



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)
MS N LAWDER**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2022

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**Secretary to the committee:
Dr A Chynoweth (Ph: 620 75498)**

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.

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Privilege statement

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.00 am.

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

Education Directorate

Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General, Education Directorate
Simmons, Ms Jane, Deputy Director-General
Moore, Ms Nicole, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy
Moysey, Mr Sean, Executive Branch Manager, Education and Care Regulation and Support
Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System policy and Reform
Nakkan, Mr John, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Capital Works
Huxley, Mr Mark, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement
McMahon, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Safe at Schools
Scholten, Ms Kylie, Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery
Watson, Mr Martin, Executive Director, Board of Senior Secondary Studies
McAlister, Ms Coralie, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Teacher Quality Institute

Community Services Directorate

Summerrell, Ms Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Communities Division
Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Branch Manager, Communities Division

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the public hearings of the standing committee on education and community wellbeing into the annual and financial reports 2021-2022. The proceedings today will examine annual reports for the Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate.

Before we begin, on behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge we meet today on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region

Please be aware the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and they will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses use these words: "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice.

In this first session, we will hear from the Minister for Early Childhood Development. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions.

Minister, could the committee please get an update on phase 1 of the Set up for Success early childhood strategy?

Ms Berry: Yes, thank you for that question. As the committee will be aware, the ACT

government has been implementing its early childhood strategy, which includes phasing in and working towards universal access for three-year-olds, in addition to four-year-old preschool.

We are phasing that in, and the reason we are phasing that in is we want to understand and work with the early childhood sector about the best way to ensure young people are getting the best start through this strategy, and we want to make sure we target that to vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, because they are the ones that are most likely to need that additional support. They are already starting from behind, and we know that those two years of preschool make a huge difference, a significant difference, on a child's early learning journey.

We have been working across a range of different directorates with what we refer to as "warm referrals", which is about understanding the needs of individual families and young people to ensure we match them up to an appropriate service and they are welcomed into an early childhood setting that suits their needs. I will ask Ms Moore to provide a little bit more detail on where we are up to with this first phase.

Ms Moore: Thank you Minister. I have read and understood the privileges statement. As the minister said, we are in phase 1. Phase 1 finishes at the end of this year, and we will move into phase 2. Under this phase, we have implemented the three-year-old initiative. That is a quite significant program: we have seen around 569 children referred to that program and those numbers continue to grow, so that is a really positive contribution to phase 1.

There is also a whole range of other initiatives under Set up for Success that we have been implementing. Under Set up for Success there are four foundation areas, and we have implemented a whole range of initiatives under each. I will give you a quick run-down of some of those key achievements.

Under the first foundation, which is "a fair start for every child", the targeted three-year-old initiative is, obviously, the big one that we are really excited about, but we have also been doing the preparatory work and modelling towards universal access. We have been able to work with CSD around providing long-term placement into early childhood education and care for three-year-olds who are part of the Children's Services Program. That means that those children can continue to attend that program for as long as they need to. Then we have been doing some preparatory work and consultation around recognising early childhood education in law.

Under the second foundation, which is "valuing educators, values children", we have delivered a whole range of trauma training supports for the sector. They have been: modules in trauma responsive practice and theory, a trauma champions network and professional networks to support the uplift in skills in that space. We have established 16 communities of practice, which are partnerships between schools and early childhood education and care services to build the collaboration and partnership between those sites, particularly where children are in an early childhood education and care service and then transitioning into preschool at that school in the following year. We have delivered early childhood degree scholarships. We have also, this year, completed a consultation process around developing the ACT-specific early childhood education and care workforce strategy that will align with the national strategy, and that

looks to focus particularly on what we can be doing here in the ACT.

For the third foundation, “every child has a story”, we have been piloting a transition and continuity statement, which is a process to support children and families as they are moving from their early childhood education care services into preschool, where their story goes with them. That is a really supported process where we hear from the child about what they like and what helps them to learn; we hear from the family; we hear from the educators and a range of other professionals working with that family. That information is not only provided to a school; they also work in partnership with the school to make sure that the right supports are put in place.

We have trialled an out-of-school hours care in preschool program model. We have moved what was called the Prep for Pre program. We have evolved that program into the Preschool Pathways project, which is delivering more support for families, and more information and support, particularly for educators who are working with children with additional needs in preschool settings.

We have been supporting the Canberra College Cares program, which is supporting young parents out at Canberra College. We have also been working really closely with Canberra Health Services to develop some resources on child development that can be shared through MACH nurses and through the relationships that CHS has—to bridge that gap between the interactions they have with the health sector and as they are moving into the education sector.

Then for the final foundation, which is “working together for children”, we have established a new out-of-school hours care licensing agreement, which aims to create better collaboration and partnerships between those out-of-school hours care services and the school setting. We have completed a co-design process for the Koori preschools, which is looking at cultural safety and how we can make sure those services are meeting the needs of those families. Again, working with CSD, we have also been able to provide ongoing funding for the early years engagement officers, which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members who work with families to connect them in with Koori preschool, as well as with the child and family service and other wrap around supports that those families might need.

There has been a whole range of activities happening across all four of those foundations. We are now coming into the final stages of this phase, where we will be evaluating and then preparing for phase 2.

THE CHAIR: A very thorough answer. Are there any elements of the strategy that are currently behind schedule?

Ms Moore: There are some elements that will move into phase 2—so they will extend into phase 2. A good example of that is the workforce strategy. We have done some consultation, but in phase 2 we will be then delivering on the workforce strategy. Similarly with the legislation, and the timeframe it takes to engage the sector.

If you look at the Set up for Success strategy, the phase 2 is a build-on from phase 1, so that was, to some extent, planned, and to some extent there has been some delays due to COVID and for other reasons we have needed to pause along the way, particularly

focusing on the impact that the sector has experienced with COVID and not wanting to inundate them at a very busy and difficult time. We have tried to move at their pace a little bit and progress what we can. Largely, I think we are very much on track. There will be a few things that will just carry over and be part of phase 2 as well.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

MR DAVIS: Minister, a little while ago the United Worker's Union, Big Steps campaign, released a report, *Exhausted, Undervalued and Leaving: The Crisis in Early Education*. One of their key findings was that 37 per cent of educators said they were not going to stay in the sector long term, and 74 per cent intend to leave within the next three years—of course, these are national figures. With those figures in mind, what are we doing specifically in the ACT to recruit and retain early childhood educators?

Ms Berry: Thanks for that question. One of the strategies is very well embedded in the Set up for Success strategy, and that is around valuing educators; because we know if we value our children and we do not value the important work that educators do in our system, then we are letting the whole system down.

Part of the work that we are doing in Set up for Success is working collaboratively with early childhood settings, as we talked about earlier: making sure that we do not overburden educators, but also providing opportunities for educators in early childhood settings with additional supports, education and upskilling; and recognising that they are the professionals in the early childhood space.

Then, through our strategy, we will continue to work with the University of Canberra and other universities to make sure that we have got opportunities for early childhood educators. Part of that work in those more formal settings is also with the Teacher Quality Institute and making sure that teachers in early childhood education are recognised in the same way that primary school teachers are recognised in the Teacher Quality Institute. I will ask Ms Moore to go into a little bit more detail about some of that work.

Some of this does sit well within the federal government sphere. What we are seeing is some really great announcements from the federal government recognising the important work of early childhood education, but it is a big ship to turn around. Big Steps has been running this campaign for around 30 years, or probably longer than that, and the sector in the country has evolved and moved and shifted since early childhood started here, and it is different across each state and territory.

In the ACT, what we have is a really close network of professionals within the sector, but also within our universities. To be able to do things here that will recognise the work of educators—the wage system is another part of that. We know that part of the campaign that the United Workers Union ran a few years ago was around pay equity, and, unfortunately, that was knocked back by the workplace relations commission at the time. Despite 98 per cent of the workforce being female, it was not recognised that the sector was underpaid, or lower paid, than their male counterparts in other sectors that have the same kinds of qualifications, who often received 10 per cent more in wages. I will talk more about some of the levers we have within our control, and I will ask Ms Haire to provide a bit more detail on those.

Ms Haire: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I will just give you a kind of contents page, and then I will throw to my colleagues for various different elements, Mr Davis. There is a national workforce strategy that has been developed through ACECQA. Mr Moysey can speak some more about that. Also, as Ms Moore has said, we are consulting with the workforce ourselves.

Mr Moysey can talk about the national strategy that has been developed by ACECQA, which has been developed jointly with all states and territory governments. There is also work that we are doing locally, which the minister has already referred to, and we can expand on the take-up of scholarships that we have had for a number of years. Also, Ms Moore can expand on the further work around the recognition of early childhood educators in the Education Act and our own workforce consultations, which have been going on, as Ms Moore said, over the last several months.

As the minister has said, we are working here in a hybrid system, where four-year-old preschool is part of the public education system in the ACT, but the remainder of ECEC is funded by the commonwealth government. So it is a federated and hybrid system. I will ask Mr Moysey first to speak about the national process, and then Ms Moore will expand further on the elements that the minister has outlined.

Mr Moysey: I have read the privilege statement and understand its contents. Education ministers have adopted a national workforce strategy called Shaping Our Future, and it commits all Australian governments to work with the education community to attract, develop, support and retain high-quality teachers, educators and leaders in Australia's education system.

It is a 10-year plan, and it aims to go at all of our common needs and interests around the country. It is not a coincidence that there are six focus areas: the first focus area is "professional recognition"; the second focus area is "attraction and retention"; followed by "leadership capability"; "wellbeing"; "qualifications and career pathways"; and "data and evidence". A lot of it is shaped by what we have heard from the sector around the country and by the impact of COVID-19 as well. As mentioned by Ms Haire and the minister, there is an acceleration process that has been initiated by national cabinet. I think Ms Moore is going to speak more about that.

The scholarship program, which the ACT has had for some time and is part of Set up for Success, has been warmly welcomed by the sector. It is \$25,000 per applicant to complete their tertiary degree—their early childhood teaching degree. It is offered over four years to eight years, depending on the choice that students make to complete the qualification. It is a three-way agreement between the directorate, the provider and the student. There is mutual benefit in the agreement, and the provider gets support when students need to do their practicals, which is often a very challenging situation for services and providers.

In June 2022, we had 23 scholarship holders studying towards a degree and an additional eight scholarship holders that were in the process of commencement. Since the introduction of the scholarships in 2014, 32 scholarship holders have successfully completed their degrees, and another 16 of those scholarships will be made in this current financial year. The feedback we get from scholarship holders is very positive,

and it is a real way of consolidating retention in the sector as well.

MR DAVIS: There are a few answers there, so I have a couple of follow-up questions. I will ask about the scholarships first. What obligations do we put on scholarship participants to stay working in our sector for any period of time, if at all?

Mr Moysey: There is an obligation to be part of the sector, and it ties in with what we would like to see in best practice in terms of the employment relationship that is established at the outset of the agreement. If the student wishes to move services, that can happen, and we negotiate with that new employer the same arrangement for what is left over with the agreement. There is a further year that the person participates in to receive the final payment for the scholarship. The payments are made throughout the scholarship program. It is designed to have that retention aspect as part of the agreement.

MR DAVIS: In the last financial year, did we fill all the spaces in the scholarship program that we had budgeted for?

Mr Moysey: I would have to take that on notice. I believe we did, but I will take that on notice to reconcile the figures.

MR DAVIS: That would be great. I am not sure if Ms Moore had some follow-up to my original question or if I have another supplementary opportunity. Where are we at?

Ms Haire: If you would like, Mr Davis, Ms Moore can talk about the consultation with the workforce here in the ACT around the development of workforce strategy and the recognition of early childhood in the law, which is part, as the minister said, of raising the status of early childhood education and educators.

MR DAVIS: The workforce planning consultation was my supplementary question, so thank you, Ms Moore.

Ms Moore: Earlier this year, we commenced a consultation with our workforce here in the ACT—with the early childhood education and care workforce. As I mentioned before, we were really cognisant of the impact of COVID and the pressures that sector was under, so we designed a process that meant people could opt in and participate in a range of ways. We had online briefings that people could attend; we had a survey; people could write submissions; and people could phone the team and provide verbal submissions if they liked. There were a whole range of ways that people could engage. We started with some information papers, just to get people on the same page to start with, and we had five of those online sessions, 16 written submissions, two verbal submissions and survey responses.

We were engaging on three remitted initiatives: one being the early childhood workforce strategy; the second one being recognising early childhood in law, which Ms Haire has mentioned; and we were also consulting on how we would, in the ACT, implement the preschool reform agreement. We saw those things as really connected—in how we could engage people once and have a whole range of topics that are about supporting the workforce and the sector.

Specifically, around the workforce strategy, there are a few things that are outlined in

Set up for Success as existing commitments that we really wanted to unpack and design with the sector. The first one is around professional standards, which are intended to be for voluntary adoption. Particularly, what we heard through the consultation, and what we know is the intent, is that the value of professional standards is not about compliance; it is about really supporting professional development conversations and pathways for people—for workers in the sector. We know that teachers have professional standards, and we want to make sure that the early childhood education and care sector also has the same level of professional recognition and support, and that is what the intent of professional standards in that sector would be.

We were also consulting about another commitment around delivering more coaching and mentoring support for the workforce. We heard that there was definitely a lot of support for that, and that coaching as a way of working has a lot of benefit and more benefit than individual professional learning and training on its own. That ability to coach and work side-by-side with people was really valued, so we are certainly looking at how that would fit into the strategy. We have delivered some of that already with the Preschool Pathways Partners, who are doing coaching and mentoring—coaching support with preschools and early childhood education and care services. Certainly, coaching would be a theme within the strategy.

We were also consulting on the professional development fund and about how can we use those funds in that bucket to best meet the needs of the workforce. We were asking about the types of professional development that the sector would need. There were a whole range of things that people mentioned, particularly around neurodiversity, working with children with additional needs and working with families. We will be taking all of that feedback and looking at how we use the professional development fund to support those needs.

We also heard, particularly, and this is the link back to the national work, that there are a lot of things we can do locally, and they are the things we will do; but there are a lot of pressures that are really national drivers—things like pay and conditions that are really a concern for the sector. Which brings us back to that professional recognition of the value of the workforce and the work it does with children. When we talked to them about recognising early childhood education in law, there was a lot of support for that and really recognising that early childhood is part of education—that children learn at that early age, and it is not just childcare; it is not babysitting; it is actually delivering a really important early learning service for children and families. Within that, we heard that people also wanted early childhood teachers to be recognised—recognising early childhood education but also recognising those professionals who are delivering that education as well.

