what is the additional funding for?

**Ms Berry:** We think we can get an answer for you.

**Ms Howson:** I suspect it is just changes to the salary cost, which is incorporated in the adjustments in the enterprise agreement, as well as wage indexation, that explains that difference.

**Ms Daly:** What is actually published in the budget papers is the new initiatives moving forward. Last year it would have been the five psychologists. It is a half-year effect as they come on at the beginning of the school term. This year actually reflects the 10 new that will come on for 2019, which is a half-year effect in the 2018-19 budget papers and then a full year rolling effect moving forward. That is why you see the increase. Also, as Natalie has said, there is the indexation that is applied moving forward.

**MS LEE:** But surely that factor is built in already when you do the forward estimates?

**Ms Daly:** It is, actually.

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**Ms Daly:** Yes, it is actually built in. We do the new initiative, but it is building on to the existing one.

**MS LEE:** On top of that.

**Ms Daly:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the \$729,000 that is set aside for this year, what exactly will be

delivered with that funding? How many psychologists will be employed this year?

**Ms Howson:** In this calendar year?

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**Ms Howson:** In this calendar year we already have—

**Ms Berry:** The five at January.

**Ms Howson:** Yes, the five from January.

**MS LEE:** The five from January, and then what?

**Ms Howson:** And then next January—

**MS LEE:** Yes, until then.

**Ms Howson:** we get the next five.

**Ms Berry:** Ten.

**Ms Howson:** Sorry, 10.

**MS LEE:** So 15 in this financial year.

**Ms Howson:** I will let Ms Brighton answer this question.

**MS LEE:** Now you are confused with the calendar year and the financial year.

**Ms Brighton:** In the 2017-18 financial year we employed five additional psychologists. They came on board in January 2018. In the 2018-19 financial year we will engage an additional 10 psychologists and they will come on board in January 2019. Then in the 2019-20 financial year we will engage an additional five psychologists, and they will start in January 2020.

**Ms Howson:** Which explains that half-year financial effect and the difference from last year's budget papers.

**MS LEE:** Maths might not be my strong suit, but is that a total of 25 now?

**Ms Howson:** 20.

**Ms Brighton:** 20.

**MS LEE:** Because you had the five and then the 10 and the 10?

**Ms Howson:** No; five, 10 and five.

**MS LEE:** Thank you. I do know my five times table, thank you. The original



Shaddock recommendation talked about a ratio of one to 500 students. Keeping in mind, and in context with, the projected enrolment figures, how are we currently travelling with that ratio once the 20 are factored in? And how will it look after taking into consideration the projected growth in enrolments?

**Ms Berry:** They will come pretty close, in my understanding. But this is also the work that we are doing on looking at the work that psychologists are currently doing in schools. It is considering that work as well as the recommendations of the Shaddock review on the actual numbers per students and whether the work is meeting the students' needs by just having a ratio to students.

**Ms Brighton:** Thank you for the question, Ms Lee. When the report was released, the government's response to the report talked about the multidisciplinary approach that we were taking. Our student support services include school psychologists as well as a range of other allied health professionals: youth workers and social workers. That totality of the collective of allied health professionals and social workers means that we are offering a really broad support service to students, rather than just looking at psychologists as the only people in the school for students.

**MS LEE:** When we look at coming pretty close to the one to 500, does that include all of the allied health professionals as one to 500 or is it just psychologists?

**Ms Howson:** We will have to take the specifics of the question on notice to come back on the proportion.

**MS LEE:** That would be good, thank you.

**Ms Howson:** Our argument would be that we are getting close with the additional psychologists. But, in addition to the additional psychologists, we argue that we have a holistic, multidisciplinary allied health professional team to support the needs of students in schools.

**MS LEE:** While you are taking that ration on notice, would you be able to make sure that that takes into consideration the projected enrolments as well?

**Ms Howson:** Certainly, yes.

**MS LEE:** So it is not just based on today's student figures.

**Ms Howson:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** Thank you very much.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I want to talk about trees on school grounds. Any of you who have had time to look at the urban heat island report will have noticed that schools starred very highly in that. When I say highly, I mean that they were hot; there were not a lot of trees. Obviously, in the summer this discourages kids from playing outside. What is the education department's policy about trees on school playgrounds and school grounds?

**Ms Berry:** Any large concrete structure will produce a heat effect. A school is a large concrete structure and often has a lot of children in it. There is a tree-planting program occurring right now within ACT government schools. Rodney Bray can tell you more about what we are doing in schools to ensure that heat mitigation processes are in place as part of the tree-planting program.

**Mr Bray:** We do not have a formal policy as such, but our normal practice is that whenever a tree is removed, whether it be for maintenance reasons or because the tree is too old and needs to be removed, we replace the tree—at least one for one, if not more sometimes. We also have landscape development plans as schools request those. They generally involve the planting of trees.

As part of our heat mitigation strategy, we are implementing a planting program of mature, grown trees. I think we are doing it at six schools in the next few months. We are going to be rolling that out as an ongoing program. We have done an exercise at six schools, and we are planting mature, grown trees specifically to deal with the heat load at those schools.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Great. I have also heard the comment that you sometimes prune very aggressively to reduce any potential that anything might ever fall off the trees. Is that right?

**Mr Bray:** That is right.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Is that fair commentary?

**Mr Bray:** That is correct. We do tree audits at every school, every year. If we have maybe a large storm event and the school has a concern that a tree may show signs of damage, we will go and check the trees. Then we go in and do whatever the tree audit report recommends. There is obviously a scaling of the severity of the works. Some are higher risk; we activate those immediately. Then we gradually work through the audits progressively until all our recommended works are completed, post that audit report.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Are all schools audited by the same arborist?

**Mr Bray:** I would have to check on that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** While you are checking, can you also check whether the same arborist also does any work that they have recommended?

**Mr Bray:** I can say from memory that in the past we have had that situation, but we have been trying to separate the two roles. I will take that question on notice so that I can give you a specific answer about when that has happened and what we are now doing to manage what could be seen as a conflict of interest.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It sounds as though trees are managed centrally from the directorate, not by the local school community. Is that correct?

**Ms Berry:** I would not say that that is the case all of the time. An example is Aranda

Primary School and the work that they did there. They did a whole big nature adaptation project where they have big water collection things—I do not know what they are called—underneath.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Swales?

**Ms Berry:** I am not sure. They are big tubs or something underneath the ground. There are these whole big plantings that they have done at the school and they have never had to water them, particularly in the last couple of years when it has been so hot and dry. This garden that they have created is going great guns. I think they pretty much manage that little area themselves.

**Mr Bray:** They do. That was one of the landscaping master plan projects that we helped the schools facilitate. In terms of general maintenance of trees, at the beginning of 2017 we changed the responsibility for the management of trees. Prior to that, the education support office would organise the audit reports and send them out to schools for the schools to then carry out the work. The difficulty for schools was that in some years there would be no work and in other years there would be a lot of work. It can be quite expensive, perhaps \$20,000 more. Schools found it very difficult to manage those peaks and troughs in their budgets. It was easier for us, in the education support office, to manage those peaks and troughs spread across a whole system. We agreed with the schools that we would take back the responsibility and the cost of maintaining the trees. The schools have not lost any funds because of that; we have just taken that work back in the education support office, and we deal with all those.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** But the schools have a say in decisions about where trees are planted?

**Mr Bray:** Yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If a tree will be demolished et cetera?

**Mr Bray:** That is right.

**Ms Howson:** In terms of bringing trees down, student safety is our paramount concern. That decision is not just a decision of the school itself; it would be a decision on the basis of our expert advice.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** From what you said, new schools are being built with a few trees, at least as many trees as were on the grounds when they started?

**Mr Bray:** We always have a landscape planting program at all of our new schools. Trees are always planted as part of the project.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Given that there are now more and more very hot days, are trees the main thing you are going to use for making the outside attractive for kids to get out at lunchtime when it is hot or will you continue to put up shade cloth and things like that?

**Mr Bray:** There is a combination of all of those things. Again, we work with the schools, depending on what they would prefer to have installed. We have been working along the lines that we have shade structures over all sandpits in schools, because kids tend to sit in one location and there is a risk of sunburn. When it comes to play equipment, usually the students are moving around and there is not such a high need to have them covered with shading; the more important thing there is actually the soft fall underneath the play equipment.

Generally, in relation to what was called a COLA—a covered outdoor learning area, the old term used back in the building the education revolution work—we learnt that a lot of schools built the external weatherproof shade structure as part of their BER project. These days the shade structures are so well designed with this shade cloth that they are much cheaper to both construct and maintain, because after a few years you only have to replace the shade cloth. They are much more colourful; they are much more imaginative. So schools tend to go to that kind of shade cloth form of shading in the school. It is always a combination of weatherproof COLA-type construction, shade cloth or trees. We work with schools around all of those three options as they would like them to be developed.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Do you do any spraying with pesticides or herbicides outside in the school grounds?

**Mr Bray:** I would have to check on that. I do know that, with any chemicals that are used in school grounds, obviously we have to comply with the safe work method statements in the manufacturer's recommendations. I would have to take that on notice.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If you could, yes. And could you let me know which ones are used and whether they are managed centrally or by the school. Possibly it is both, if you have a central list of approved things and the school does not. I am particularly interested in weed control, which you quite possibly do chemically?

**Mr Bray:** Yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I do not know, but you may well do.

**Mr Bray:** I will check on that and come back.

**MS LEE:** I have a couple of questions on non-government school education. In terms of accreditation or reaccreditation of non-government schools, can you take the committee through that process: what it involves, how long it takes?

**Ms Berry:** Margaret, I do not know if you heard the question.

**Ms Stewart:** I did not, sorry. Would you mind repeating the question?

**MS LEE:** Not at all. My question was about accreditation and reaccreditation of non-government schools, what that general process is and how long it usually takes?

**Ms Stewart:** We call it registration rather than accreditation. The general process for

non-government schools is lengthy and involved and follows the legislation. Generally for a new school there is a notification period for the minister to approve an in-principle registration, and that is up to two years in advance of the school commencing operation. Then there is an actual registration. There are a number of criteria in the act under which the schools need to be assessed, and that period, if approved for registration, is a five-year period. Before the expiry of that five-year period the school must apply for renewal of the registration. Again, the registration renewal period is another five years. Is that enough information?

**MS LEE:** Thank you. I have a few follow-ups on that. There must be some instances where schools have not met the requirements for registration. Are you able, without going into specific details, to give some reasons why? When schools are not able to be registered, what is the general practice?

**Ms Stewart:** I could not give you a general picture. That would be individual circumstances and you would be talking about history which I do not have at my fingertips. We do not have any schools currently not registered. A number of criteria in the act cover curriculum through to financial viability et cetera. There are a number of criteria against which a school may or may not be reassessed.

**Ms Howson:** We would always be working with the school to overcome any of the impediments. It is quite an iterative process. We would give feedback on how the school performed against criteria and would work with them to address those criteria in order to get them ready for registration. As Ms Stewart said, it would relate to their capacity to deliver an educational service within the school, as well as their financial viability.

**MS LEE:** Is the process for registration reviewed on a regular basis? Is that part of the directorate's process?

**Ms Howson:** A school that is registered would be reassessed within a five-year term.

**MS LEE:** As in the directorate's processes in terms of registration, is that reviewed?

**Mr Berry:** I, as minister, sign the registration, but the directorate does all the support work with the school, if they are having some issues, to get them through those issues so that they can be registered. Support for the schools around what they need or if they have any questions—that is all done with the directorate. I do not personally get involved in that sort of detail. The advice that I have is that I would be conflicted if I did that. The directorate does all that work and I sign the registration.

**Ms Howson:** Is your question: are we reviewing our approach to registration?

**MS LEE:** As with any process, I suppose it undergoes a review system. Does that also form part of a review system where you look at the way you register non-government schools?

**Ms Howson:** One example might be the recommendations of the royal commission which have come out recently. In that regard we would be looking at advising the minister on how we might ensure that we meet the recommendations which

government has agreed to throughout our registration process. From time to time, the answer would be yes, there would be modifications to the process on the basis of the contemporary issue and the need to reassess.

**Ms Stewart:** If I could add, the process is very well prescribed in the legislation. It is quite detailed, the process that we have to follow, and there is quite a lengthy section of the act that regulates this.

**Mr Matthews:** For clarity, it is part 4.2 of the Education Act, from section 88. It talks about the registration process, including how panels are formed to assess the criteria in the act and provide recommendations to the minister. Subsection (6) of 88 goes into the criteria that my colleagues have touched on, from having an appropriate educational offering, appropriate policies and procedures and financial viability. That is a detailed set of criteria that is prescribed in the legislation and the panel will pay due regard to that in terms of applications from non-government schools. It is a robust framework which can be modified, as you say, from time to time, or individual applications can focus on particular elements of those registration criteria.

**MS LEE:** Correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that that part of the act has not been changed for quite some time.

**Ms Stewart:** That is correct.

**MS LEE:** I was just making sure I did not miss anything. Does that mean the registration process for non-government schools has pretty much been the same for a number of years?

**Ms Stewart:** As I understand it. I am reasonably recently in the role.

**THE CHAIR:** When was the last time the criteria were amended?

**Ms Stewart:** The criteria?

**THE CHAIR:** For registration?

**Ms Stewart:** The criteria are specified in the act. We would have to look up the history book.

**THE CHAIR:** It has been a while since I looked at this. They are specified in the legislation?

**Ms Stewart:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Or are they by regulation?

**Ms Stewart:** No, they are in the legislation.

**Mr Matthews:** In the legislation. Again, it goes back to section 88 of the act. Subsection (6) talks about the criteria for registration of a school.

**THE CHAIR:** Will any changes, as Ms Howson alluded to, in response to, say, the royal commission's findings, require legislative change?

**Ms Stewart:** Yes.

**Ms Berry:** We have already flagged with the non-government schools and the Catholic school sector as well a review of our current legislation as it stands, with regard to recommendations coming out of the royal commission's report.

**Mr Matthews:** It is perhaps appropriate to point out that the criteria already include consideration, for example, of schools having appropriate policies, facilities and equipment for the safety and wellbeing of students. Certainly we would regard those general welfare considerations already covered by the criteria but, to the extent that the legislation needs to be amended or there needs to be a sharper focus on that through the actual registration process, that is where we will consider the ongoing findings and issues that have come from the royal commission.

**Ms Berry:** I was going to say—I was just recalling—that I even remembered mentioning early last year, when there were some incidences, that if there were recommendations from the commission which would mean that we would have to change legislation then we would look at that when the time was right.

**MS LEE:** There could be some changes coming?

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** On funding for special needs or disability education funding, are you able to provide a bit more information about how it works for non-government schools?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Thanks for the question. Non-government school funding for the ACT has been aligned with the commonwealth funding model, the model that is legislated by the commonwealth. We pay our share towards that. The commonwealth shifted, with the new arrangements commencing this year, to using the nationally consistent collection of data for students with disability as part of the calculation of the resourcing standard for non-government schools—and all schools, actually, but your question was specifically about non-government. We pay our share of that. It is not open for negotiation in a lot of ways, yes. We just line up.

**MS LEE:** Whatever that figure you need to pay is?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Correct, yes.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the directorate or the minister liaising with the non-government school sector, is there a formal process in place? When there are new schools that are being planned, for example in Molonglo, do you have a formal process? What kind of engagement do you have with the non-government school sector?

**Ms Berry:** There is pretty regular engagement with me and the directorate as well, I think. It would be almost weekly with the directorate, across a range of things. But with regard to the process for new schools in new suburbs—which we have engaged

with the non-government school sector on quite considerably around how new schools are now allocated to non-government schools, which is a little different from the past—the independent schools and the Catholic schools have said that they would prefer a fairer process, rather than just a first in, best dressed kind of process with new schools. That has been a conversation that has been happening for a little while now with the non-government schools. Is there anything else you want to add?