MR DAVIS: Bringing us back to my first question on that report, when we look at those national figures, of course they are going to have an impact in the ACT. How many, if any, early childhood educators have we lost from our system in the last year? Assuming that we have lost some of them—when we look at these national figures—have we been able to replace those educators in the last year?

Ms Berry: I think it is probably a difficult statistic to nail, but I remember, before working here, there was some analysis with the United Workers Union at that time on educators leaving the system. This would have been a long time ago now, and I do not

know if there is any recent research, but it used to be that in the ACT we had around, as you say, 37 to 40 per cent. I think the highest was South Australia; they had the highest turnover. I am not sure where it sits now. Mr Moysey, do you have detail on that?

Mr Moysey: I have some sense of where that is going, Mr Davis, if that is okay, Minister. It is a national concern, and actually tracking what is happening to the workforce is something that is part of the national strategy—how do we get a better compass on the movement of the workforce? Because we know from provider feedback, we know from our own assessments, and we know from the workforce census that there is movement. For example, there is a growth in the number of people who are in the sector for one to two years, and there is a reduction in the number of people who are in the sector for 10 years or more. It is quite volatile, so it is hard to tell, for example, who is leaving and not coming back; who is leaving for a time and coming back; and who is leaving, moving interstate, and joining there, et cetera. One of the conversations is: how can you get a better compass on the movement of people in the sector and out of the sector? Certainly, the challenge that we all face is ensuring the supply of people coming into the sector and the qualifications for that.

MR DAVIS: Surely we would know how many people have sent in a resignation in the last 12 months?

Ms Haire: Can I check, Mr Davis: we are talking about the sector as a whole; the four-year-old preschool is a small—

MR DAVIS: That is right. I am just talking about people who would be on the government payroll.

Ms Haire: In the four-year-old pre-school?

MR DAVIS: That is right.

Ms Haire: I do not have that figure with us. I am not sure that we track the preschool teachers separately to all of the teachers, but I can speak to the whole teacher number, if that is helpful.

MR DAVIS: The point I am trying to make is, while accepting that this is a national problem, I would not want to ascribe blame to our government for a national problem. If we are seeing figures, or a retention rate, higher than the national average, we have got something to share; but if we are seeing a retention rate lower than the national average, we have got something to learn, so that is the figure I am trying to get out of this.

Ms Berry: I think there are two parts to that, Mr Davis. There are the teachers that are employed under the Education Directorate, the early childhood teachers within our own preschool systems, and there are the early childhood teachers that are employed within the sector in private or not-for-profit services. Through their registration with the Teacher Quality Institute, we will be able to do that, but we are not quite there yet, because they are not registered.

MR DAVIS: Okay.

Ms Berry: At some point in the future, because they will be registered the same way nurses are registered and the same way every other teacher is registered, we will be able to get a good handle on it. This is probably the most positive sign in the early childhood space that things are starting to change—recognition for this workforce for the important work they do. Clearly, during COVID, that was fairly obvious, even though early childhood educators did feel a bit knocked around because of the essential work they were required to do. The lack of recognition by the federal government at the time meant they were really feeling bruised at a difficult time for all of us, but particularly for them, because they have been calling for recognition for the important work that they do.

It is not just taking their word for it; the research is there that backs it in. Now, with a government that is wanting to develop an early years strategy—that is working with the sector and states and territories around what it is we need to do to shift this sector—there is an understanding that it is not just blowing noses and changing nappies. It is the most vital developmental stage of a child’s brain. The early childhood educators in those early years are brain builders.

We have got some work to do. It is a big ship to turn around, but we are starting with that and working closely with the sector to understand the pieces that we have the levers on, which is the Teacher Quality Institute and registering our early childhood educator teachers. Then, what is the pathway for them in a career? Is it that we want them to stay in the early childhood sector, or do we want them to transition and move through our early childhood system onwards to the education system? Those are the kinds of partnerships we are working on with the University of Canberra and other universities so that there are those pathways to either stay as a professional in the early childhood space or move into our education system. Both areas, as you know, are experiencing a workforce shortage. Like I said, we have got some really great opportunities because people are starting to pay attention to it federally.

MR HANSON: Minister, last time we were here for budget estimates, we discussed the announcement by New South Wales and Victoria of \$15 billion in total. Have you had any discussions with those governments since or a closer look at what they have announced? How have we responded?

Ms Berry: I have not personally, but I know the directorate have been doing some analysis on those announcements and how they compare with the ACT. We gave you a very broad and brief overview, but I can ask Ms Efthymiades to provide a bit more detail on that.

Ms Efthymiades: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. We did not get to unpack a lot of the Victorian and New South Wales reforms last time. The fundamental thing they have in common is that there was an analysis done in both states of what they term “deserts” in child care—heavily in their regional and remote areas, obviously—which the ACT does not have. We have areas that have less availability, but we have nothing that would be classified as a desert. A huge amount of the investment for both jurisdictions is to redress that. That includes capital in some cases.

The stories we have had from Victoria are that they are negotiating with each local council and identifying where land could be made available. Then the Victorian government is probably going to put in infrastructure—of the transportable ilk. We know that is good quality—modern-day, transportable infrastructure; that is the equivalent. Then a bit of landscaping for the outdoor learning areas et cetera, so they can stand-up childcare provision in those locations.

In addition, they are offering incentives to recruit people to those spaces. The very heavy emphasis in both of those reforms in New South Wales and Victoria is to redress where they do not currently have early childhood education and care provision in regional and remote centres.

MR HANSON: Have we done a similar analysis in the ACT—if we want to go to the full 30 hours for four-year-olds—to see where those gaps are and what investment would be required in ACT, or do we already have sufficient facilities? This is just in capital and infrastructure; we can go to people next. As you have identified, a lot of the New South Wales and Victorian cost—\$15 billion in total—is in infrastructure. Do we have existing infrastructure, should we wish to expand, or are there gaps?

Ms Efthymiades: The current priority we are enacting is the reform for three-year-olds—standing that up. The initial analysis we have done is on the availability of infrastructure for the reform for three-year-olds. That has been our first priority. As that gets agreed by government and announced and landed, then conversations about four-year-olds may be subsequent to that, but the current priority for us is absolutely around the three-year-olds. That is not quite through the pipe yet, but we have definitely done all the underpinning analysis to inform government's decisions.

MR HANSON: So you have looked at the three-year-olds and you have identified where there is need for extra infrastructure or people?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes.

MR HANSON: Okay. When do you anticipate getting to the four-year-olds, or would that await a direction from the minister?

Ms Berry: Do not forget we already provide 15 hours for free in the ACT. Victoria do not, so their 10-year strategy is to move towards the 30 hours.

Ms Efthymiades: That is right—in 10 years.

Ms Berry: We were already implementing part of their strategy, I guess, and we are moving on to the next stage, which is the universal access for three-year-olds. As Ms Efthymiades said, we have done the analysis for the three-year-olds. You will have noted that before the strategy had started, with our new school builds, we added early childhood settings to our primary schools. So we have already started working on our own infrastructure to make sure that there are early childhood spaces connected to our schools.

The next part will be moving through the strategy—focusing on the rest, but we have got a bit of time. The Victorian strategy is for 10 years, and a big chunk of that was in

infrastructure. We already have a lot of the infrastructure in place and do not have the geographic issues that Victoria has; so, first of all, we have started by adding to our facilities within our new schools.

MR HANSON: For sure—I am thinking about long-term planning here.

Ms Berry: That is right.

MR HANSON: The extra 15 hours—what does that mean in terms of infrastructure? Have we already got that infrastructure, or will it require some new builds or not? Or you have not started that process yet?

Ms Berry: That is why we are starting the phase-in of the early childhood strategy for universal access for three-year-olds—so we can properly understand the sector’s ability to deliver on that part of the strategy. Then we can start working on increasing the hours in the strategy for the four-year-olds. Ms Efthymiades, I do not know if the Victorian government had an exact time frame for when the 30 hours was going to kick-in?

Ms Efthymiades: No, just for when it will finish.

MR HANSON: It starts in 2025 for three-year-olds—doesn’t it?

Ms Efthymiades: Locally, yes.

MR HANSON: The next thing is that, obviously, we have a situation where in New South Wales and Victoria they are talking about incentivising staff. In order to recruit, they are going to have to start paying more, and, as we just heard, it is already a tight market. Have you looked at what this step is going to mean for us in terms of demand? If you are an early childhood educator and you can go and earn more in Dubbo or somewhere, where the cost of living might be lower as well, and you are paid more—is this going to have an impact on the sorts of strategies that you already put in place?

Ms Berry: The different systems that are operating across the country mean it is not an apples and apples comparison, first of all. Secondly, I think we all recognise that there is an issue across the country that we need to address. Unfortunately, when states or territories go out on their own to try and encourage people to come and work, it means that other states and territories can either be left behind or have to adjust their own strategies to have an equal chance of engaging people within that sector. There is a little bit more to that, I think, that needs to be unpacked as far as where the people are working within each different system, because they are different. Can you break that down a little bit, Ms Efthymiades? Does that help?

Ms Efthymiades: There is quite a lot that is unknown at this stage, Mr Hanson. There is potential with the national work. As the minister has suggested, that really needs to get a level playing field across the board that is better than the current level playing field. That is critical. Then, in terms of relativities, the ACT is not in the same position as Victoria and New South Wales in terms of regional and remote attraction pressures. We are considered to be a metropolitan environment here, with all that comes with that; therefore, we do not have that aspect.

The marketing was done here locally, and I saw a lot of the advertisements myself on television, which does make it awkward—when one jurisdiction is going out independently of all the others. However, we are really pulling together the workforce strategy elements and hearing what matters to our ECEC sector. That is how we are planning to shape up the things that matter to them and therefore be attractive for them to stay, and/or attract more. That is where we are investing our energy, and then, hopefully, there is an overall uplift when the conditions for attraction and retention to the workforce nationally come into play.

Ms Haire: If I may add to Ms Efthymiades’s answer. As the minister has indicated, jurisdictions are all starting in different places on this. In the ACT, the recent workforce census of ECEC staff showed that more ACT ACEC staff are paid above the award rate than the national average, and, as you know, the incentives are based on pay and conditions. Nationally, only 35 per cent of staff are paid above the award, and in the ACT 58 per cent of staff are paid above the award, so we have some existing advantages here.

MR HANSON: I guess they need to compare that with cost-of-living issues, because Canberra is obviously a more expensive place to live than, perhaps, regional New South Wales or Victoria. I do not know if that is counterbalanced?

Ms Haire: I am not sure, Mr Hanson. From the workforce census, certainly it is quite a significant difference between the ACT and nationally.

MR HANSON: Alright. Thanks very much.

MRS KIKKERT: The annual report refers to CYRIS having a “referrer out functionality”. Does this mean that if the CDS refers a family for an outside autism assessment it would be tracked, and if so, are there any age limits?

Ms Rule: I might get Ms Summerrell to talk about the rollout of the CYRIS system into the Child Development Service and what referrals it can and cannot make.

Ms Summerrell: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. CYRIS has been now rolled out through the Child Development Service and the Child and Family Centres. There is a section within CYRIS that does capture the “referral out” data. That can be for a range of things; so referral out can be because someone is coming in for one particular assessment or mode of assessment, but there may not be other things that that young person may need in terms of referrals. That dataset can capture any referrals out. If there was a need to refer to an external provider, that would be captured within CYRIS in terms of autism assessment. We do not see large numbers of referrals over the 12-year-age group. We are not seeing large numbers of people seeking referrals out over 12.

MRS KIKKERT: Hypothetically, a family comes into the Child and Family Centre—they are a family of three, and one child is four and the other child could be 14 years old. If the three-year-old child is referred to an autism assessment outside and the 13-year-old may also have need for a referral outside for autism assessment, the three-year-old will be tracked but the 13-year-old or 14-year-old will not be tracked.

Ms Summerrell: The system is one thing—the system is just a data collection mechanism. I think what you are asking about is the policy parameters for autism referrals. The autism assessments that we provide are up to 12 years. We can refer people to other services, but we do not provide those services.

MRS KIKKERT: I understand that. But my question goes back to CYRIS collecting the data. If the 13-year-old is in need of an autism assessment, will it be tracked with CYRIS; yes or no?

Ms Haire: If they are in our system and they have been referred to another service, it will be tracked in our system.

MRS KIKKERT: It will be tracked. Okay; thank you. Also, in terms of security reasons, it mentions on page 93 that CYRIS can only be accessed by those with the authority to do so. Who within the CDS and the three child and family centres has the authority to access the information?

Ms Summerrell: I can answer that. Within the Child Development Service and the child and family centres the access sits with the people who would be entering the information—so any of the child and family workers or the allied health professionals within the CDS. CYRIS is used to capture the information on intake and then also to capture the necessary information about that person’s treatment journey. That information is accessible to any of the workers who would be required to be inputting that information into the system.

MRS KIKKERT: And staff at CDS?

Ms Summerrell: That includes both the Child Development Service and the child and family centre. The therapists obviously need access to it. The bookings are also tracked in there, so they need to be able to access that to see the previous notes and information about that child, to update the information. It is essentially a records management system.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: In regard to the Child Development Service, the 2021-22 target for hours of service provided to clients was 21,125. The 2021-22 result was 16,944 hours. What caused such a large decrease in hours of service?

Ms Summerrell: Thanks. There are a range of possibilities around the changes in hours of service. The impact of COVID is significant on both the Child Development Service and the child and family centres. We are seeing that families are tired. Also, there are restrictions around: “If you are unwell, please do not present and please do not come.” People are naturally taking a really cautious approach to that. So the most likely impact on that is COVID and the changes that we have had to make. We have also had to make subtle changes to the way groups are run, and a whole range of things, which means that we may see fewer people because of the changes we have had to make to continue to be COVID-safe.

THE CHAIR: The explanatory note for the statement of performance references that

staff were provided with time to learn a new client management system. Did that training take away from frontline services?

Ms Summerrell: Any time that we require staff to do training, whether that is for professional development or anything that is away from face-to-face clinical service, that obviously does have an impact on their ability to then provide that service. Professional development, though, is a core part of an allied health professional's working journey and it is really important for them to have the space to be able to do that.