**Ms Howson:** No. You are right, minister. I meet with the head of the Catholic Education Office and the head of the Association of Independent Schools in the ACT on a quarterly basis, and different parts of our organisation, my deputies, would meet with the non-government sector senior officers on a range of different initiatives that are happening throughout our calendar year. In relation to planning for new schools, we facilitate engagement for those sectors with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and facilitate the exchange of information between that directorate and those sectors.

**MS ORR:** One of the things we have heard about quite a bit throughout the estimates hearings so far has been the growing population within Canberra. How is the Education Directorate responding to the growing population, and to the popularity of public schools?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, you could not have missed that there has been a considerable increase in the population of the ACT. I do not think a week goes by when it is not talked about across the community in a whole bunch of different areas. As the population in parts of the city increases faster than in others, the directorate needs to make adjustments to schools to ensure that all children who are in a priority enrolment area get access to their local school.

We make adjustments from time to time to meet the needs of our growing city. I will hand over to Mr Gotts, who is the person with all of the data. I do not know whether you have specific circumstances that you want to talk about within different areas. Of course, on the north side right now, we know it is growing considerably and it will continue to grow for quite some time. When we have been talking about increases in funding for transportable classrooms in those growing suburbs, for schools that need that additional space, that is all done as part of our planning and taking into account all the data that we collect and put together to make sure we have a good outcome for all of those schools.

**Mr Gotts:** I can give a bit of a run-down on how we go about tackling what is, as the minister outlined, quite a complex issue. She is right in saying that the population of Canberra is growing, and, with that, enrolments in our schools are growing. They are growing very strongly. Over the last few years they have been averaging growth of around 3½ per cent. Last year, 2017, it was four per cent. This year was a bit lower than that, but the trend for significant growth is continuing, and we expect it to continue for some years into the future.

The sorts of things that we look at are things like the number of births in the ACT. We look at migration into the ACT. We look at the numbers of students that are coming across the border from New South Wales into the ACT, and at full-fee-paying international students coming into the ACT. We also look at the ratio between



students who attend public schools and students who attend non-government schools, and any changes in that. Those items are constantly moving.

On top of that we look at growth areas. As the minister said, the northern part of the ACT has significant growth. We look at the rate of growth in those areas. We plan ahead for the number of schools and school places that will be required to ensure that every child has a place in their neighbourhood school. We do that on a continual rolling basis. We get assistance from external players where we think we need additional advice or insights, and then make recommendations on a regular basis as to where there have to be modifications in the capacity of the overall system in order to meet the fundamental requirement, which is to make sure that every child has a place in their local school.

**MS ORR:** Could you give me a bit more detail on what is being delivered in Gungahlin? As you noted, the north has a lot of growth pressures. I think there is a funding commitment of \$25.4 million to support the growth of school enrolments across Gungahlin. Can you run me through what you are doing there?

**Mr Gotts:** I can. There is a new school opening in the suburb of Taylor, which will open next year. That will provide significant additional capacity. There is detailed work underway now for an increase in the Franklin Early Childhood School, which provides additional capacity. There are a number of other existing schools in Gungahlin that are increasing their capacity, such as Gold Creek, Neville Bonner and Amaroo junior and senior. Those schools are all increasing their capacity.

We look at potential growth curves, so we are looking further ahead and doing the preliminary planning and assessment regarding where else we might need an additional school. We work with our partners in EPSDD, the Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority to work out how best to achieve that.

Again, looking at the north, we are conscious, as an example, that there is planning underway for a development on land currently owned by the CSIRO. We look at that and work with the organisations involved in that. We look at how many children are likely to come out of there, when they are likely to come and how many schools we will need. Equally, there are projects in Molonglo and in Ginninderry. With the developments there, we work with the joint developer to find appropriate school sites. It does mean walking over a lot of paddocks with thistles and things in them, but we are very keen to make sure we get the most appropriate sites for our schools.

In doing that, we also look at potential sites for non-government schools. We are conscious that there will not just be growth in public schools; there will also be growth, as Canberra gets bigger and bigger, in non-government schools. We look for sites that would suit non-government schools as well.

**MS ORR:** The school that will be in Taylor—I know it is currently subject to a naming competition—broadly, I am familiar with that. It is due to open next year. Can you run me through the number of placements for that one?

**Ms Berry:** I can do that: 600 school places; 44 preschool places; and room for expansion at that school, if it is required, for another 140, I think.

**MS ORR:** The Franklin Early Childhood School is already established up to year 2. I have had quite a few people ask me about this, so can you run through how that school is going to be expanded? It will go up to year 6; that is my understanding.

**Mr Gotts:** Yes. The plans for the expansion of Franklin are for an increase of 400 places.

**MS ORR:** Is it going to be staged?

**Mr Gotts:** Yes.

**Mr Matthews:** The decision by government, as represented in the budget papers, is that we will enable the current year 2 cohort at Franklin to remain on site and continue their education there. We will be using transportable accommodation to facilitate the continued enrolment of that cohort on site whilst we do some further engagement with the school community about the end solution there. The school community have been very active in their discussions amongst themselves and in their representation that they would like to have an expansion of their school and be actively involved in the design and decision-making around that. That is what has been committed to as part of this budget.

As Robert said, in the context of our future planning, we are looking across the whole of the city, including in Gungahlin, at the best way and the best mix of delivering school opportunities. Franklin is an important part of that. The thing that we were very keen to do was to offer certainty to the current cohorts in time for the enrolment process for next year.

**MS ORR:** So the current year 2s will be able to enrol in year 3 next year, while the broader planning work is going on. The other question I get quite a bit is about secondary school provision in Gungahlin. Correct me if I am wrong, but I vaguely remember mention of a scoping study—or is that for Health? It has been a long couple of weeks, so feel free to fill me in.

**Mr Matthews:** I am not sure about a specific scoping study, but I can report that over several years the government has made an investment in increasing capacity at schools in Gungahlin. Of course, we focus our capital works delivery on the commencement of a school year as a new school cohort comes online. Our delivery of capital works is much more linked to the school year. The financial year, of course, is a really important reporting responsibility of ours.

For the beginning of the 2017 school year we did school expansion at Harrison, Palmerston and Neville Bonner, for example. So there was already increased capacity in 2017. In 2018 we have done additional capacity at Amaroo and Gold Creek junior campus. So already for this year there has been additional capacity. Mention has already been made of the new school at Taylor and the additional capacity that will provide for 2019.

The budget initiative that you were talking about, which is for more places at Gungahlin schools, provides the ability to offer additional capacity at four other

schools in Gungahlin. They are all direct investments.

Based on the planning work that Rob and his team are doing, our engagement with other parts of government, and indeed with school communities, we are getting a future pipeline of work, to try to project and match that demand—at a time, as the minister mentioned, of quite unprecedented growth in our city. We are able to do that. Some of that demand will peak and then subside, but in other areas it will remain constant into future years, as the city continues to grow. We have also been looking very closely at Molonglo as the next growth front here, and at west Belconnen, through Ginninderry.

**Ms Berry:** There is planning for east Gungahlin.

**Ms Howson:** In the last budget there was some funding; that might be what you are thinking about.

**MS ORR:** It is a very vague memory.

**Mr Matthews:** That is right. There is some planning work being done on another school in Gungahlin, which in the past has been referred to as east Gungahlin. Effectively, it is another secondary school in Gungahlin.

**MS ORR:** Is that looking at where a secondary school would be?

**Mr Matthews:** It is looking at sites and delivery and capacity issues.

**MS ORR:** You mentioned the Molonglo school. That was my next question because it is quite a significant one in Coombs—the establishment of a school in Molonglo. Can you run me through what you are looking at doing and how that will meet the needs of the community there?