THE CHAIR: There were clearly a lot of hours of service that were not provided, all very important services. Is there an attempt to deal with the backlog of need for that service?

Ms Summerrell: We are not seeing, at this stage, huge increases in wait times. The wait times for speech, OT and physio remain between one and three months, which is relatively consistent. People come in to our drop-in clinics. That is a main part of our service offering, and that is how we monitor and track how we then allocate services within that. So we get a good idea through the drop-in clinics of whether the service demand is really increasing. At this stage, we are taking those intakes and putting those people through to assessments or groups, or whatever it is that is needed.

THE CHAIR: Cool.

MR DAVIS: In our last annual reports hearing this committee recommended that the government review how child and family centre satisfaction surveys are undertaken and publish the results of the review. Could you tell the committee a little more about how that work is progressing, whether those survey assessments have been updated and what that is telling us about the work?

Ms Summerrell: Yes. Thanks for the question. Yes, we have been looking at client satisfaction and how we record that information and the best way to do that. Previously, the surveys were: "My experience was good—yes/no," or "I liked this part of it—yes/no." We are moving to much more of a scale of that so that we get a better representation, rather than just yes and no, of what parts of the services were most valuable and where we can make adjustments. That work is still underway.

I am really conscious, in that work, that sending a survey to people is one mechanism of working out how people perceive the service. There are other ways that we do that as well, through conversation and through discussion groups where we seek feedback from participants and then make the necessary adjustments. I think that what is important is how we capture those conversations as well, in terms of the valuation. But, yes, the surveys themselves are still in the process of being updated to be more reflective of a broader scale.

MR DAVIS: They are in the process, sure. But this was a recommendation of this committee this time last year. Can you tell me what, if anything, has changed about how we collect and record those survey results in the last 12 months?

Ms Summerrell: What has changed is that we have developed a new set of questions

and a rating scale, and we are working to implement that throughout the centres now.

MR DAVIS: Great. Do you have a delivery date that you are aiming towards to have that consistent across the centres, and any expectation on when you would be able to report back with a body of time to see what those surveys are saying?

Ms Summerrell: There is an internal process that we have to undertake when we change things that we report on. We are starting that process now of being able to formally make those reporting changes. In terms of time frame, I am very conscious of the reporting periods and trying to get it in line with that. But we do need to go through that process to actually change what we report on.

MR DAVIS: My last follow-up, Ms Summerrell: will any of those questions speak to the experience of the client based on locality, like how far they have had to travel to access the service? I ask because, as a member for Brindabella, I have heard from constituents occasionally that there are certain programs or amenities that they cannot access on the Tuggeranong side and so they have had to travel a greater distance. I just wonder if that will be part of the survey work you are doing.

Ms Summerrell: I would have to check whether there is a specific question around postcode. However, I will say that we are starting to pull in more postcode information to understand more where people are coming from. Whether it is part of the survey, I am not 100 per cent sure; I am sorry. But it is forming part of how we better plan for our services. Obviously, it is always a component—being very aware that a postcode and demographic has changed and making sure that we are seeing that.

MR DAVIS: That is great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The annual report talks about the CAYPELS program, and it states that additional specialist equipment has been identified and purchased in 2021-22. What was that equipment and what was it for?

Ms Summerrell: Thanks for the question. That equipment was purchased for a range of reasons, really. One is that it is really important that we maintain modern equipment. CAYPELS is a service that it is a temporary, short-term loan scheme. We often see people come and get equipment to try it out for a period of time, whilst they are making longer term decisions about the type of equipment that they want. It is really important that, as a service, we have modern and contemporary equipment so that people can have the benefit of being able to do that. Obviously, some equipment can be quite expensive for families, so it is really important that they get that opportunity to try something and see if it works. Part of the funding was used to make sure that we had that modern, contemporary equipment.

I can tell you specifically that we purchased a range of hoists, a range of seating systems, some multi-standers, mini strollers, bar seats, activity chairs, wheelchairs and some high-low beds. That was all specifically around self-care activities and making sure that we could, as best as possible, enable people to maintain that independence that is really important for young people.

Ms Berry: If I can just add to that, Mr Pettersson: the program is not known to people

who do not have children, who do not need to access it. In some ways, it is an invisible service to the rest of the community. But it is so important because, for young people changing and growing, with their abilities changing and growing, they might need to adjust or apply different equipment to help them and to help their families live a good and decent life.

The CAYPELS program gives families the opportunity to trial, but as children grow and evolve then the equipment that they need will change and evolve as well. With an adult service it is a bit different because you kind of stay the same size. For young people, because they are growing and changing in their capabilities, the CAYPELS program is so important. As we said, making sure that we have the best, most modern equipment which is changing and evolving every day as well is also a really important part of this program. We do not want families and young people having second-rate equipment to trial. We want them to have the best quality and the most modern and up-to-date service that we can.

Ms Haire: There is a complete inventory of all the CAYPELS equipment on the website so that parents and clinicians can look at what we have available and then apply to access that equipment as they need to.

THE CHAIR: You will have to forgive me for not digging up old annual reports, but how has the number of loans tracked over the past few years?

Ms Berry: I might see if we can find that data for you.

Ms Summerrell: Yes, I do have that information. The service has over 950 pieces of equipment available for loan. In 2021-22 there were 873 loans of equipment, and that was for 186 clients. I am sorry; I do not have the data from the previous year, but I do have the first quarter data of this year, which will give some indication. For the first quarter data of this year, we loaned 256 pieces of equipment for 83 families.

THE CHAIR: All right. Interesting. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: I asked about the child and family centres before. I want to dive into those a little bit more. I have been a member for two years now and I have been surprised at the frequency with which I refer constituents to the child and family centre for the services they offer and they are not aware that they exist or aware of the breadth and depth of the services that they offer. Can you talk me through how the government is promoting those services and making sure that they are accessible?

Ms Summerrell: Sure. That is a really good point. I think promoting the work of the child and family centres is really important. They do incredible work. The interactions that people have with them, we hear from constituents, are so positive and really help families along their journey. We do a range of things to promote the services. We work very closely with our NGO partners in making sure that they are aware of what service offering exists for each term. We plan the terms with some particular providers as well, where we share some of the resources for how we roll things out. We work very closely with the Koori preschools and the three-year-old initiative.

We have really strong partnerships and engagement within health and education as well.

Our MACH nurses, for example, who utilise part of our physical buildings, are also a really large referrer into the service, as well as immunisation. We are, as well, looking at how we promote more broadly. We have a presence at a range of community events—I do not want to say fairs—local community events that pop up.

MR DAVIS: I was just talking to the minister about this on the way in.

Ms Summerrell: Yes, I think “fair” is the wrong word; they are community events. We often have a stall and a presence there, and we often partner with other agencies as well. Then there are situations like, for example, Children’s Week, where we really promote the services quite heavily through more traditional mainstream mechanisms and through social media, where we highlight the work that is happening in those centres.

There are other activities that we do that really push out into the community where we are trying to highlight a particular service. There are a range of ways that we do that. We are always happy to hear suggestions from the community about what else we can do. A lot of people do just walk in, surprisingly. They just walk past and walk in. That that is a great way for people to find us and shows us that the centres remain somewhere where people feel really safe to walk through our doors.

MR DAVIS: Okay. So that is one end of the spectrum—making sure that people who do not know about the centres do know. What about the other end of the spectrum, where someone has learned about the centre and does walk in, only to learn that the service they are expecting is not being provided anymore or has not been provided at that site but has been in others? How are we recording that information to inform, particularly at the Tuggeranong site, where I hear this from constituents firsthand, to make sure that there is a consistency in what is being delivered across the centres?

Ms Summerrell: With the centres, we work together in our planning. We come together as a group. Rather than them being run as individual centres, we come together and we look at what the demand is telling us and what we are seeing in those particular regions. The centres do provide region-specific service offerings. In one of our centres, where we have high levels of South Sudanese communities, we provide a specific South Sudanese Learn, Giggle and Grow playgroup. There are specific things that we do with that demographic data, which is really successful. Hearing what it is that people are wanting is one way that we plan. We do record that. If someone comes in and has an intake conversation with someone and says, “I need this particular service,” that does get recorded.

Where there are programs or groups that have changed, they have generally changed because there is something else that has come in now that provides that same type of learning experience but there may be a newer, better practice way of delivering that service. So rather than it not being delivered at all, it may just be being delivered under a new name and a new method of programming. But if someone came in and they had a very particular need, our intake staff would work with that person to make sure that they got what it was they needed, whether that was in our centres or through a referral to another NGO organisation. I think there would be very few times when we would not be able to provide some sort of help to someone.

MR DAVIS: Great. Since that data is being recorded, can you tell me, specifically at

the Tuggeranong site, what services have changed over the last 12 months, based on that demand or that feedback from the community, and how that is informing, for that site in particular, what might be planned in the future?

Ms Summerrell: I would have to take the specifics of that on notice. I can tell you what Tuggeranong is offering at the moment, but I do not have in front of me what has changed in the last planning cycle for them.

MR DAVIS: I would be interested in not only what Tuggeranong is offering at the moment, but what that demand level looks like. Are there particular programs that are giving you stronger data and how are we bringing people into those programs? You said that there are an awful lot of people who just walk through the door. I wonder: are we actually tracking, “Okay; this program is subscribed to capacity or oversubscribed because of referrals from X school or X location”? I am interested in a bit more of that as well.

Ms Summerrell: We do see high levels of popularity with our Circle of Security program. That would be the case in Tuggeranong as well. That is a program that is normally quite highly subscribed. Our playgroups are normally very highly subscribed as well. In Tuggeranong, from memory, the multicultural playgroup is particularly highly subscribed, as well as Circle of Security. They would be the two that I would highlight, but I am happy to take the question on notice to be much more specific. But they are the two that I know of in Tuggeranong where we get really high levels of demand.

MR DAVIS: That is great. My last in this line of questioning is: what would we do at a child and family centre when a program becomes oversubscribed? Is it a referral to another centre and the supports to access that? Do we bring in staff from another centre and stand up an additional program? Or do we turn people away? What does that look like?

Ms Summerrell: It can be a combination of any of those things.

MR DAVIS: Okay.

Ms Summerrell: If someone walked in, say, in week 7 or week 8 of the term and said, “I want to join Circle of Security,” we would have a chat with them to understand what their circumstances were and what their situation was. It is really best that they start those programs at the beginning of the term, rather than part way through. So then that person would be referred to the start of the next term. But if that family or that person had particular needs that meant that we were concerned about them waiting for that period of time then we would provide additional wraparound supports to them, through case management, for example, or potentially another playgroup, until that time came. That would be how we would manage that situation.

However, if we saw that we had these enormous influxes into, say, Circle of Security, we would use that information as we planned for the upcoming terms. We would look at: how many of these do we need to run and how can we best meet the demand? It may be that we run more at one centre than another or we may juggle and shift the way that we run all of the services, based on that demand. Our demand very much determines

what services we offer.

MR DAVIS: Okay. Thank you. Ms Efthymiades, would you like to give us a bit of an update on how Tharwa Preschool is tracking this year?

Ms Efthymiades: We have a cohort for next year, Mr Davis, which we are excited about. There is a relationship there with Charles Condor Primary School, and they also have their onsite preschool. Being a campus of Charles Condor Preschool, I think, stands them in good stead because Charles Condor has a strengthening cohort there overall and we have got local kids in Tharwa. So 2023 is looking happy.

MR DAVIS: I just know that you would think it would be weird if I did not ask. Thank you.

Ms Efthymiades: Always good to tell a happy story about Tuggeranong.

MR DAVIS: I could not agree more.

Ms Berry: We have quick update to follow up on a question.

Ms Haire: We took a question on notice earlier and we have been able to find out the answers in relation to the scholarship. I wonder if it is helpful to the committee to finalise that before we close?

THE CHAIR: Sure. Yes, please.

Ms Haire: I will ask Mr Moysey to provide the information.

Mr Moysey: Thanks, Ms Haire. Mr Davis, you asked whether we were able to fill all the scholarships within budget. The answer to that is yes, which is really good. I think one of the advantages for people who are attracted to the scheme is that we do have a national quality framework which is very proactive towards development and aspirational goals. So people know that once they get into that qualification they can work anywhere around the country and they know that they are working on children's development and quality care too.

MR DAVIS: Sorry, Mr Moysey. I hate to seem difficult. I think my question was a little bit different. I am glad to hear that we have accommodated the demand within the budget.

Mr Moysey: Yes.

MR DAVIS: What I am interested in is whether we have actually spent the budget? Clearly, with the workforce shortage, we would love for this to be oversubscribed; right? To have more people—

Mr Moysey: Yes. The budget follows the scholarship, if that makes sense.

MR DAVIS: That does. Okay.

Mr Moysey: Yes, so it works as a wave, if you like. It goes with the person as the scholarship goes along.

MR DAVIS: Right. But we do currently have scope to accommodate for more scholarship enrolment—

Mr Moysey: Yes.

MR DAVIS: if the demand was there?

Mr Moysey: Every year we have a release of further scholarships; that is right.

MR DAVIS: Great. Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. We now draw this session to a close. Thank you, Minister Berry and all officials. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice, could you please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days. The committee will now suspend for a short break and reconvene at 10.45 am.

Hearing suspended from 10.07 to 10.45 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion looking at annual and financial reports for 2021-22. In this session we will continue speaking with Minister Berry, this time in her capacity as Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. If there are new officials present, I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. When you speak for the first time, can you confirm that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. Minister, I was hoping the committee could get an update on the work underway across Gungahlin to expand schools and build new ones.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. I understand that this is a matter that would be dear to your heart, as a member for Yerrabi. Last week we officially opened Throsby School in Gungahlin. That was delayed, obviously, because of COVID, so we could not actually get into the school. But it was lovely to get out there and have a look inside the school and see how the young people, the students, families and teachers, and the school principal, were already starting with a really positive culture within that school environment. I will ask Ms Efthymiades to go through some of the data on what is happening in Gungahlin, but of course we have still got schools to come, with Kenny and Taylor high, as well as a new college which was committed for in the election.