**Mr Gotts:** The school there is due to open in 2021. It is due to open as a P-6, to begin with. It is on quite a large slice of land and there is capacity for that to be expanded to include years 7 to 10 as well.

**MS ORR:** With that one, is the initial planning underway?

**Mr Gotts:** That is well advanced.

**MS ORR:** You have pretty much answered my final question.

**Ms Berry:** There is also a non-government school site in Moncrieff.

**MS LEE:** Mr Gotts, I think you referred to Amaroo, Gold Creek and Neville Bonner schools, and budget paper 2 refers to 500 more places in those schools. How are those places being provided? Are they similar to what you have in store for the Franklin expansion, as in the use of demountables?

**Ms Berry:** It is a combination of permanent infrastructure expansions and transportables as well. We can give you the breakdown.

**Mr Matthews:** For the beginning of the 2019 school year at Neville Bonner there will be 100 additional places and for the beginning of the 2020 school year there will be another 100 additional places at Neville Bonner. For the beginning of the 2020-21 school year there will be 50 additional places at Amaroo K-6, 50 additional places at Amaroo 7-10 and 100 additional places at Gold Creek. In 2022 there will be another additional 100 places at Gold Creek.

**Ms Berry:** Ms Lee was also after information about the actual form as well.

**Mr Bray:** As an example, the current strategy at Neville Bonner Primary School is to install transportable buildings. Because the school already has so many transportable buildings we have engaged an architect to look at a master planning solution that may result in the replacement of some of the transportable buildings by a permanent building.

For the start of 2019, with the limited time available, we will be installing transportable buildings, but we will move towards a more permanent master plan solution. In the short term it will be transportable and in the long term it might be permanent build. That is yet to be decided.

**MS LEE:** What is that time frame?

**Mr Bray:** The architect has been engaged to look at a longer term master plan solution. With so many students at that school we have to look at other impacts around play areas, shaded areas and even the size of the staffroom for teachers, as well as indirect impacts such as car parking. The master planning will look at all those issues and ensure that whatever we have as a final long-term solution is something quite acceptable to the school community.

In the case of Gold Creek we are looking at going with transportable buildings on the junior campus site. At Amaroo School we just finished building a new permanent structure for the beginning of 2018, so at this stage, given the numbers of 50 students in the junior and 50 students in the senior campus, it is most likely we will be using transportable buildings for those smaller numbers of students as solutions.

**MS LEE:** Will any of the three schools lose any play space or other common spaces?

**Mr Bray:** As an example, at Amaroo School we doubled the size of the hall-cum-gymnasium as part of the works. We also replaced the hard courts that were taken over for the new building. In our planning we always look at the indirect impacts. Certainly at Gold Creek the impact of additional students will reduce the play area. The play space at Gold Creek is shared with the Catholic school. It is on the same site, essentially, and it is becoming quite a crowded site. We have a landscape architect and an architect looking at the layout to make sure we have enough play space to address the needs of the students. That will be a significant issue at Neville Bonner and at Gold Creek when we do the expansions there.

**MS LEE:** Is there any plan to alleviate some pressure at Yarralumla Primary School and North Ainslie, which are both over capacity?

**Mr Bray:** They are not over capacity yet. They certainly have a high level of enrolment. We are looking at both those schools at the moment. I am not sure exactly where the architects are in terms of their engagement, but both those schools are very much front and centre with our planning in the short term.

**MS LEE:** Thank you for all the information on the ways we are dealing with some of the capacity issues. Are there any other methods or strategies the directorate is thinking about to address capacity, aside from the physical infrastructure aspects?

**Ms Berry:** Yes. We did a couple of things with a change of policy. We have provided the opportunity for New South Wales residents to now have priority enrolment areas. That means they will know much sooner whether they will get a place at their selected school, rather than having to wait until a couple of days before the school year starts. We are continuously looking at priority enrolment area boundaries. There are the capacity increases, through providing transportable classrooms, looking at different designs within the school communities and continuing to work with school communities about efficient and effective use of space for education.

**MS LEE:** I have another question here on high school curriculum. How much flexibility do high schools have at a school level, in terms of the mix of subjects that they are able to offer?

**Ms Howson:** All of our schools implement the Australian curriculum. In that sense, anything that is being taught in our schools relates back to the Australian curriculum. We have an autonomous approach to our school system here in the ACT. It is designed to enable schools to meet the needs of the students and respond to the interests and aspirations of the students in their school.

**Ms McMahon:** As Ms Howson said, there is certainly the capacity for each school to design its school-based curriculum, which is informed by the Australian curriculum. The Australian curriculum has a series of achievement standards that we address throughout schooling, from kindergarten through to year 10.

**MS LEE:** Does that autonomy go to the principal level?

**Ms McMahon:** That would be the pedagogical leadership team of the school.

**MS LEE:** So, yes, the principal has that overarching responsibility.

**Ms McMahon:** Yes. They are supported by the ESO in supporting and developing that school-based curriculum when required.

**Ms Howson:** I would also say there is a role for the school board in supporting the school's decisions around curriculum.

**MS LEE:** Would it be fair to say the decisions would be lying with that school leadership and the board? It would be a combination of working with the director but then being informed by the Australian curriculum?

**Ms Howson:** That is correct, yes.

**Ms Berry:** It would come from a number of different areas. It might be a need in the school for delivering a particular session on something or enthusiasm from the students to do something different like vegetable gardens. There are all sorts of things like class bike maintenance programs or whatever. The school community might see something of interest to the school students and the parents. If it fits in with the curriculum, as long as it is okay, there is some flexibility. If it fits in, the programs are developed. It is not immediately just a decision of a principal or the pedagogical leadership. There would be conversations getting around the school about different things.

**Ms Brighton:** A good example of that would be, in implementing the science curriculum, Melrose High has put in place the ACE science mentors program. That is the program I mentioned earlier on. It is linked up with academics and researchers who are working specifically with students at that school. It is the science curriculum implemented in quite a different way to what is happening in some of the other schools but still firmly anchored in the curriculum. It is executed under the pedagogical leadership of the principal and his senior team. A very critical science leader who is a former Prime Minister's science teacher awardee is running that program. We will look to scale up that program across our system as part of the Future Skills Academy.

This is one example of what it would look like—taking the curriculum and looking at that local decision—when a principal and their pedagogical team know their school really well and know what the needs of their students are. Ms McMahan might have some further examples of that.

**Ms McMahan:** Recently I have come from a school as a school principal—the school in Molonglo which is currently operating, Charles Weston. Our decision around our specialist teaching areas was a school-based one, in consultation with the community. We were looking at a futures direction for our language acquisition. We wanted to make sure not only that we had adequate language pathways but also that we were teaching digital technologies across our school.

We teach coding from pre-schoolers right through to year 6. We see that that is an opportunity to really upskill students in those soft skills, those 21st-century skills that we will be needing. We work with the leadership team and our teachers in developing an inquiry-based curriculum that incorporates the achievement standards of the Australian curriculum.

**MS LEE:** That example would apply, for example, to Lyneham, where they have the LEAP and the SEAL programs? It works in that way as well. Do schools that have some of the specialist programs we just talked about in some of the examples have different capacity issues to schools that do not? Have you seen a trend? Do you see more enrolments or applications to those schools? Have you kept data on any of that?

**Ms Efthymiades:** You could not say that every program has an oversubscription, but there are certainly some. Lyneham is an example of where there are very clearly defined specialist programs. They have very clear criteria. Lyneham has historically

had a reasonable proportion of students coming from outside its priority enrolment area, particularly with a view to accessing those specialist programs. As more and more students come into the priority enrolment area for Lyneham, the capacity to take those from outside is decreasing. Therefore, those criteria become really important in terms of prioritising which students from outside can come into the school.

Lyneham is a great example of where those attractant programs, potentially, are attracting large numbers. But there would be others where it is less the case, and they can quite readily accommodate students from outside the area into the school. I think bilingual programs are another one that are quite an attractant.