Ms Efthymiades: Thanks, Minister. Thank you, Chair, for the question. There are a number of key areas of progress in Gungahlin's school infrastructure, as the minister has alluded to, in terms of planning. It is on every front. There is the primary school expansion at Margaret Hendry underway. There is also the coming high school in Taylor, next to Margaret Hendry School. There are plans underway for an additional college in Gungahlin, and there are more immediate plans around working with

Gungahlin College itself on expansions there for the short term, while the longer term college is in train. That is a lot of fronts. The minister also mentioned the high school in Kenny—that is in east Gungahlin. There is the primary, and Throsby has just opened two high schools. So it is two counts for primary, two for high school and two college, across the board.

THE CHAIR: Let us go through them one by one. How is Taylor high progressing?

Ms Efthymiades: I might need to refer that to capital works. I will just hand that to Mr Nakkan, if that is okay?

Mr Nakkan: Thanks, Deb. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. The high school expansion at Margaret Hendry School is progressing. It was previously behind plan. We have done a lot of work to catch up. It is due to be completed early next year. We have made arrangements with the school to manage any extra capacity that starts next year in the current buildings. We did an upgrade to the existing building which created some more capacity. These additional works in the new site have been delayed, obviously, by the pandemic, by the lockdowns, and most recently by the wet weather. But it is progressing to the target.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Margaret Hendry School expansion. How is that progressing?

Ms Berry: That is that one.

Mr Nakkan: Sorry; that was Margaret Hendry.

THE CHAIR: I thought I asked about Taylor High School.

Ms Berry: Yes, that is it.

Mr Nakkan: The high school in Taylor is part of the same program, but it is obviously a different construction. That is progressing to plan at this stage. It is under pressure because of the previous issues around the expansion of Margaret Hendry. But works are progressing. The car park work is just about complete. One of the main buildings now has a roof on it, which enables the program to be less impacted by the weather. Once we have the roof on and it is weatherproof then we can do the internal fit-out without concerns about the rain delays.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Kenny High School.

Mr Nakkan: Again, Kenny High School is progressing to a revised plan. Previously we advised that it was delayed. That revised plan still holds. The weather and the pandemic are impacting there. We have had several slabs completed recently. We do have a framework up on the single-storey building, which will enable us, in a fairly short time, to get the roof on and to be a dry site to continue to work in. As well, there is work on the gymnasium. A slab has just been completed and we are starting with the metalwork for that.

THE CHAIR: The budget included funding for planning to the second college in

Gungahlin. When can Gungahlin residents expect to see that progress?

Ms Haire: Chair, I will hand to Mr Nakkan in a moment. That was provided for in the recent budget. The planning is taking place currently and then it will be up to further decisions of government. John might expand on some of the planning work and consultation that is underway, including, I believe, some of the environmental assessments that are going on.

Mr Nakkan: Thanks, Director-General. Chair, the work to investigate the most appropriate site for another college in Gungahlin has commenced. An initial identified spot is the block of land adjacent to Gold Creek High School, along Clarrie Hermes Drive. We are only very early in the preliminary investigations. We are looking at site conditions, including water courses, drainage and services. We will work through that process. That is our preferred site. But we have a lot of work to do before we get to determine that that is our fixed site. That will then form an approach back to government for future decisions.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

MR HANSON: With the college, the P&C came out and said, "Look, we are already at capacity; we are over capacity. What is the plan in the short term?" You mentioned that a little bit of that planning is happening. Can you give me more detail about what you are going to do at the existing Gungahlin College, in terms of extra capacity, please?

Ms Berry: Thanks for that question, Mr Hanson. Last week Mr Nakkan and I met with the P&C from Gungahlin College and some of the students there, and they talked to us about some of the ideas that they had. We talked about some of the investigations that we have done to make sure that there is space at Gungahlin College for the medium term, until the new college is built, and some of the decisions that the ACT government has made already or that we are working towards to ensure that there is space at Gungahlin College.

A couple of those go towards putting in some more transportable classrooms, which the P&C were happy to hear about. That would provide some certainty around making sure that there are additional spaces inside the college and the library, and the community spaces, to free up some of those where they are under-utilised or not used during the day, so that the college and the students and teachers can access those spaces as well.

It has been a really positive outcome so far for the existing college, making sure that those spaces are available. The P&C contributions to some of the ideas were well received by the government and by the Education Directorate. We will continue to work with the college and the P&C and the teachers to ensure that there are those other spaces, and any other rostering or scheduling changes that we can do to make sure that there are facilities available for people to learn, and for teaching staff to teach in. Is there is anything I have missed there, Mr Nakkan?

Mr Nakkan: Yes. Thank you, Minister. We are also working with the college on doing some internal modifications to some of the science and lab areas to make them have better ergonomics or to be a general learning space. At the moment the science labs are science labs. The modern design of schools means that the science labs can be used

both for practical and theory. We are looking at making some changes in there so that they can get full utilisation out of those spaces. The changes that we discussed with the P&C and the community, we believe, are sufficient to give us capacity for the start of next year and to build a bit of reserve capacity to enable us to do some internal works throughout the year.

MR HANSON: That is just for next year, but the new college is not going to be delivered for quite a few years. How many transportable or demountable classrooms are you talking about there? Have you got a specific number?

Ms Berry: Is it two?

Mr Nakkan: Minister, I can answer that on your behalf. We are preparing to deliver two transportable buildings, which provides four standard sized classrooms.

MR HANSON: Right. And in terms of the community spaces, you mentioned the library. What do you mean by other community spaces? What else? Can you be a bit more specific about what spaces you are talking about?

Mr Nakkan: Yes. There are two community meeting rooms in the library that are used by the library and CIT. For the start of next year we will be using those, but at the same time we are assisting CIT and the library with creating similar spaces elsewhere in that building so that that community function can continue.

MR HANSON: Right. If you look at the catchment, the size of the school as it is now, have you done the analysis to say, “Okay; we have X number of students in 2022, and we are anticipating whatever it is in 2023 and whatever it is in 2024 and 2025,” so that you have an idea of what that growth is and you are planning for that? Have you done that work?

Ms Berry: Yes. In addition to the work that we are doing specifically on the Gungahlin College site, we have adjusted the priority enrolment areas, which is one of the things that we do across the system to adjust, depending on where the capacity or the growth is within the city, so that people can attend their local schools as much as possible. Ms Efthymiades might have some detail on the school enrolment projections.

Ms Efthymiades: Thanks, Minister. Mr Hanson, the projections are showing that there will be an uplift in 2023 but not a huge change beyond that. We are going to monitor those. As you might recall from the last hearings, when we thought there was growth coming, we monitored really closely and there was none, effectively, for five years. We have now got an uplift for 2023, which will be navigated through all those items that Mr Nakkan has shared. We will continue to monitor to see whether there is further expansion required there, but the numbers at this stage are not indicating significant uplift beyond 2023.

MR HANSON: Right. It might not just be specific to Gungahlin, but the ABS has been under-reporting population. That came to light earlier this year. Has that had an impact, assuming that it is mostly in those growth areas, be it Gungahlin or Molonglo? Have you looked at that revised ABS data to see whether that is an explanation for some of this overcapacity? Has it had an impact?

Ms Efthymiades: In general, there were two offsets. There was a dampening of the growth due to the pandemic and less migration et cetera, and then there was the undercounting. Those things have played out differently in different regions, as you have just mentioned. Interestingly, though, they have played out mostly in the inner south and Woden as slightly higher than anticipated, but we have factored those into our new projections for now. In all honesty, we have to keep iterating that work, because once the borders open up again and if migration comes back to a level that we have seen before, we will have to revise those again. For now, they have been revised, and the biggest areas of uptick that were different to the past were in the inner south and Woden.

MR HANSON: I may have missed it before: with the new college, have you identified a location in Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: Yes, beside Gold Creek High School; there is a piece of land just beside it.

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, as Mr Nakkan said, that is the government's preferred site, but at the moment there is a range of analysis and assessment going on to confirm that that site is appropriate.

MR HANSON: Is that from an engineering point of view?

Ms Berry: Yes, everything.

Ms Haire: Yes, as he described, environmental, engineering, hydrology et cetera. A final decision will be made based on that evidence and advice.

MR HANSON: But you do have alternative sites, if that one is not viable?

Ms Haire: We have considered a range of alternative sites.

MR DAVIS: While we are talking about school infrastructure, it would be remiss of me if I did not ask: while I know that the growth is not in my electorate in Tuggeranong, have there been any substantial renovation or expansion projects on any school campuses in Tuggeranong in the last year?

Ms Berry: Yes, there have. Mr Nakkan can go through some of that detail.

MR NAKKAN: I will start my response by noting that we are expanding one school in Tuggeranong at the moment. Charles Conder will be getting a transportable classroom in the new year, to acknowledge the growth that they have achieved over the last few years.

We run an ongoing program of public school infrastructure upgrade renewals, and all schools participate in that to varying levels. We have done a lot of work throughout the territory, but in the Tuggeranong area we have done work such as at Wanniasa senior campus, where we are just about to complete putting a new roof on that school. We have upgraded some learning areas. At other schools we have done some sustainability improvements, such as glazing and insulation at Monash school. We have commenced

some other car park works there. We have done some work at Lake Tuggeranong College on learning space upgrades. We have done quite a few significant projects.

Probably the largest one we have done over that time is at Wanniassa Hills Preschool, which has received a total thermal building refurbishment. That meant replacing the gas heating system with an electric system. In order to do that, we have had to upgrade the glazing and the insulation. That has been a significant investment in that space. We are also doing roof works at the adjacent primary school site.

MR DAVIS: While we are on infrastructure more broadly, this committee has made some recommendations when it completed the school infrastructure and maintenance report around some school campuses in Canberra that many would argue are reaching the end of their natural life. I would like to get a better understanding about how we make a judgement that is not dissimilar to the work in the housing space, in the growth and renewal program, where a school is just too old and too expensive to continue renovating, and the cost-benefit analysis says it is better to knock it over and start again. Can you talk me through any work that is happening in the directorate on that analysis and how you would make some of those decisions?

Ms Berry: We have 90 schools across the ACT now, with the new builds coming along. There are some older schools, as you say; and, through this capital works program, upgrades are delivered to ensure that our older schools remain fit for purpose. Ms Efthymiades will be able to provide a little bit more information about how the planning work happens with those older schools.

Ms Efthymiades: It is a classic case. Those 90 schools span a wide age range—about 100 years—so the needs vary. There have been a number of really good examples of exactly what you have spoken about. For example, at Garran, we are renovating that school. With its location being so proximate to all of the hospital facilities, and the comings and goings, there is a plan to relocate nearby, but with a whole new school. That is a modernisation effort of the largest possible scale, because it is an existing school with an existing priority enrolment area, but an old existing school. An upgrade and an expansion simultaneously are probably our best example.

There are others that have come into play where an expansion is needed as well as a modernisation and a refresh. With the Majura Primary School, the agreement there to cater for additional students was for an expansion and at the same time a modernisation—better amenities, going through with a fine-tooth comb around any safety-related issues et cetera. There is a modernisation effort, in tandem with the expansion. It is not a whole new school, like Garran, but it is a substantial upgrade as well as an expansion.

They are the kinds of opportunities that we look for. Also, for example, Campbell primary was basically completely upgraded on a safety basis, around asbestos. It is a brand-new facility that they are all incredibly excited about, and they are in it now. That is another example of where an ageing school, on a safety basis, was completely refurbished.

MR DAVIS: What I am interested in figuring out is how you make that decision. If I look back to the school infrastructure and maintenance inquiry, we had school

communities who were—not to verbal them—essentially making the case, “Our school is too old to keep fixing.” We have those cases where we have had these huge modernisation, practically rebuild scenarios. How do we make that decision? Is that information publicly available so that some of the other school communities that feel like they are probably overdue for a Garran-style project might know how to make that case?

Ms Efthymiades: The whole infrastructure program is a mixture of new greenfield sites and upgrades, effectively. The upgrades are on a huge continuum, from some of the fairly minor upgrades through to a major rework like Garran. There is a whole range of situations. One of the things we do is absolutely to go through on an age profile basis and run alongside that any safety factors around asbestos, lead paint and those kinds of things. That is obviously a critical consideration. We then have amenity—the staffroom, the library, the hall and those sorts of things. When a school is larger, are they meeting the current needs?

The final consideration is the design of the pedagogical spaces. More contemporary pedagogy has more open learning spaces in general. For example, at Campbell primary, the school has pretty much decanted from that building and it is being used for other purposes; they have all gone into the contemporary learning spaces because they are finding that so much more practical and appropriate for contemporary pedagogy.

That is the continuum of considerations. We start with the age profile, and then go to safety, amenity and pedagogy.

Ms Berry: And enrolment as well.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes, and that is run alongside it, in terms of growth.

Ms Berry: For example, Garran had the additional factors of the hospital rebuild going on around it, and the changes within the demography of that area. It is the same with Majura. Belconnen High School was one previously, and Narrabundah College. Narrabundah is going through a refresh, if you like. Some of our schools, because they are older, also have parts of the schools that are heritage listed. You cannot knock down a heritage-listed school, so that will need other considerations about how it is upgraded or expanded.

With all 90 schools in our system, all of the capital works are identified within the budget. I understand completely that the families who attend our public schools choose public schools because they deliver a great education. But the most important school for them is their own. Of course, they will want the best possible outcomes for their own school and their own area.

The P&Cs work very closely with the school, the school board and the Education Directorate about the priorities for that school. That can sometimes include safety or hazardous material removals. It can also include a whole range of other upgrades or a refresh that the school sees as being a priority. We work with the school through infrastructure and capital works to identify and give them a time frame for when that work might be happening.

Parents and families from all schools can see what has happened across the board. Whilst I understand that everybody's own school is the most important, as I said, they can see that work is happening across our system to make sure that all of our schools are great schools.

MR DAVIS: In the last year has the directorate done any analysis of any other school campuses that might be eligible, or are being considered, for a Garran-style rebuild modernisation project, based on some of the formulas and assessments that were discussed?

Ms Haire: I will ask Ms Efthymiades to take you through the ongoing process that we have, Mr Davis, not year by year but an ongoing process of assessing the schools and the works, the planning for—

MR DAVIS: I have a pretty good understanding about the ongoing process, which the minister just explained, through P&Cs, school boards and the like. I am asking whether you have identified any schools in the last 12 months that have met that threshold that Garran obviously did for a pretty wholesale modernisation project. You do not necessarily have to name them but have any of them hit the threshold?

Ms Berry: Examples are Majura and North Ainslie, because that is the area where we are seeing growth as well, and where we will need to do significant upgrades and expansions because the growth has occurred—in a different area, I suppose, but those are older schools and they need some upgrade and expansion.

Ms Efthymiades: We go through a pipeline, but those things then get recommended and they become decisions of government. They are not at that stage yet, but we absolutely have a pipeline of considerations.

MR DAVIS: Okay, that is clear. I ask this question with a degree of sensitivity, but I think it is really important. Calwell High School is in my electorate. I share the view that the minister has put in this place before, that public schools are great schools, and I also share the view that the minister has put about a concern that reporting on individual schools risks stigmatising them. At the same time, as a local member, I cannot deny the fact that it is an issue on which I receive a lot of representations. I would like to get a better understanding about what we are doing to make sure Calwell High School in particular is a safe school for students, teachers and parents.

Ms Berry: Thank you for that, Mr Davis. I would encourage you, if you do get representations, to put them forward to my office, because we are very happy to work through, with those individuals, the kinds of supports that are available now in Calwell.

We can talk about the additional staff and support that are available in Calwell and more broadly around the safer schools program, which is about making sure that all of our schools have access to supports when they need them, and positive behaviours for learning as well, which is part of making sure that our school cultures are respectful and safe. Mr Huxley can provide a little bit of detail on the support that is available in Calwell and, perhaps more broadly, Ms McMahon can talk about the Safe@School Task Force.

Mr Huxley: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Absolutely, Mr Davis, we share your concerns. Our priority at Calwell High School is to make sure that it is a safe, productive and enjoyable working environment for all members of the community, and we take that responsibility seriously.

In response to that, we conducted a special purpose review at the school, which was an independent analysis of the school, the functions at the school and the areas where we could focus on improvement. We have been very transparent with the community. There has been strong community engagement from staff, students and parents in the community, and we have made that report publicly available on the school's website.

Since then, the school has been acting on the recommendations in that plan and have responded to it with an action plan at the school, which is being implemented, along with some findings on work health and safety that were included at the time. It has resulted in us also supporting the recommendations for additional supports and resources into the school, which included an additional permanent youth worker, three additional permanent executive teachers or school leader Cs, one specifically for teaching and learning support, one for implementation, to lead the positive behaviour and learning program uplift at the school, as well as a student voice. I refer also to student pathways and careers—an SLC responsible for that. So there are three executive teachers to assist in the implementation of the action plan.

A range of additional supports have been put into the school, including a director of school improvement, who has been onsite at the school during term 2 and term 3 this year. There is an executive school leader B, supporting student wellbeing and behaviour management at the school. An additional executive teacher, a school leader A, was present onsite in term 2. There was an additional business manager supporting the school in term 2. An identified PBL coach—a specialist expert in Positive Behaviour for Learning program—was assigned to support the school and plan for the uplift and implementation of PBL at the school.

There are two additional specialist mentor supports for the learning support unit during term 4. There was an additional student wellbeing officer in term 3 to support students in alternative programs, and a redeployment of directorate staff as required on an as-needs basis in response to the action plan.

Quite a comprehensive range of supports have been offered to the school. We have seen some good early trends. I am by no means overstating this, but we have definitely seen a decrease in the number of suspensions and the number of incidents during terms 2 and 3. We absolutely hope that trend continues, as we continue to work with the community in implementing our response to the special purpose review.

I will hand over to Ms McMahon to talk about the Safe@School components of the work at Calwell.

MR DAVIS: Just before you do, Ms McMahon, because I am interested in talking about the Safe@School Task Force, with respect to that special purpose review and the recommendations, can you confirm how many recommendations there were in that report and how many have been implemented in full?

Mr Huxley: There are eight recommendations currently in the report. They are quite comprehensive in nature, and they are all integrated and relate to each other. It is very hard to read one as a single, standalone recommendation, Mr Davis, because they are also co-dependent. Schools are complex systems. Obviously, these recommendations do build on and integrate with each other.

There has been progress on those eight recommendations across the board as part of the action plan. On some of them it is sequenced work, though, and will take one to two years, at least, to do some of the systems change and culture change at the school. But we have seen some good progress on the implementation against those recommendations, and I think the early data speaks to that.

MR DAVIS: Can I get an understanding about the frequency with which you communicate, particularly with parents, and with the school community more broadly, updating them on how those recommendations are progressing?

Mr Huxley: The school at the moment has really increased its communication with the school community on a range of matters across the board in terms of the school's bulletins, the social media posts and interactions with the community. It has an open-door policy to any parents who want to come in and talk about the issues and concerns as they relate to the school, and progress. That has definitely been one of the things that the school has looked at doing—increasing and improving the communication out to the community. That has been a feature of the work in the last two terms.

Ms McMahon, do you have something to say about the Safe@School Task Force?

Ms McMahon: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Following on from what Mark has explained around PBL and its impact at Calwell High School, one of the things that we did at Calwell was to introduce the new PBL dashboard at Calwell, as the trial school for that. The dashboard allows real-time access to information around behavioural incidents, both negative incidents and positive incidents, major and minor incidents. It allows the school to be able to identify what those behaviours are, where they are happening, when they are happening, by whom they are happening and to whom they are happening.

Access to that real-time data has been able to nuance the responses to behavioural incidents at that school. We are seeing about a 50 per cent reduction in incidents at Calwell High School at the moment, with all of the measures that have been put in place. Also, that very strong access to data has allowed that to happen, as well as making appropriate choices with interventions at that school. The introduction of PBL at Calwell High School has had a significant impact, and I think that is something that the school should be really proud of, with that work.

The Safe@School Task Force is a short-term piece of work that is allowing us to explore how we can improve our systems of safety across our schools and set up our schools with stronger foundations in that work as we move forward. It has a range of components that we are working through at the moment. There is the establishment of the actual task force itself, and we have been able to finalise all of our recruitment into that task force, which is really great, and uplifted our ability to project manage. We are also bringing some really strong WHS expertise into that team.

We have been undertaking a couple of reviews. Mark has identified the special purpose review at Calwell. We also did a rapid review of 17 of our schools, and we are just about to receive the report back on that. That will be a report that identifies systemic changes that we could be making, as well as some specific things for those particular schools. In those school reports, there is also that level of systemisation of some of those recommendations. We are looking forward to getting that work so that we can do the rest of the planning that we have in place for that.

We are looking at reviewing the requirements for all of our staff—the training requirements in WHS and associated fields—so that we can start to develop those training supports with a more nuanced feel to them. We have manager training that all of our staff must undertake over a two-year cycle, and we are looking to see what else we might need so that we can make our school leaders into safety leaders at their school and champions within their own schools.

We recently met with all of our WHS leads—our HSRs in our schools—and we are listening to what their training requirements and needs are. We are seeing and hearing that sometimes some of that HSR training is not quite situationally specific. It is really good for the construction industry, but maybe not as nuanced as it could be for schools. We are looking to see how we can improve all of that as well.

We are also responding to any of the recommendations that WorkSafe is making for us in a range of our schools. That is an ongoing process. That is everything from making sure that the eyewash is in date in the first-aid kits through to occupational violence and our responses around psychosocial safety. We are working closely with the regulator to make sure that we understand what they are seeing as some of the areas for improvement and responding to those, both on a school basis and taking some of those learnings from a school basis and broadening it out across our system response.

We are doing a lot of work with the AFP at the moment, and ACT Policing, to make sure that we have some good connections. We are developing an MOU. We are talking about how we can work together in an ongoing manner. It is having some great benefits. We had the station leads go out to our principals meetings last week so that they could introduce themselves and so that the principals can have a really good connection point, not for those emergency situations but for advice and support, and to understand what is happening across our system. We were able to let our ACT Policing colleagues know every time we had to send children home, probably until the end of term 3, when a school had to go into remote learning or a subsection of that school had to go into remote learning. We let the station officers know so that, if they saw kids down at the shops, they knew they either had to be at school or they had to be at home. It was about connecting in and making sure that, as a community, we are working together for safety and it is not a case of everybody working in isolation.

I refer also to looking at data and how we can improve data, which I think will take us full circle, back down to PBL and how we do that.

MR DAVIS: Do you have a time frame to which you are working to have the report finalised? When you do, is it your intention to make it public?

Ms McMahon: We will be getting the report shortly; then we will be working through that. I do not have a time line yet for the publication of that.

MR DAVIS: I am separating the report you are talking about and the task force report—the recommendations more broadly.

Ms McMahon: I do not have a specific time line for that one, no. I cannot answer that one.

Ms Haire: At the moment the task force is in place for a year.

MR DAVIS: Is it our intention afterwards, when the task force report is finalised, not unlike with the teacher shortage task force, that that will be publicly available?

Ms Haire: We probably use the term “task force” slightly differently here, Mr Davis. It is not producing a report. The task force is managing the body of work that Ms McMahon has described. The task force’s focus is on managing the body of work. Part of the announcement for it did not include a report. However, we will, of course, report fully on it in the annual report next year.

MR DAVIS: That does not assist with the fallout. Not only has the Safe@School Task Force been, I imagine, in large part, a response to a lot of the media reporting about some concerning instances, but there has also been, I imagine, an expectation set by stakeholders in this space about how we dealt with the teacher shortage task force. We made that report publicly available. Would there at least be some sort of executive summary when the Safe@School Task Force is completed to give people an idea about what has been dealt with?

Ms Haire: Certainly, there will be, Mr Davis. As you know, in this year’s annual report there are quite extensive references to its work program. We will continue to report through that and in many other public ways around that work.

THE CHAIR: Could the committee get an update on the school lunch program trial?

Ms Haire: Ms Scholten will respond to that, Chair.

Ms Scholten: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. In answer to your question, during the last few years in particular, around COVID, we have delayed implementation, but we are working to start rolling that out in 2023.

THE CHAIR: Do we have schools identified?

Ms Scholten: We have a list that we are currently working through at the moment, and it will be through a staged implementation. I do not have the list with me. I am happy to take that on notice and come back at a later stage.

Ms Berry: In working through the schools, because we are starting with just five, and because our schools operate across a range of different systems for providing canteen operations and also out-of-school-hours care services, with breakfasts that they might provide, there is not a blanket “all of that’s going to stop and we’re going to implement

this new program”. We are trying to figure out, through this phase-in and through this pilot, what is the best system and how that will work well.

Some of our schools have parent-run P&C operated canteens, so the profits they make from their canteens go back into the school. Some of the operators are larger community-based operators. There might be a couple of schools that do not have a canteen that is operational at the moment. There are the out-of-school-hours care services, which are separate, early in the morning and in the afternoon, who often include breakfast and afternoon teas in their service provision for those students, but it might not expand to students who are not part of that program.

It is about working through all of that, and that is the reason why we have identified a primary school and a high school at this stage across different parts of the city that operate differently so that we can find a system that works. Hopefully, it will be something that we can use across the whole of our public school system, noting that each school will have a different canteen operation or other food services.

MR DAVIS: I note that the committee made some recommendations in the school infrastructure and maintenance inquiry around utilising school canteens and some of the cooking infrastructure in schools’ home ec classrooms for the delivery of this program. Could I get an update on where the response to that recommendation is up to? Have there been any investigations done about how to better use the infrastructure we already have in that respect?

Ms Berry: I think that is part of the pilot—understanding the infrastructure that is available within our schools and whether or not it is available.

MR DAVIS: This should be a quick one. I moved a motion in the Assembly in June 2021, when I asked to give effect to an ongoing policy of support for teachers and students to allow for students to attend organised peaceful protests or demonstrations that accord with the policies around the management of peaceful protests. Can I confirm that such a policy has been written and shared amongst schools so that there is an understanding?

Ms Berry: Mr Davis, you will recall that the ACT government and I had already said that children could attend climate strikes in the past and that that was perfectly okay with the Education Directorate.

Ms Haire: I will ask Ms McMahon to answer, but the short version, Mr Davis, is the arrangements that the minister has described to you continue to be in place. Ms McMahon, would you like to expand on that?

MR DAVIS: Before Ms McMahon does, I will clarify a point there. The reason why I brought this motion and the reason why I asked for a specific policy was that, as the minister has described, the current situation is that particular protests or particular events get almost permission from government or from the minister. I wanted to understand whether there was a policy of ongoing support for that kind of demonstration, and if teachers and school leavers understand that that existed, when these conversations are happening on school campuses.

Ms Berry: To be clear, I do not give permission to schools and students for absences. I think that needs to be made clear. Whilst I am responsible for children at our public schools, I do not give permission, but we do have a policy in place now.

Ms McMahon: Not a specific policy. The policy exists already to allow children to attend events outside school. That is with parental permission. Part of the curriculum is also dedicated to understanding civics and citizenship, through the humanities curriculum. In that, teachers will teach students, at age-appropriate levels, what it means to have a voice and to have a say within our democratic processes. No child will be told not to attend a political or a particular protest or a way of demonstrating or having their choice, but it is up to their parents to give them permission not to be at school. That is their responsibility, and we would not question that, but we certainly need that level of permission. If a child does not attend school without their parents' permission, we would send a notification to the parents to let them know that that child was not at school on that day and seek a response from the parents as to why they were not there.

Ms Berry: We just need to know where they are.

MR DAVIS: Naturally. Would you mind taking on notice providing to the committee a copy of that policy?

Ms Berry: I think it has been provided previously, so we can do that.

MR DAVIS: If it has, I do not have it, so I would appreciate that; thank you.

Ms Berry: It may have been before this term of government. I recall it being provided previously.

MR DAVIS: I understand that. I knew what existed previous to this term of government and my view was that it was not sufficient, which is why I brought a substantive motion to the Assembly in June 2021, so I am interested to see whether there has been any work as a result of that motion and whether the policy has been updated. That is why I am interested in the most recent copy of the policy.

Ms Haire: If I can assist, Mr Davis, I think the substance of the policy has not changed. We have ensured that we have communicated that clearly to reflect the very important point that the minister and Ms McMahon have made: if children and young people are not attending school, that must be with their parents' permission; and to communicate that that is an option and, without identifying specific types of activities, that it is an option when parents will allow that for their child. It is around the communication of the policy to make it clearer how parents can enable their children to do that, rather than changing the policy itself, because those parameters around the duty of care, which Ms McMahon and the minister have talked about, do not change.

I think your point was for that to be well understood so that parents who wish to support their children to take part understand how they can do that.