**MS LEE:** Mawson?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Telopea, Yarralumla, Mawson—those schools. What it really means for those schools is that, over time, because their own enrolment base is growing within area, there are fewer out-of-area students that can come into those programs. But we are still able to meet our guarantee of students able to enrol—guaranteed enrolment—in their local school.

**MS LEE:** Would it be fair to say, from the director's perspective, that there is a priority set? People in the PEA are guaranteed. Then, even if there is that special program which allows students from outside of PEA to come in, they would be second? Is that right?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Correct. There is a catch number, too, for those programs. The criteria that we have around the specialist programs is defined entry criteria, a capped number, so it is not just a limitless program. Those are agreed with the director of school improvement, for the relevant network. That is the order. That is one of the priorities for processing out of areas. There are other circumstances such as significant wellbeing issues. Sometimes there are legally based issues; sometimes there are vulnerability issues; sometimes there are significant mental health issues. Those are also considered as priorities in terms of enrolments from outside the area.

**MS LEE:** Do any of those special programs have a test or anything that students have to sit?

**Ms Efthymiades:** I do not know specifically. It would vary. I know, for example, that for the LEAP gifted program Lyneham has very specific academic criteria that relate to that. Whether or not that is a separate assessment, I am not sure. But it is very specific academic criteria.

**Ms Brighton:** If I could just add to that. When we have programs that are particularly successful in terms of student participation and any outcomes, we look at whether there are any opportunities to scale that across the system and share that learning. We spoke earlier on about our professional learning communities and the need to collaborate as a system and take those learnings. That is a good example of when we would look to illustrate that with a range of different opportunities, so that it is not just at a particular school but system-wide.

**Ms Howson:** It is rare that a school that I visit does not have something on offer that

meets the needs of its community.

**MS LEE:** Will the Future Skills Academy we talked about earlier be run organisationally like this or is it a separate thing altogether? For example, with the Future Skills Academy, do they also have to have that criteria or is that a completely separate program?

**Ms Howson:** It is universal access for our public education students.

**MS LEE:** Yes. So that is a very different sort of thing?

**Mr Matthews:** Different model.

**MS LEE:** Different model altogether.

**MS CHEYNE:** Could I ask about some of the changes to appropriation. This is not my strong suit, so if I misinterpret numbers, please let me know.

**MS LEE:** I could not even do the five times table earlier.

**Mr Matthews:** Ms Cheyne, can we ask for the page number so that we can make sure?

**MS CHEYNE:** It is pages 17 and 18 of your specific budget paper. I will start on page 18. What are early childhood scholarships and what has happened between last year, with the estimated outcome, and the money being entirely moved to this year?

**Ms Daly:** The early childhood scholarships, in particular, as with a lot of our rollovers, are usually due to timing issues. In this particular case, the scholarships are usually to assist applicants to gain their certificate III qualifications; it can take up to 18 months for them to actually access the funding to pay for that. The rollover is just a continuation of that program into the 2018-19 year. Unspent from 2017-18 does not mean that it is not being accessed; they just may not be applying yet for that reimbursement until this financial year, the 2018-19 year.

**MS CHEYNE:** It is not on the forward estimates. Is that because you wait to see how many people access it this year and then we might roll it over into next year?

**Ms Daly:** I am just checking. Sean might just be able to give you some more information as to the specific program itself and how it is funded.

**Mr Moysey:** We are looking at a refocus of the early childhood scholarships. There were two scholarships; one was a tertiary and one was for cert III. Skilled capital offers a program for cert III, so that is now going to take the lead on the cert III programs. The tertiary programs we are recasting for this coming financial year. As Lynette said, the rollover is for those people who are still finishing their cert III and entitled to those payments. Then we are recasting the tertiary program.

**MS CHEYNE:** So that will not be needed beyond this financial year, but we have blocked it in for the people who are finishing up but will not be finished until this



financial year.

**Mr Moysey:** That is right.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you; that is very clear. We have significant changes with the superannuation and wage parameters. What has driven that?

**Ms Berry:** That is just the shift in the workforce. As our older cohort move out of government services, they are taking their CSS and PSS pension arrangements with them. The younger workforce comes in on a fund of choice, which is a different contribution rate; there is a lower amount of superannuation required by government.

**MS CHEYNE:** And the impost is coming down a bit?

**Ms Berry:** Yes. Basically, the cost of superannuation for government is actually coming down. We are not paying the higher cost of the premium programs that we had in historical years. That is really just a reflection of the shift in our workforce ageing profile.

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not need to see them, but do you maintain statistics on how many people you are expecting to retire each year?

**Ms Daly:** Absolutely, when we are budgeting. This is across the whole of government, so it does look at it across all directorates. We look at the profile of the staffing and the expected future retirements and exiting from the workforce when we look at the planning as a whole around the superannuation contributions.

**MS CHEYNE:** Is that done centrally or does each directorate do it?

**Ms Daly:** It is a combination of both.

**MS CHEYNE:** I imagine there are probably some different circumstances in each directorate, but when I think about teachers, in particular—

**Ms Howson:** Different workforces.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, exactly.

**Ms Daly:** That is right. It does look at the technical—

**Ms Howson:** Teachers love their job. They are so committed, they do not like to retire.

**MS CHEYNE:** It made me wonder. Are we being a bit too optimistic in terms of people's retirement rates? They might love their job so much that they stay around. I assume there is an actuarial basis for a lot of this work as well.

**Mr Matthews:** That is right, Ms Cheyne. We do update that figure every year, in consultation with treasury. In terms of the projections that are made, if there are any variations on a year-by-year basis, we work that out with treasury, and that is reflected in the following year's budget papers.

**MS CHEYNE:** And for this year it is reasonably significant?

**Ms Daly:** Yes.

**MS CHEYNE:** I want to go back to page 17, the Comcare premium reduction. That also looks like a big number. What has influenced that?

**Ms Daly:** That is a one-year, one-off impact for us. That has come through the advice of the insurance agency itself. With our Comcare premium, there are fluctuations in the premium every year. It is a complex model that is calculated. It goes on the number of staff salaries and the number of previous incidents historically, rectified claims and things like that. It fluctuates every year. This year is considered to be a one-off reduction in our Comcare premium due to historical factors. They have only applied a one-off, as they are expecting the premium to come back up again in future years. As they do another actuarial review, that will determine the future impact, again across the whole of government. It is not just our directorate; they do it as a whole. That is why there is a one-year impact for this year. They have maintained our level of funding in terms of the Comcare premium moving forward, as they are expecting it to level out.

**MS CHEYNE:** What does “general savings” mean? I appreciate that the figures are very small, so I am not that concerned, but I am interested in what “general” covers.

**Ms Daly:** That in particular is our directorate’s contribution to the government office block and the work that is going on behind that establishment. Each directorate is contributing to that work, and that is our contribution.

**MS CHEYNE:** Can you expand on that for me? What does your contribution mean?

**Ms Daly:** Based on each directorate’s current level of assets that we either own or rent in terms of our space out in the community, there was a determination about the contribution amount that they would then make to the project itself. It is around the establishment of the actual government office block protocol—not necessarily the construction itself but the work that is going on around the transition work, consultation with directorates, and the—

**Ms Howson:** It is essentially getting the public service ready to move into the building and operate in a different way. It is going to be based on activity-based working principles.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes. We heard about this on Friday.

**Ms Howson:** There is a central team—a change management team, if you like—that has been established in the Chief Minister’s department to support all of us in that transition.

**MS CHEYNE:** So each directorate contributes to the funding of that?

**Ms Howson:** That is right.

**MS CHEYNE:** To make sure you are ready for early to mid-late 2020?

**Ms Howson:** That is correct.

**MS CHEYNE:** Which office block are you moving to?

**Mr Matthews:** I represent the Education Directorate on the whole-of-government committee.

**MS CHEYNE:** I am pleased to hear it.

**Mr Matthews:** Our ESO is primarily moving into the government office block in the city. Obviously the vast bulk of our staff are in schools, and will remain in schools. Also, we will maintain the Hedley Beare teaching and learning centre, where a number of our staff are based. We also use that as a training facility. A relatively small percentage of Education staff will be moving into the city office block.