MR DAVIS: In order to expand the question taken on notice, could you also provide the committee with examples of how that has been communicated? I ask that because it has been put to me that there is still not the kind of level of understanding of that

policy, and that was my intention with the motion in the Assembly. I would appreciate that.

MR HANSON: On page 35 of the annual report, under “Performance Analysis”, when you look at strategic objective 2, which relates to educational outcomes, and 2(a), (b), (c) and (d) go on to the next page, the government has failed to meet any of those targets for educational outcomes. Can you explain why, and can you explain what you are doing to fix that, please?

Ms Efthymiades: Strategic objective 2 is about learning gain between two respective year levels in NAPLAN—3 to 5 or 7 to 9. Learning gain is probably one of the most important things that we could seek to measure. In fact, there are many ways of measuring learning gain, particularly at the individual student level, where it matters most. There are reading levels, there are commercial assessments that schools buy, such as PAT tests et cetera that allow them to look at learning gains, so they can monitor that really closely.

With that importance, we included this indicator in the budget papers. Using it at a system level and using NAPLAN as the tool for measuring it is a relatively new thing. One of the things that we have found is that the gain reported for ACT is very strongly influenced by what has happened nationally. The gain that happens between years 3 and 5 nationally and the gain that happens between years 3 and 5 in the ACT are very connected. In the few years we have been using this measure, it is always quite variable. We are taking a good look at that measure because we recognise the importance of it, and we also recognise how tightly it seems to be tied to the national measures.

In terms of the achievement, or not, of the targets this year, we do not ever apologise for setting ambitious targets, because that is part of what, as a system, we are striving to achieve. One of the things that is interesting in this is that there is a target for each year level and then that sets the gain target by default. While in this case none of those gain targets were met, in three out of four of them we did achieve an increase in gain compared to the previous measure.

It is all a bit mucky in this area because, in 2020, NAPLAN did not occur, so the last one we have is 2017 to 2019. In year 3 to 5 reading, in year 3 to 5 numeracy and year 7 to 9 reading, all of the gains achieved for 2019 to 2021 exceeded those from 2017 to 2019. We did not hit the ambitious target, but we did see improvement in three of the four.

The fourth one is year 7 to 9 numeracy. For numeracy overall, we have been looking closely at our performance data. It is an area where we are seeking to invest more energy and effort for uplift. I will throw to Ms McMahon to unpack that a little bit—the “what we are doing about it” part, the second part to your question.

Ms McMahon: In 2021 we initiated a strategy for uplifting the knowledge and skills of our teachers in teaching mathematics, called Finding the Balance—a nice mathematical term for it. It was suspended briefly in August 2021 because of COVID, but during 2021 we piloted the program with 70 school leaders across 18 schools. They worked through a series of professional learning, which had been designed specifically for them, using some of the expertise in maths, locally and also nationally and

internationally.

That program has since been expanded and is now working with 98 teachers from 18 schools, and they are getting both synchronous and asynchronous learning in how to teach numeracy in our schools. Just last term we have started to partner with the University of Adelaide to pilot a new maths in schools online MOOC. A MOOC is a massive open online learning course. Our teachers will be going through that MOOC in understanding the contextualisation of maths and numeracy development.

It started last year. We should start to see the impacts of that in the coming years, but we are really building the strength of leaders and teachers in our schools to be the numeracy champions at their school and to be supporting each other.

MR HANSON: As a follow-up, and looking at national trends, you are right to identify that it is interconnected. What we are seeing nationally is starting to improve literacy for year 3, and that is linked to phonics and more explicit instruction. That is the advice that I have received. That is something that is happening interstate where they are going back to basics on literacy. Has that trend towards more explicit instruction and phonics been taken up in the ACT? It seems to have been demonstrated that it is working at a national level.

Ms Berry: I might start, in responding to that, with early childhood education. It is the best space to start around literacy, with a young person, and giving every child an equal start to a great education in their early years.

We also have, in the ACT, the PIP program—now called BASE—in our kindergartens, which teachers use to assess a child’s learning, where they are up to and what kind of additional supports they might need. There are the different programs that Ms McMahan has talked about. It is also about focusing on our teacher professionals knowing that every child might be learning differently or have different learning needs. Whatever instruction or education method is provided—

MR HANSON: Specifically, Minister, a trend that seems to have been adopted nationally, or certainly in other states, is that move towards phonics and more explicit instruction. Going specifically to those, is that something that you are looking at, regarding lessons from interstate, where it is starting to have a pick-up, to see whether that is something that can be utilised more in the ACT?

Ms Berry: That is what I was getting to, Mr Hanson. It is a combination of those, and it will be the teaching professional who will make the decisions about what is the most appropriate delivery and—

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, if I can help on that, I will pass to Mr Huxley in a moment to talk about our early years literacy program, which has been in place for around three years, and I believe one of the experts that we work with was on the radio this morning, from the University of Canberra.

MR HANSON: Who?

Ms Haire: Misty Adoniou. I will pass to Mark to explain how this program works. It is

based on 10 essential elements, which include, of course, phonics and phonemes as part of that. It also includes a range of other evidence-based teaching strategies for early literacy. We are seeing, in the ACT, as you have noted, improvements. Mr Huxley, could you expand on that, and the literacy champions work as well?

Mr Huxley: The early years literacy initiative has been running for over four years and it is guided by our national literacy expert, Christine Topfer. The program is designed on the 10 essential practices, which were researched and developed by Professor Nell Duke. Two of those practices, of the 10, are explicit instruction and phonemic awareness. They are absolutely core, as part of that.

The challenge, Mr Hanson, in the language of back to basics or just a phonics approach, is that we have students who are coming into schools in the ACT from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds and different stages in their journey. We want our teachers to be able to respond to the breadth of needs as they present in the classroom. We could have students coming in from situations in the family environment which mean they are coming in with really high-level skills, and the challenge is how to extend them further. How do we meet the needs of students who need the basics right through to many of our kids who actually need to be extended—

MR HANSON: You are saying it is part of that suite where you identify the need in a child to be at basics?

Mr Huxley: Yes.

MR HANSON: Others are not; then that is available within that suite?

Mr Huxley: Yes, and I think having teachers with the skills to identify those needs. We are very fortunate in the ACT that we do have what was the PIPS assessment, which is now called BASE, in kindergarten. This program is in direct response to some of the variants we were seeing within schools and between schools, between the BASE data and the year 3 NAPLAN data, which was why we actually brought this program together.

The sorts of things that you would expect to see in the classroom are described in those 10 practices and include fostering literacy motivation, engagement and reading aloud of age appropriate books and texts, and small group instructions so that when you do identify students with different needs you can actually target the strategies, based on the needs, and put them in smaller groups. Other practices include activities that build phonological awareness and reading fluency; explicit instruction; research informed by and standards aligned with writing instructions; intentional ambitious efforts to build vocabulary and content knowledge; abundant reading material and reading opportunities in the classroom; and ongoing observation and assessment of students' language and literacy development that informs their education.

A really important one that we have seen, definitely through the pandemic and COVID, is collaboration with families in promoting literacy—how do we actually build parents' understanding about what they can be doing at home to support the sorts of strategies that are being deployed in the classroom for the young person? So that is the breadth of the program.

I think it really points to some success that we have seen on the ground with it, and we have had our consultant. Part of the work that Christine Topfer does is an assessment with the schools that she has worked with. We were seeing, at the start of the initiative back in 2018, quite a variance between classrooms in the school, in terms of the existence of those 10 approaches consistently within a school. We have seen a significant improvement in the consistency between classes, in schools that have participated in the literacy practice, as a result.

MR HANSON: The other area that seems to spike is the gender gap between boys and girls. There is national reporting today about year 9 literacy levels amongst boys. Looking back through a series of annual reports from here in the ACT and the ATAR of 60 or above, or the ATAR at 90 or above, you can see there is a significant difference between the achievements of girls and boys, with boys doing less well. Can you, again, explain why that is and explain what is being done to try and close the gender academic gap, for want of another phrase?

Ms Haire: I will pass to Ms Efthymiades for that, Mr Hanson.

Ms Efthymiades: Mr Hanson, there are a range of differences. In NAPLAN terms, girls outperform boys in reading; boys outperform girls in numeracy. That has been a thing and it varies a little bit over time. But, overall, that has been a key difference. In terms of the ATAR, a lot of the senior secondary measures really depend on what pathway a student is heading for.

There are a range of pathways that come out of our senior secondary certificate and therefore there are a range of performance measures that are quite strongly influenced by student choice. The way the numbers fall out is quite strongly influenced by student choice. Mr Watson, I believe, is online, so may be able to unpack this further. With those that take a tertiary pathway, when we have a look at that data and when we look at our high achieving students, there is not a gender pattern. It varies year on year, depending on individual students. So there is no gender predetermination, if you like, of our highest achieving students.

MR HANSON: The data that I have got from the annual reports says that for ATARs at or above 90, which I presume is pretty high, the difference between boys and girls is reasonably significant.

Ms Efthymiades: I will get Mr Watson to unpack that further, but the piece I was talking about was that when we look at our top 10 or top 20 students, year on year, there is no pattern there. So there is not anything that says—

MR HANSON: Yes, but that is a micro number. When you are talking about the performance of high-performing students, an above 90 ATAR, there is a reasonably statistically big difference, isn't there?

Ms Efthymiades: I will ask Mr Watson to report to that, because that is the SSS data.

MR HANSON: Sure; okay.

Ms Efthymiades: However, what I wanted to emphasise is that there is no predetermination that if you are a male you cannot achieve the highest of ATARs.

MR HANSON: No, but they are not. I am not saying you cannot achieve it. Of course you can, but statistically what the annual report is showing is that, be it an ATAR above 60 or an ATAR above 90, boys are well behind girls. I am not saying a boy cannot get there, but statistically they are not achieving as well as girls.

Ms Efthymiades: No, and it is not just a single boy either. What I am saying is that it depends on the disposition of the student, and over the years those numbers of the highest achieving students have varied.

MR HANSON: Okay. The annual report data that I am looking at—and I have looked at a bit of a trend analysis—shows that, in every year I have looked at, girls are achieving a higher ATAR, above 60 and above 90, than boys and are beating boys significantly in literacy in the later years; that being year 9, which is the last recorded by NAPLAN.

Ms Efthymiades: I might just finish off the NAPLAN piece and then hand to Mr Watson. Year 9 NAPLAN has been long understood now to be more of a measure of engagement of students with schooling at that point in time. By year 9 a lot of students have worked out that there is not a lot of money in it for them—for want of a better phrase.

There are some students who are motivated to achieve highly, and they will continue to do their best in all those kinds of things. But there is a general understanding nationally—and there is a classic case of counterpoint in this—that by year 9 NAPLAN a lot of students have decided they will just do it because they are sitting there on the day and they have to do it, but they are not actually going to all put in their best effort.

That builds over time, from year 3 through to year 9. The classic counterpoint is in Western Australia, where they tied the year 9 NAPLAN completion to credit. If that kid got a certain level of achievement in year 9 NAPLAN, they would get a certain credit in their year 12 certificate. So if you look at the year 9 Western Australian results, they are quite different to the rest of the country.

MR HANSON: So you think it is an engagement issue and the boys are less engaged than girls at that level?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes, and less inclined to do their best in that particular test, which then has no particular consequence, even though it is very much in the public domain, broadly—

MR HANSON: So you think it is an engagement, rather than a literacy, issue?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes. That is definitely a contributing factor.

MR HANSON: All right. And if there is something working in WA, has the ACT looked at this?

Ms Berry: It is not supported here in the ACT.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes, and it is only working in terms of their engagement with the test. There is not a difference in their achievement.

MR HANSON: Are you doing anything to try and get boys more engaged? Why are boys less engaged than girls?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, just to underline the point Ms Efthymiades is making, she is talking about engagement with the NAPLAN test, not engagement more broadly. We can speak differently about all the things we are doing—

MR HANSON: But when you look at it, it is ATAR and NAPLAN, and when you look at the number of boys going to university, there is definitely a disparity. I am wondering whether we are just accepting that that is what it is, and not doing anything, or whether we are saying that this is an issue and we are going to do something.

Ms Berry: I think that is probably a more complex question to ask, rather than just a comment, Mr Hanson, because we are doing a lot of work across the ACT around different pathways for young people. That is not always university; sometimes it is a different pathway into vocational education and training or apprenticeships or other kinds of work.

That can be presented differently. Over decades and decades, young men were encouraged to go and take up a trade, rather than going to university, so that is a cultural thing across our community that we need to address to give people different opportunities in school and education. We are doing that with young women: giving them a chance to try different trades in construction, for example, to shift the gender imbalance in the construction industry so that young women now have a choice of going into a trade rather than perhaps into university or some other employment. I think what would be useful would be to unpack that data through the ATAR and some of the other ways that students might have different pathways, as far as a career or ongoing learning and education goes. Mr Watson?

Mr Watson: I have read, understand and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thanks very much for inviting me in to speak and thank you, Mr Hanson, for the inquiry around this area. It is very important that we be able to have open discussions about what is happening in the ACT in regard to leaving, around the ATAR as well as a lot of different measures, particularly in the national context, so thank you so much for bringing it up.

As was previously mentioned, there are lots of variabilities and differences in terms of how individuals and groups of students achieve certain things at different times. This is true if we break the data up from a socio-economic point of view or from a gender point of view et cetera. It is evident at the moment, as you have rightly pointed out, that there are some differences in some measures when it comes to the ATAR in certain percentage bands. Interestingly, it does change from band to band, depending on where you look. The overlap or the gap does change. But what you have said is right: that over time there is consistently a little bit of a difference.

I am not in a position to talk about engagement per se, because that is not something

we collect data on here at the board. But I can say that boys and girls, in a general sense, from a general perspective, at different times in their educational journey, through from early school into university and post university, do seem to perform differently. The depth of the sociological reasons for all of that is not something that I am in a position to, or qualified to, talk about today. But I would say that, overall, I am not alarmed by what I see. I am not convinced that either girls or boys, in this context, are being disadvantaged.

We try and provide a curriculum in year 11 and 12 which provides equal access across schools. Certainly, at the board we are not in the business of trying to determine which schools should do which subjects or which students, male or female or whatever, regardless of any differences, should choose which subjects. But it is true that there is difference in the outcomes in some areas. I suspect that, if we drill down, we might see differences in VET, and we might see differences in the types of subjects that people choose.