**MS CHEYNE:** That would perhaps explain why general savings is quite a low number, because in terms of the staff you are actually moving, as part of the whole public service workforce it is quite small?

**Ms Howson:** That is right.

**THE ACTING CHAIR** (Ms Cheyne): That is really helpful to get across. Ms Le Couteur, do you have a question that can be answered in 30 seconds?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Probably not, no.

**Mr Matthews:** I can give you an answer to a question taken on notice, to fill up the last 30 seconds. Earlier, we took on notice a question about the non-government school registration. I can confirm that the current criteria were written in 2004, when the act was last subject to a major overhaul. They were reviewed in 2013. Also, though, the application of those criteria to individual registration requests does continue to get refined as part of the process that I outlined earlier in terms of a panel meeting to assess a criterion and provide advice to the minister. So there is scope to take into account, obviously, changing community attitudes and circumstances that arise, such as the situation following the royal commission.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you, minister, and everybody else who appeared. We will resume at 3.30 pm with the ACT Electoral Commission.

**Hearing suspended from 3.14 to 3.32 pm.**

Appearances:

ACT Electoral Commission

Cantwell, Mr Damian AM, Electoral Commissioner

Spence, Mr Rohan, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon, gentlemen. Before we commence, can you please acknowledge the pink privilege statement in front of you, which I am sure you have read before.

**Mr Cantwell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cantwell, did you have an opening statement or are you happy to go straight into questions?

**Mr Cantwell:** I do not have an opening statement per se. I am happy to go to questions. However, I highlight essentially the budget element for our submission: it is that clearly the key to our work is ensuring that we are well set for success in the elections plan for 2020. Underpinning that are some key activities, including redistribution; ensuring that the electronic voting system and associated ICT systems that underpin our systems are as robust and as reliable as they can be; ensuring that the associated funding disclosure is well funded; and ensuring that the community information campaign is well funded. Then we are set for success in 2020.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I feel a bit confused as to where we actually are.

**MR HANSON:** Well, I am happy to go first if you are feeling confused, Ms Le Couteur. As a visiting member I am very happy to—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes, we went back—

**MR HANSON:** Maybe we could have your question, Ms Le Couteur, in the interests of bipartisanship and—

**MS LEE:** We thought we were going to get any early mark, Jeremy.

**MR HANSON:** If you let me ask the question, though; the more I can ask, the quicker I will be.

**THE CHAIR:** Caroline can continue. Then we will get to you soon, Mr Hanson. Then we can all get going for this afternoon.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You are making me giggle, Mr Hanson. I will ask a question about political donations. As you would be aware, the government—well, Labor and the Greens—have made a commitment that they intend to develop legislation to ban developers from making political donations. Have you done any work on the mechanisms, because presumably this would come within your purview when it arises?

**Mr Cantwell:** This was an issue that was raised as part of the select committee inquiry into the 2016 election and the Electoral Act.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It was, yes.

**Mr Cantwell:** As part of that, our response, which I understand was tabled recently, included the commission's view that, while acknowledging the intent behind the ban on political donations by property developers, we highlighted the practical aspects and the concerns around the actual monitoring of that, in particular for Elections ACT.

I would highlight those comments which were offered as part of the inquiry hearings. They included our view that it might be very difficult to determine whether donations from such property developers were focused at or given to a federal level. It could be difficult to determine how, or indeed if, they had found their way into a jurisdictional level, in this case the ACT level. In a practical sense, it also has proven a very difficult issue for the forensic examination of issues when they arise. I draw your attention to the New South Wales experience in this space, where it is difficult to try to determine exactly where and how those donations might arise.

We offered, as we tabled in our response to the committee inquiry report, an alternative in practice—this was up in the air; it was just a suggestion—that might see a register of property developers being maintained, other than by Elections ACT. When a donation was received clearly from someone outside that list or off that list, that would make at least the initial investigation of such breaches of legislation, should that come into play, more manageable for Elections ACT.

There are other issues around the application of it. But, firstly, we do not see it as an in-practice workable policy because, in summary, of the leaks from the federal level or from elsewhere and, secondly, in practice as we would see it operating at our level. Lastly, I would add that it would probably result in a response from us that would see some additional requests for staffing and funding. I would find the management of that issue, in particular with the staffing levels that I currently enjoy, to be very difficult. I would probably have to go through a budgetary review process to look at additional staffing to be able manage that aspect.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I cannot really comment on the staffing, but the impression I got was that the New South Wales people had been able to do this work quite reasonably and that they had been able to do a lot of work looking at conduit donors, shelf companies and things like that. I guess you may have some more inside intelligence on this than I do. But the impression I got was that they were able to look at this reasonably effectively and administer this legislation.

**Mr Cantwell:** I think the issue I have there is that they have better resources and capacity than we do. The New South Wales Electoral Commission is a much bigger organisation. For us, it is really a case of being able to manage the additional workload as well as being concerned about the clarity of information that would be sought to be examined in the first place—how funding at one level, the federal level, might leak into another jurisdictions and how you would be able to administer that properly.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That would presumably be the same issue for New South Wales, I guess.

**Mr Cantwell:** It would be, I imagine, yes.

**MR HANSON:** I have a supplementary on that: the issue of restricting a particular category from donating. I know that when this occurred in New South Wales previously, Unions NSW had a High Court case and the particular legislation was overturned. Is there anything that constitutionally would interfere with the intent of preventing developers from donating? I would have to go back to that High Court case, but if you were to say, “You can donate, but you cannot,” that seemed to be what got thrown out in that Unions NSW case previously. Have you looked at that one to see whether the legislation would be interfering with the constitution, as it did in that case?

**Mr Cantwell:** Yes, I would be careful about offering a legal opinion, in a sense. But I understand the thrust of your question. I will invite my deputy, Ro Spence, to speak. He might be able to throw some light on that, given that he has been in the organisation longer than I have.

But, for me, really, it is a question of being able to understand the variations that might exist in respect of political donations by property developers. Indeed, for me, in the ACT, how do we define “property developers”? Where would you draw the line in terms of who or what entity constitutes a property developer? Or what entities might, for the purpose of, dare I say, circumventing such a ban, arrange themselves in a legal stance such that it is difficult to label them specifically as a property developer entity? Again, I am not an expert in that legal sense. It is just a question I would have. But I invite Ro to make comment on the New South Wales circumstances if he can.

**Mr Spence:** Yes. I would stress that we are not lawyers. However, my understanding of that constitutional case was that the High Court ruled that it is viable to prohibit donations from a particular group if there is deemed to be a reason to do so, to sort of summarise the ruling. So any prohibition on donations needs to be equal and fair to the risk that it is proposing. That is my understanding of that ruling. It was not a flat, overarching rule saying that it is permissible to do that. It must be done in a measured way. Whether any proposed law to be introduced in the ACT meets those High Court rulings is not a matter for the Electoral Commission but must be considered, I believe, if it were to be introduced.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Noting your comments about donations from property developers, there has also been the proposal to simply say that only electors can donate. From an administrative point of view, would you see that also having the sorts of problems you were talking about?

**Mr Cantwell:** Would I see it having the same problems?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** The same sorts of problems if there were a restriction. It has oft been suggested that people who can vote would be the only people who would be allowed to influence the election with money—that is, make political donations. There is a logic in that which you may or may not agree with.

**Mr Spence:** That used to be the law in the ACT.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I know it used to be the law in the ACT. There was not in fact a challenge on that. It was a different challenge of a different law.

**Mr Spence:** Again, my point—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes, I am well aware it used to be the law in the ACT.

**Mr Spence:** And my understanding was that the amendment to that law was in relation to some High Court considerations about the legality of prohibiting donations from non-ACT electors. Again, not being lawyers, that is a consideration that needs to be looked into.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That was not actually the question I asked, but obviously the ACT law was never tested in court. I was actually more concerned with an area which I thought you might have more knowledge about, the administrative burden of such a law rather than the legal aspect. I do appreciate, as you say, that you are not lawyers.

**Mr Cantwell:** I think what I would have to do is look carefully at the impact of any changes to the legislation in this space because of the staff size and the capacity at Elections ACT in the first place. I would simply have to make sure I had the resources, whichever way legislation went, if it changed. You would expect that I would have to then ascertain, if I did not have the resources, what budgetary review process might exist to allow me to seek additional funding or staffing to cover that requirement. I would not say that is not doable or impossible, but I would just have to examine what the impact would be in a real sense. It is just that it is a small staff.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the upgrade to the ICT system and electronic voting, there is a table on page 106 of budget paper 3. The expenses and the funding appear only during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 years. That is starting in the election year itself. Is that barely enough to ensure an adequate system is in place for the growing number of electronic voters?

**Mr Cantwell:** Yes, it is. We have given ourselves the deadline of a year prior to October 2020. We want the ICT upgrades and the work and the testing complete—I call it full operational capability—by a year before that, so October 2019. The timings are manageable. They are tight, but we have encompassed within our strategic risk register procedures to ensure that the work we are proposing, what we have won moneys for, or work for which we might need to seek funds through a budget review process has the capability of those ICT systems, in particular the EVACS you mentioned, being in place in time. It is a focus for our team.

In this space I rely heavily upon Rohan and our elections operations manager because of their experience base and, where necessary, consultants or contractors to assist us with technical work. Of course, all this is coordinated in lock step with the ICT services people, our security advisers and our own contractors and consultants to make sure we have it all tied together. I am confident that what we have in place will meet the requirement of October 2019.

**MS LEE:** We know there is a trend towards more people voting electronically, especially with the upgraded system. Given the potential risks of interference or any electronic issues that may come about, has that been factored in in terms of the amount being expended? Have any contingencies been put in place? What are those plans?

**Mr Cantwell:** There are a couple of points I am glad you made. Firstly, the emphasis on electronic voting, and the success the ACT has enjoyed since 2001 has been well deserved; it has been a class leader in this process. But as we identified in our budget bids for the money to upgrade and improve EVACS, it is necessary to make sure those systems are as robust and reliable as they must be to meet the requirement.

Now eVACS is one of a number of ICT systems that enable our electoral and business processes. The money that has been assigned over those two financial years is adequate to meet the requirement for EVACS. Having said that, as we continue to look at the other ICT systems—in particular, those which manage the polling place management system and also the system that manages some of the backroom administrative functions—and as we identify where we can improve those systems, I highlight the potential for us to go through, particularly for the latter system, a potential budgetary review process to ensure those systems are equally up to the task for 2020 and beyond.

I am not trying to get ahead of the procurement process system. I want to make sure we abide by the financial act and treasury's guidance in this space. I am grateful for the work they have done with us to this point to ensure we have identified what might be possible and the sorts of ICT issues in that space. It has been very much a team effort.

The last thing you alluded to are some of the cyber risks. That is a very much a concern across any form of electronic database management. We are familiar with that. The safeguards within our system in the ACT are very carefully managed. Because it is an electronic voting system and not an internet-based system, by its own design it is much more difficult for someone who has malicious or other intent to interfere with both the process and the results. There are no external access points; it is all internal at each point in place, for example.

You are right to identify that risk, and other institutions are also looking at that. As a collection of electoral commissioners and commissions across Australia, it is a body of work that has drawn the attention of COAG. I know our Chief Minister and Head of Service attended a series of briefings both before and during the recent COAG in February which spoke to this point. The PM and leadership at COAG have given direction for the electoral commissions around Australia to work together in this space.

The PM has tasked his cyber adviser and the Department of Home Affairs to work with us and the other jurisdictions to look at what is the cyber health of the current jurisdictions—that is, what is our current state of play in terms of our cyber risks and how we are treating those—what risks might emerge over the next five to 10 years and as a collection of commissions and, with work yet to be done, how that might look in the next little while.



It is a very important area. Since becoming the commissioner I have worked with some of our other agencies. I have reached out to working relationships I have with some of our federal partners in this space to ask them to help us understand some of those risks. I think we are well set at this point, but we should not underestimate the malicious or other intent of a party or parties that might cause us an undoing.

Key to all of this is the fundamental safeguard of our most important responsibility—to ensure integrity and trust in the system; to ensure our community trusts that their votes are private, secret and kept in the right format, particularly with electronic voting here, and to ensure that the people or organisations the community are voting for are seated in power. We cannot ever threaten that, so I am very careful about our cyber threats. We will continue to take advice from the collection of commissions I referred to and our federal agencies, as well as from within our ICT services, who are very good in this space.

**MS ORR:** Will it all be electronic voting in 2020? Can you clarify that for me?

**Mr Cantwell:** It will not all be electronic voting. There is a growing community trend to further embrace the opportunity when presented. One in three voters, when given the opportunity at the last election, in 2016, chose to vote electronically. There are many benefits in doing so for us as a commission, the community at large and, indeed, the representatives competing for election.

It will not be exclusively electronic voting; paper ballots will be offered as well. When I share lessons learnt from other commissioners both here and overseas, it is interesting to see across the ACT and elsewhere in Australia the growing trend that, when given the opportunity, people will vote electronically. Of those who sought to or needed to do pre-poll voting at the last election, the vast majority at the electronic pre-poll centres voted electronically.

**MR HANSON:** I want to go to the issue of external players in elections. We have seen it in America, with allegations of influence from Russia and elsewhere. What if someone was trying to influence our election? It could be OMCGs, or it could be a political entity that wanted an election result one way or the other. They might not be indigenous to the ACT; they could be based in Darwin or overseas—it does not matter where. Are we monitoring that? If they do that—let us say someone spends a lot of money on a whole bunch of Facebook and Instagram posts and so on—how do the Electoral Commission and the act respond to that? Do you monitor that sort of activity? Political parties, third parties and entities in the ACT would be reporting, but these organisations would not be. If you get a whole bunch of activity—it could be Facebook bots and things like that—how do you monitor that? Do you do that or is someone doing that?

**Mr Cantwell:** My responsibilities in this space are around the Electoral Act, in particular, to ensure that the systems we use are robust and workable against such electronic threats.

**MR HANSON:** I am not so much concerned about the internal Electoral Commission systems. I am concerned about someone creating, on Facebook or Instagram, a whole

bunch of dummy accounts. These are the allegations about what has happened in America.

**Mr Cantwell:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** How do you monitor who that is and how that is happening? Is that done by the Electoral Commission or the AFP? Do you have linkages there to scan the environment to see if that is happening?

**Mr Cantwell:** I will ask my deputy, Rohan Spence, to comment on this. Certainly, at the federal level, part of the body of work I referred to earlier in terms of determining the cyber health of our various jurisdictions, including our own, includes that very question about the monitoring or the determination of what threats exist externally; that is, outside the immediate jurisdiction but influencing the political machinations which are going on as part of the political processes.

You are right to be concerned about it. I recall that not long after taking up this appointment we attended a seminar in Perth that focused on this and other subjects. The academic outcome from that, in particular in terms of the US experience, was that the US are taking various procedures themselves in this space. I could not comment in detail on that, but it was about the threat or the actions that they allege to have been undertaken by Russia in their democratic processes. Information being made available to voters to make up their own minds and inform the campaigns was certainly being undermined by such actions. We have to be very careful about how we seek to monitor and manage that. It is a very complex space. There is no easy way to go about how we manage that.

**MR HANSON:** I appreciate that, but what are we doing?

**Mr Spence:** The two jurisdictional areas that the Electoral Act provides the commission with management over are authorisation of electoral material and campaign expenditure. That is really the limit of where the commission has oversight. In that area the expenditure cap is only relevant from 1 January in an election year. At that point the commission engages in a scan of traditional and social media to try and identify any organisations that may be captured within a third-party campaigner category. Of course, many political participants out there are also very helpful to the Electoral Commission in that area and point out anything that they think we need to be paying attention to. Likewise, in the area of authorisation, the authorisation rules are an ongoing law; it is not just in an election period that those laws are relevant.