This is a generalisation, but girls would appear to be a little bit more focused and a little bit more organised and a little bit more directed in a general sense towards year 11. I do not know if this is a maturity thing. We also know that it would appear that a higher percentage of girls might choose the T pathway, in terms of the proportion of the cohort, with boys making decisions about certain other pathways. Remember, we have got probably one of the highest take-ups, regardless of gender, of tertiary pathways in the country. We also have probably the greatest flexibility for students in year 11 and 12 to choose other pathways as well, or mixed pathways.

The other thing to keep in mind—and I have referred to this in the annual report around the idea of university entrance—is the idea that there are such a plethora of ways to move from the secondary sector into the tertiary sector, be it VET training or be it university, and that the ATAR is one of those things now. It is certainly not the be-all and end-all that it was seen to be. Therefore, for me, the focus has been: what suite of things can we provide? How open is the access that we can provide so that all students have the opportunity to choose what they want to do?

One of the issues is that the genders, or any break-up that we choose to have, should get exactly the same results in any given subject, at any given time, in year 11 and 12, or across the package. That is alluded to by some others. It is a very complicated and big question. I think about all of the variations around that. That is something that I and my team, and in our partnership with the directorate and with Catholic ed and the independent sector, are continuously looking at. Is it fair? Does it provide access? It is definitely a complex question.

But back to your initial thought about the difference in the ATAR: yes, there are differences in the nature of the completion at certain bands over time. But I am not sure that that is a result of anything that is unfair, or due to a lack of access or increased access. It would never be true that there is any view in schools in terms of the interpretation of the assessment and moderation et cetera, because we have a very good system when it comes to both social moderation and statistical moderation across schools. We work very hard to make it fair. But, like you said, Mr Hanson, it is very important that we interrogate, talk about, think about and study things that are apparently different. There may be causes for that. So thank you for asking. I appreciate

it very much.

MR DAVIS: I want to pick you up on the point that the ACT has a higher proportion than anywhere else in the country of students taking the T pathway, or the tertiary pathway. I imagine that the logical extension of that is that that contributes to our acute skills shortage, in particular in the building and construction industry. I have not been a public school student for more than 10 years, but I can recall great organisational and social pressure to enrol in T units, to go to uni, to get a degree. Can you talk me through what we are doing to encourage and promote, as an equally good pathway, the accredited pathway and getting students into vocational education and trades? In the broad, are we happy that as a city we have a higher T pathway? I suppose that is the principal question. But then how are we making sure that that accredited pathway is as encouraged?

Mr Watson: I can talk from a board system perspective. In terms of any specific initiative that might be taken by the directorate, I will leave that to my peers in that space. But there is something I need to correct, if I did not say it clearly. When I talk about our percentage of students who are successful at getting into university, I am talking about from the whole cohort.

MR DAVIS: Yes.

Mr Watson: But the annual report talks about the balance of students who have attained an ATAR and may take that decision, and the number of students that have not. Some people look at this data and say, “Oh no! That is low,” in that 55 per cent have qualified directly for uni as a result of the ATAR. Keep in mind that pretty well 100 per cent of the students that have a T package, with the intention of going to uni with an ATAR, qualify for direct entry to an Australian university. That is the first thing. This is something that the whole territory should be incredibly proud of, and it is because of what happens in schools. We provide the opportunity, but the schools are the people who deliver that. That is great. Out of the 100 per cent of all of the students, there are 55 per cent with this direct entry and then you have 45 per cent who have chosen alternative pathways.

What this indicates is not a weakness of the system or that 99 per cent of students are trying to get an ATAR. What it shows is the strength of the system, because there are all these other students who are saying, “Well, actually, I know that there are alternative pathways to university. Therefore, I could do this range of subjects at school which would prepare me for the workplace, or for training at CIT in a general sense.” A lot of those students do vocational education to get specific competencies like skill sets, and other people look to get full certificates, such as a certificate II in a particular trade area.

So, in fact, what is happening is that, overall, the trend is that students are making very informed and directed decisions about their education in year 11 and 12, often keeping lots of options open and being willing. Particularly across year 11 and 12, when they are more mature and they have a better picture of what they want to do, they have the opportunity to choose from so many things. For instance, I know of students who have had the opportunity to study in a range of vocational areas, and then they have been able to apply to a transition program into university, even though they did not have an ATAR, and take up that opportunity because they have come to that understanding. So

the idea is that doors are never closed. Some students will complete a T package and may qualify directly for university and say, “Wait a minute; I need to take a gap, or I want to do a trade area instead or maybe go back to university.”

To your point about that idea of the pressure to do one or the other: I think it is probably at more of a micro level. I think that you will find it is the expectations from families, from particular community groups within schools or across schools, particular schools et cetera. There are cultural differences in terms of what people expect and do not.

But what I do know is what we have been able to provide over the last four or five years of curriculum review, which has basically uplifted every course that we have got and increased the number of VET courses. It is to provide choice and opportunity. From my understanding, from my observations in talking to principals and to section heads and sector heads, everyone is very interested in kids pursuing the opportunities that are best for them, with advice informed by family guidance and all of those things. I am happy to say that I think things have been moving in the right direction when it comes to what you have been asking about. Thank you so much for the question. I really relish the opportunity to talk about it.

MR DAVIS: That is all right. If I could just pick up on that point, before anyone else contributes, because I think it goes to Mr Hanson’s point about the gender balance as well. I want to pick you up on your point, sir, about any door being open and to take that analogy to its conclusion. My point is that I think one is covered in streamers and lightbulbs; both doors might be open. So how are we countering some of those external pressures that you spoke about, like family pressures, social pressures, community pressures et cetera, to consider a tertiary pathway and to make sure that kids in schools now know that they can make a pretty good quid as a chippie? How are we encouraging that pathway specifically?

Mr Watson: I will say one more thing on that and then I think it would be appropriate to pass to the people who actually provide directly to the students. I would say that, from the board’s perspective and the office of the board, where I work, we are looking to provide as much insight and advice and professional learning to teachers and to schools around their curriculum, particularly working with industry as we develop courses, so that the options are there.

As an ex-principal, when I think about the relationships between students and their parents, with their teachers, with their peer group et cetera, there are so many factors that go into kids developing their view of the world and the choices they want to make. It is such a multiplicity. It is very difficult to target one thing or another for kids to make a particular decision. I think the way to characterises it is not to look at in terms of pressures, although I understand why it is seen that way; it is to look at information gathering, at guidance et cetera. I think the maturity of the student is very important. Some students are ready to make life decisions at 16, and some people are not necessarily as equipped to do it in their 20s as we might like. So you have this continuum.

I can certainly say that, from my perspective, in working with the sectors and principals, and the leaders that you see before you now, there is incredible dedication to making sure that students are as informed as possible. Given all those different pressures, as

you call them, or inputs, there is a real effort to make sure that kids are embracing the opportunities and making those decisions. As for the actual initiatives from within any particular sector or school, I think it would be appropriate for me to hand back to the directorate for that. But I am happy to answer any other questions about anything as we go along. Thanks very much.

Ms Berry: Thanks, Mr Watson. I think, just going back to the start of your question, a lot has changed in the last 10 years and, indeed, in the last five years. Education is an ever evolving and changing cycle where things never stay the same. A couple of the programs that I recently announced this year are the Head Start program, which was a Labor election commitment, as well as the ASbAs that are available in schools. Those programs are about matching up young people to a trade—not necessarily in construction; it could be in hairdressing or another trade—with an employer, because they actually want to do it, not because they are just passing time but because they are passionate about that career pathway.

It might be something that they have not identified yet or they have just decided that that is actually what they want to do, and then giving them the chance to pursue that. Mr Watson talked about those external pressures from families and others. The Head Start and ASbA programs are about making sure that we wraparound their families as well, so that families understand what is coming out of this. With families, what we hear is that if a student does not finish year 12 that is a problem. Instead, they will be getting a qualification in a trade, which is equivalent to or more than year 12 in any event, after they have completed their apprenticeship or whatever it is that they go to. I might ask Ms Scholten to talk a bit more about those two initiatives, for example, as ways that we guide students who might not choose university but choose another career pathway.

Ms Scholten: Thank you, Minister. Mr Davis, there have been a number of initiatives over the last 12 months that have been implemented. Those two mentioned by the minister have been exceptionally successful not only in providing options for students but for them to start thinking about experiencing those experiences through year 10 so that they have some idea before they even move into years 11 and 12. We have had a lot of really good feedback from employers who need these essential skills in non-tertiary-based areas, in the vocations. In particular, in the pilot we started of Head Start this year there were 50 places, but, to date, we have had 174 students from 18 public schools express an interest in participating. What that has resulted in is about 88 work experience places with about 23 employers, across four industry sectors.

For those people who have not been successful in going into the pilot places, we have assisted them to look at broader areas in the vocational education system to see where they may go to. In particular, we have had quite a number go through the Australian School-based Apprentice program, as mentioned by the minister. That includes targeted areas such as health and education, and also placements with the ACT government public service, which has been very successful. That contributes to a broader career opportunity in parts of our community, especially in those areas where there are quite significant skills shortages.

One of the other things that you might be interested in is understanding the building and construction pilot program in particular. Going to your point earlier about students

and young people understanding options available to them: this is a really successful program that started in terms 2 to 4 this year for years 7 and 8 students to experience building and construction, right at the beginning of their schooling, and to align with some of their class choices to give them an experience before they actually have to make that choice later on in their schooling career.

We also commenced a year 9 and 10 program last term, term 3. This was targeted in particular to our young ladies, to experience what building and construction is all about. We had 110 young female and some of our gender diverse students participating in that program and continuing through this term. This is a pilot program, and we only anticipated about 60 and we have already well exceeded that—nearly doubled that amount of people.

I think we have a lot of opportunities available. It is about starting early in their schooling, in high school, to make them aware of these different choices. Essentially, it is about student choice. There are many opportunities for us to continue to expand this. We also have the career pathway programs with CIT, which we are looking to broaden into other industry sectors that will complement some of the priorities of the ACT government with regard to building skills here locally, such as cybersecurity. We are looking at diversifying that. On Friday we are doing a hackathon with young college students, in order to help promote those ideas, going forward, not necessarily just down the tertiary pathway.

MR DAVIS: I hate that I can now take after my dad and say, “A lot has changed since I was at school.” It makes me feel old.

Ms Scholten: I think there are so many choices, Mr Davis. It would be hard, if I was a student now, to choose, because of the exciting career paths at tertiary level or in the VET sector in some of those essential skills that we need.

MR HANSON: There was an ABC report about a Grattan Institute research paper that talked about lack of curriculum detail and inadequate support, leaving many teachers drowning in a near impossible amount of lesson planning. The Australian Education Union commented on this and said that it is not news to AEU members, who work day-in, day-out to deliver quality education to their students without adequate workload relief and support in schools.

I am just wondering what is being done to support teachers with lesson planning. Without verballing them, speaking to the Catholic education system, I think what they are trying to do is make sure that lesson plan for teaching maths for year 2 in Tuggeranong is the same as it is in Gungahlin and that teachers do not have to reinvent the wheel every time, so that they can focus on teaching rather than necessarily doing all of the planning for it. I am just wondering if you have identified this as an issue and whether there is any work being done to try and take some of that pressure off teachers.

Ms Berry: There is and there has been for some time now. COVID gave us a chance to enhance our online library resources. When the Education Directorate initially developed that resource it was accessed by over 40,000 check-ins at the point of time when we first implemented it, not just from the ACT but from all over the world, where teachers in schools were accessing those kinds of resources. I think it is important to

note that you would not expect a single program to be run identically in each individual school because it would depend on the student cohort and the number of students—the way the students are learning and the way the teacher is teaching. However, the tools are there and available. We have the Hedley Beare virtual library, which I can ask Ms Simmons to talk a little bit more about, and how we are supporting teachers with those kinds of tools.

Ms Simmons: I have read and understood the privileges statement. Thanks for the question, Mr Hanson. There are a range of ways we support schools, and some of that has already been talked about in terms of support around literacy and support around pedagogy. The Hedley Beare virtual school was set up to support our schools during COVID, and we found that has been very popular. We commenced that in July of this year, and we continued that virtual school until the end of term 3. That provided primary schools with lessons each day. They were live streamed, and they were live streamed for 30 minutes—some for 40 minutes and some for 45 minutes.

What we have been able to do is bring all that together. Whilst it was being live streamed and it was being presented by expert teachers from across the directorate, we were also able to build it as a library. We have that as an ongoing library and a pool of resources that is able to be provided. I think it is really important to note that, as was similarly mentioned earlier, no one student learns the same, and it is not necessarily the right thing to do to have every student learning the same thing at the same time. All of our schools implement the Australian curriculum. They are all required to do that, and we support our schools in implementing the Australian curriculum to ensure they meet the needs of all students.

I think the learnings from the virtual school are that this is one way we can support schools. At the moment, we are also looking at other ways we might be able to pool together a range of resources from across the directorate, particularly focussing on the secondary level and looking at ways we will be able to do that that is going to be accessible for teachers right across the directorate. There are also resources that are available online all over the place, but what we want to be able to do is pick up what is working well in the ACT and bring it together. That is one of the things we are currently working on—that is the approach that we are working on.

MR HANSON: Let's say, you are teaching maths to year 8. It strikes me that you are going to have very experienced maths teachers, who have been doing it for years, and you will have some maths teachers who have just come out of university. I presume that the people who are new want to lean on the experience and expertise of those more experienced teachers. Are there template-like lesson plans that teachers can go to for those resources? When you say it is a library, what is it?

Ms Simmons: The library is really a resource, not necessarily a lesson plan. The Hedley Beare virtual school were lessons that were being taught, so you can emulate that or you can actually utilise the people that were presenting them. The people were being videoed and they were actually delivering a lesson. What we found was there were lots of people logging on to look at the lessons who used those lessons, and, in some cases, logging on later to access those lessons—so that is that part of it.

We are also, at the moment, as you would be aware, implementing the version 9 of the

Australian curriculum. It is due for implementation in the ACT from 2024. We are in the process of working with schools. We are working with schools now, and we will be during 2023, to support the implementation of the new curriculum. That will also include some samples around lesson plans and so on, so that is a major piece of work that we will be supporting our schools with as we move forward into 2024 as well. There are a range of things that are occurring, Mr Hanson, so it is really important we understand, as I said earlier, that we need to tailor what we do for our students in our individual schools.