**MR HANSON:** It strikes me that the system is set up to monitor the people doing the right thing, in a way, but you could have people who are setting up 5,000 Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts and putting a whole bunch of money behind that. Seemingly, this was the way it was done in America. It could be done by a criminal element or it could be a politically affiliated organisation in another jurisdiction. What proactive way can that be looked at? Do you have links with the AFP and the ability to dig behind it? Have you spoken particularly to Facebook and Instagram—the big social media operators—about this?

**Mr Cantwell:** To this point we have not spoken to the social media operators. I dare

say that is worth pursuing. I think that would best be achieved effectively by the commissioners collectively at the ECANZ council level. We have had cause to establish and work with the Australian Cyber Security Centre in this respect, in terms of cybersecurity, and in looking at residual risks around our own electronic voting system and what might be able to be achieved in terms of malicious or accidental damage to our EVAC system.

I have established those links. I have brought in some contacts that I had in my previous career, in terms of cybersecurity staff. My interaction with them has encouraged me more than discouraged me in terms of the proactive actions that they are undertaking and can lend assistance to both for us as an individual jurisdiction and across the board for other jurisdictions.

It is a complex, evolving and dynamic space. Often with such threats or such actions, as soon as one threat is detected and a counter is developed against it, there is another variation thereof and something else appears on the network that same day. I would not want to be overly glum or gloomy about this potential, but it is right to raise the threat and the potential for this to occur. It could just be, in an electioneering sense, a breach of the Electoral Act, as Mr Spence made reference to, or, as I think you are suggesting, something that is more malicious and seeking to undermine the democratic process.

**MR HANSON:** That is right. Let us say an OMCG have decided that they do not like the Liberal policies or they do not like the Labor policies, and they think they will benefit under a better operating environment for them. They have a lot of money and they could decide to try to influence the outcome of an election. That is what, reportedly, allegedly, Russia has done in the US. But it seems to me that we are looking at the authorisation of electoral material that we are used to, as opposed to the far more subtle way it has been done to try to influence opinion.

It is good that you are speaking to people that you were previously associated with in a former career, but it strikes me that the Electoral Commission does not therefore have a dedicated element that will be investigating this.

**Mr Cantwell:** Within our current resource base, I do not have someone who is looking at this full time. I think I have brought into this space an increased awareness of it, simply by fortune of my prior background and my contacts. Since being in this role we have had cause a couple of times to ask the ACSC, Australian Cyber Security Centre, and their resident experts to look at both procedural and technical aspects of a couple of residual vulnerabilities which I wanted to have examined.

This raised its profile at the same time that it became an agenda item in COAG in February, as I mentioned previously. The directed cyber health checks and the second phase behind that, coordinated actions and resource actions, at the federal, state and ACT level, will address these sorts of things. Certainly, I will undertake to make sure those sorts of concerns are flagged before—

**MR HANSON:** I think it would be useful for someone to be thinking about this.

**Mr Cantwell:** Absolutely; I agree. What worried me most, after coming away from

that conference last November in Perth, and with respect to, as you referred to, the alleged actions by the Russians, I would have to say was the conclusion of an academic at the conference, whereby the intent of the Russians was not only to undermine the outcome of elections in the United States but also to undermine democracy, writ large.

That would suggest a far deeper and broader, more sinister campaign, which could have implications in other jurisdictions, even our own, well outside the United States. So it is right to raise the concern. If it exists somewhere in technology that something could cause us harm or cause the actual systems and our processes some harm, or at least bring into question the outcome, we need to be alert to those. I have got that on the radar, for sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to follow up a bit further on Mr Hanson's questions, what powers do Elections ACT and you as commissioner hold in forcing a third-party campaigner to conform with the Electoral Act? Mr Hanson alluded to someone outside the ACT or perhaps even internationally looking at creating multiple profiles on social media, but if an entity decided to just flood physical material into the ACT during an election campaign, what powers do you have if they have, for instance, overspent or are overspending?

**Mr Spence:** The Electoral Act is fairly prescriptive on the fines imposed on overspending the electoral cap. It is twice the amount by which they have overspent; that is the fine.

**THE CHAIR:** The horse has sort of bolted by that point, insofar as the damage is done.

**Mr Spence:** This could well be the case, but we do not find out any of that information until election returns are submitted, which is 60 days after the election. Until that point we have no way of identifying campaign overspends.

**MR HANSON:** What compels an organisation that is not in the ACT? You have your known players in the ACT—political parties, unions, lobby groups and so on. Let us say it is someone overseas or someone interstate; what powers do you have to impose those sanctions on a group in Queensland or in China? Is there any power?

**Mr Cantwell:** I would have to take advice on the legal aspects of it, in terms of it occurring overseas. If it is proven or alleged to be an overseas entity that is doing such a thing, I would have to take advice on how even the powers in the current Electoral Act would be applied in that circumstance. If it is a domestic entity that breaches the Electoral Act, they are liable to the punitive or the jurisdictional response that we would impose upon anyone if they were in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** I will ask the same question of you as I did of the Auditor-General: did you make a direct budget submission to cabinet or was the submission made by the Speaker for the Electoral Commission?

**Mr Cantwell:** We put our submissions in through the Speaker.

**THE CHAIR:** How is that process evolving, given that the structure is still relatively new?

**Mr Cantwell:** I am happy with it, but I do not have something else to compare it to, by direct experience. I simply respect the processes as they are laid out and that have been established between the Speaker and the Treasurer. We conform to that process, as it was explained to me when I took the job up. I think that is fine. I have not had any issues or feedback that have caused me some concerns about it.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you see any ways of improving the process in future years?

**Mr Cantwell:** The Speaker highlighted to the Chief Minister, in his capacity as the Treasurer in this regard, the outcome as it related to the rulings for the Electoral Commission being able to roll over up to 10 per cent of its appropriations from one financial year to the next.

The issue, as I saw it at the time, was how that could be interpreted as inhibiting, restricting or impacting upon the independence of statutory authorities such as the Electoral Commission. I recall being party to the correspondence or seeing a copy of the correspondence that the Speaker shared which agreed to that arrangement—that is, up to 10 per cent, under the arrangements with the Treasurer. I noted that it would continue to be a work in progress. I understood that to be that we would continue to monitor it and if I think that in some way in practical terms it impinges upon my statutory independence, I would certainly highlight that. I would be expected to do that. I would be required to do that, and I would do that through the Speaker's office. I do not have cause to take that any further at this point. It is only early days.

**MR HANSON:** Could you update us on the electoral redistribution that you go through, the mandated process? I am aware of the provisions in the act for that. I want to know where you are at with it. I think the first thing is an initial draft, or do you consult before the draft? I cannot quite recall. What is the first step?

**Mr Cantwell:** I have written to the membership of the redistribution committee. That includes the ACT planning authority, Mr Ponton, and the ACT Surveyor-General, Mr Jeff Brown. I have met with them informally, simply to ensure they understand, as I do, the process at this point and how we are going to proceed from here. We have yet to appoint the fourth member of the commission. Normally it has been the ACT regional director for the ABS, although I am in contact with the head of the ABS, looking for an appropriate member to step up to the mark.

So far I have written to them and highlighted and outlined the time line and the process, and included a draft instrument to ensure they understand what the responsibilities might be. We need to meet. The process kicks off at a point two years prior to October 2020. The process of community engagement, suggestions and comments will proceed from that point forward. I am happy with the process.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today. I also thank the representatives of the ACT Education Directorate. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript when it becomes available in coming days. For those who have appeared before us today, the committee asks that any

questions that were taken on notice be returned to the committee secretary within five days, with day one being tomorrow. On that note, the committee will adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

**The committee adjourned at 4.10 pm.**