Ms Berry: To add to that, Mr Hanson, and we have talked about this previously, is the Affiliated Schools Research Program and our relationship with the University of Canberra. This is a program that is unique to the ACT. It is nation leading. It does not exist in the rest of the country. It gives us the chance to work with the university and with beginning teachers in implementing research projects, because, as I said, education is evolving and a space of continuous learning. They can conduct research at a school around a delivery of a particular theme or priority topic, and that research can then be turned into a lesson plan. It can be viewed by teachers—existing teachers and more experienced teachers—to continue to update their professional knowledge and provide tools around more up-to-date methods of education that have not been identified previously through these research projects.

This has been a really important and very well received piece of work that we only have in existence in the ACT. We are so fortunate to be able to be working so closely with the University of Canberra on making sure we provide those opportunities to school principals and school leaders to continuously update and enhance their profession through this program—not just for beginning teachers but for existing and more experienced teachers to hone their skills as well.

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, just picking up two separate points that you made. The point you made about collaborative teaching or learning from more experienced teachers is very much a part of the model of teaching we support in ACT schools. We have implemented and support professional learning communities and communities of practice, which is based on a collaborative, supportive model of teaching, where teachers learn from each other and learn with each other, and that is part of how each school is organised.

The separate point you made is about the availability of curriculum resources. As you would recall, when the Grattan Institute report came out recently there was a slightly mixed response to it. We are working with the teaching profession here in the ACT to understand what would work best for them in terms of curriculum support, which is what Ms Simmons is talking about and the work we are doing.

There was money in the August budget that came out to support some additional curriculum supports. We are currently engaging and consulting with the teaching profession here in the ACT in our public schools to identify, in terms of curriculum supports, what would be of most use to them, because I think there was a bit of debate following the Grattan report about whether it is lesson plans, whether it is scope and sequencing of the curriculum, whether it is learning from others as you have described—what is the best support? We want to design a model that suits the needs of the profession here in the ACT.

MR HANSON: Okay, thanks.

THE CHAIR: I am hoping you can provide an update on how the directorate is preparing for the implementation of the Education Amendment Bill recently passed by the Assembly.

Ms Berry: Ms Efthymiades, could you provide some information about that?

Ms Efthymiades: Just pulling up the specific details, because I am not sure the global answer of “everything is looking good” will suffice. As you know, there are multiple elements to that. The non-government school education standards, et cetera, are well in train, and all that takes effect from 20 December. There are a number of steps that need to be put in place for the non-government elements. In particular, standing up the Registration Standards Advisory Board; the processes are well in place for that and on track.

In terms of suspensions policy, et cetera, that has all been well progressed and the information shared across all sectors, so all sectors are feeling well prepared for that. The student movement register—again, there are a number of elements to that. There is the standing up of the technical system, there is policy and then, obviously, implementation. We have been communicating with the non-government sector around that one, and that one is all on track as well.

The answer is: it is all on track for effective commencement on 20 December, noting that 20 December is school holidays. That date was selected intentionally before the end of the year in case we needed a safety net for the re-registration process for some non-government schools. We set that date during the worry that COVID was going to peak and we would not be able to conclude some of those re-registration processes, so that is why it is 20 December, but those things really come into effect next school year.

The other thing to be mindful of in terms of the non-government sector is their compliance with those matters. They have a nine-month window before any compliance action can be taken against them, should they not have commenced, so there is still quite a lot of lead time. Everything is, essentially, on track.

THE CHAIR: Good to hear.

MR DAVIS: The Teacher Shortage Taskforce: I appreciate the report was only released two months ago, but I suspect it has not just sat in the drawer getting dusty. Do we have an update on any of those 20 recommendations? Were any of them easy ones that are already implemented? Are there any currently in train?

Ms Haire: Thank you for your question, Mr Davis. Yes, it has only been two short months, but we are working apace in conjunction with the Australian Education Union to implement the recommendations from the Teacher Shortage Taskforce. As you would recall, one of the main recommendations from the taskforce was to change the casual relief model and encourage the use of in-built relief—and I know that is an issue you have been interested in in the past. That is recommendation 8 from the taskforce report. I am happy to confirm, when our ACT public schools received their budget

estimates for next year a few weeks ago, that included confirmation of the process for them to switch from budgeting for day-by-day casual staff to engaging ongoing staff as in-built relief to cover for unplanned absences as part of their school staff planning for next year. This gives effect to one of the most significant matters that was found in the report, which was that the casual relief model was not fit for purpose.

We are also working in conjunction with the AEU. There are 20 recommendations all together and a number of them relate to pay and conditions, so they are going to be progressed through the enterprise bargaining process which is underway, and we are working with the AEU under the industrial arrangements for those. Those will happen in due course, in alignment with the finalisation of the EBA.

The other big milestone to mention is—recommendation 1—the development of a retention and attraction plan. That is going to be tabled in the Assembly—in this room, in fact—at the start of the next Assembly sittings for 2023. As part of that, we undertook to have an ongoing, rolling system of projections of what we need and the strategies we are going to use to both attract additional teachers and, very importantly, retain the excellent teachers we have here in the ACT public education system. Fulfilment of that recommendation is one of our highest priorities.

I can also confirm that we are looking at all of the other recommendations. One of the other important ones that we have addressed already, and is already in place, is recommendation 8, which related to the classification of permit to teach. I will check the report in a moment. We have already negotiated that with the AEU and that has come into effect to give effect to that recommendation. So, despite the fact it has only been two months, I am very happy to say that we have been working apace on this issue, which reflects the importance of having the right, high quality workforce in our ACT public schools.

MR DAVIS: Can I ask then: how many resignations have we received from classroom teachers in the last financial year? I appreciate this is not dissimilar to the question I asked Mr Huxley in the last session, but I am just curious as to how many have left. Granted, they may have moved interstate or moved to the non-government school sector. How many have we lost?

Ms Haire: I can give you our separation rate, Mr Davis.

MR DAVIS: Please—that would be great.

Ms Haire: Our separation rate for the Education Directorate is 5.9 per cent, but our separation rate for teachers is 5.7 per cent. The Education Directorate separation rate at 5.9 per cent is the lowest in the ACT public service, which is outlined in the *State of the Service* report. I note that teacher separation is at 5.7 per cent. You will recall in the Teacher Shortage Taskforce report we calculated the projections for future need based on a range of potential separation scenarios. We have the data that indicates we have 5.7 per cent separation, so that is the current projection we will be using for our calculations for next year, but we will keep calibrating that as we go—following the recommendation of the report so we have an ongoing process of projecting forward what our needs are.

MR DAVIS: Great. How many vacancies do we have for classroom teachers, as of today?

Ms Haire: I do not have a figure for today, Mr Davis—

MR DAVIS: This month, this week, this time frame?

Ms Haire: The most up-to-date figure I have is at 27 July. It was 65 classroom teacher vacancies, which comprised 22 permanent positions and 43 temporary vacancies. It is important to note that a vacancy does not mean there is not a teacher in front of that class. What it means is that there is not somebody appointed to that particular position, but the class itself may well be covered by a casual or by in-built relief or some other mechanism. It is a count of the vacancies.

MR DAVIS: Would you mind taking on notice how many vacancies there are as of this hearing date or in this period? Because that figure being from July—

Ms Haire: What I can say is that we will be updating that as we go through into the teacher attraction and retention plan as well, and we also report on that data every year in the annual report.

MR DAVIS: No worries; thank you.

MR HANSON: There is an advert on SEEK.com that includes the following statement: “The ACT Education Directorate is anticipating 300 permanent vacancies for 2023.” There are the 65 that you currently have. Is that 300 on top of that, and does that 300 represent replacing existing positions and filling positions where people are acting and so on, or is that representing growth?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, it is both; you are correct. It is exactly as the methodology in the Teacher Shortage Taskforce report set out—that, in order to do the projections of future need, we have to look at both the turnover, the retention element, and also growth. So that figure is the net figure and it is consistent with the figure that was published in the Teacher Shortage Taskforce report two months ago.

MR HANSON: If you take away the churn, for want of another word, the 5.7 per cent, what element of that 300 is growth and what is just replacing people?

Ms Haire: I have not got that in front of me right at this moment—

MR HANSON: Could you take that on notice?

Ms Haire: but it is consistent with the methodology in the task force report. Yes, that is certainly discernible.

MR HANSON: Are you able to provide that to the committee on notice? Is that possible?

Ms Haire: Yes. What I can say is that we can actually derive that directly from the task force report, because that is what that figure is based on.

MR HANSON: When I look at the budget, it has an FTE decrease in 2022-23. Where is the money coming from? I appreciate the ones that are already there, that you are replacing—that is a nil sum gain—but, if you are talking about growth, is that money budgeted or will it be budgeted in next year's budget?

Ms Haire: Sorry; could you repeat that question?

MR HANSON: Sure. The FTE in 2021 is 6,553. In 2022-23 it is 6,473. So there is a decrease, in fact, in FTE represented in the budget. Basically, I am saying: if some of those 300 are new positions, is the money in the budget or are you anticipating that it will be budgeted next year? Where is the money coming from?

Ms Haire: We are funded for school staff based on enrolment demand. That is adjusted by the Treasury, based on the census that takes place in February every year, and then there is a further census in August every year. It is never the case that, where growth exists, we are not funded for it, because we are funded on that basis.

MR HANSON: Okay.

Ms Haire: I think the drop that you are referring to in those numbers relates to the change in the day cleaning arrangements.

MR HANSON: Possibly.

Ms Haire: As you would be aware, we very significantly increased our workforce during 2020 and 2021 to create an entirely new service of cleaning during the day in the schools, during the COVID period, in accordance with the advice from the Chief Health Officer. What subsequently happened was that the advice from the Chief Health Officer changed in, I think, February this year, so as at June we ceased the additional cleaning, which relates to a small change in the number of staff. There is a small change also in the teaching staff, but that is not related to funding.

MR HANSON: Right. How many registered teachers are currently employed by the ACT government in schools?

Ms Haire: I would have to get that disaggregated because that is not in the annual report.

MR HANSON: No, it is not. I am just interested in how many teachers are actually working in ACT schools. When you do, is it possible for you to break that down between part time and full time—unless that is in the annual report on a page somewhere that I could not find?

Ms Berry: I can ask Ms McAlister from the Teacher Quality Institute to take us through the detail of the actual registrations. That gives us a good indication.

MR HANSON: Because registered teachers would be in government and non-government schools, wouldn't they?

Ms McAlister: They are. I have read and agree with the privilege statement. Mr Hanson,

I am not sure if this is answering the question, but we currently have 8,587 registered teachers. If we break it down into percentages, we have about 61 per cent in public schools across the territory, about 17 per cent in Catholic schools in the ACT and about 19 per cent in our independent schools.

MR HANSON: That probably does, although that is not a raw number; that is a percentage, and my maths is not good enough to do it off the top of my head. Could you, on notice, provide what the number is, for this year and the last couple of years, for registered teachers working in each of those sectors?

Ms McAlister: We can attempt that, Mr Hanson, but you need to appreciate that teachers move across sectors and across the system, so we would need to define the parameters of that request to perhaps take into account that movement. We have a number of teachers, for example, who will indicate on their employment record “casual” and they will work across each system or they might work as a casual within one system.

MR HANSON: Does the ACT government not, through the directorate, record that data? Surely you know how many teachers you have got working in your schools.

Ms Haire: Yes, Mr Hanson, and that is in the annual report, on page 144, the number of teachers that we have. We have the headcount broken down, in table 45, and that is broken down by all of the classifications of our staff.

MR HANSON: All right. This goes a bit to, I suppose, the questions that Mr Davis was asking. For those 300 vacancies that we have identified, have you had many applications? Are those adverts that getting lots of applications in or not?

Ms Haire: Yes. I just had a report from our head of people and performance a few days ago about that. It is an ongoing process and we have had a significant interest from both graduating students from the ITE courses but also from people coming from interstate to work here, so we are currently working at a great pace through those.

MR HANSON: Good. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: We are nearly out of time. I do notice we have got some CSD types with us. I do not want you to feel like you have been excluded. I was wondering if you could give the committee a quick update on the Youth Advisory Council and some of their recent achievements.

Ms Berry: Yes.

Ms Murray: Thank you very much for the question. The Youth Advisory Council has been very busy, as always. I would like to make particular note of a number of appearances that the Youth Advisory Council has made before committees of this Assembly. That includes, most recently, on Friday. The Youth Advisory Council attended and gave evidence before the inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT. They provide a submission to the parliamentary inquiry as well. In addition to that, they attended and provided submissions to the inquiry into housing and rental affordability, and attended the committee and gave evidence. In addition to this, the Youth Advisory Council has met over 12 times in the last financial year. We have

subcommittees that also meet up to three times a month, and they focus on progressing the work plan as articulated and derived from the Youth Assembly.

The priority areas during this last period were advocacy; equity and discrimination; the environment and sustainability; and health and wellbeing. The Youth Advisory Council contributed to over 22 engagements over the last period. They included a number that were of significant interest to the advisory council, such as the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and sexual assault prevention and response. Regarding the Young Workers Strategy, the Youth Advisory Council was very engaged in that process, both in the development and the design of the strategy. On discrimination law reform, they were actively involved in A Step Up for Our Kids 2022-2032, the wellbeing strategy, the second action plan of the Capital of Equality Strategy, and the next iteration of the national plan to end violence against women and children. The ACT youth portal, MindMap, was a very interesting conversation. Gender sensitive urban design has also been of particular interest to the Youth Advisory Council, and a new strategy for ACT sport and recreation.

The other area that the Youth Advisory Council has been really actively involved in is initiatives in ACT public schools, including the work that has been progressed in this chamber around access to period products and equity in that space. I am very happy to continue. They are a very active group who have been actively engaged and have been really strong on sharing and leading the conversation on where they would like to be involved. They have really enjoyed participating and providing that advice directly to this place, through the committee hearings in particular.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you for a very fulsome answer. Unfortunately, we are out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you, Minister Berry and all officials, for your attendance today. The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone for their attendance today. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice, could you please get those answers to the committee support office within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof. If any members wish to lodge questions on notice, you have five working days. Thank you. We are now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 12.46 pm.