



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022–2023](#))

Members:

**MR M PETERSSON (Chair)
MS N LAWDER (Deputy Chair)**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2023

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K Langham (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.

APPEARANCES

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1 pm.

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

Community Services Directorate
Rule, Ms Catherine, Director General, CSD

Education Directorate
Ackland, Mr Daniel, Executive Branch Manager, People and Performance
Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform
Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General
Huxley, Mr Mark, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement
Matthews, Mr David, Executive Group Manager, Business Services
Simmons, Ms Jane, Deputy Director-General
Spence, Ms Angela, Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery

ACT Teacher Quality Institute
Read, Ms Lyndall, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Senior Secondary Studies
Watson, Mr Martin, Executive Director, Board of Senior Secondary Studies

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearings of the Education and Community Inclusion Committee for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today examine the annual reports of the Education Directorate, the Community Service Directorate and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Today's proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice". This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We now welcome Ms Yvette Berry, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could I please get each of you to confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you

agree to comply with it.

Witnesses: I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. As we are not having opening statements, I will lead off with the questions and then make our way down the line. Minister, can the committee please get an update on infrastructure projects in Gungahlin and particularly on progress to deliver Shirley Smith High School?

Ms Berry: Thank you very much for that question. It was a great opportunity for me to get out to the new high school today—which is still being completed but is looking well on track to be ready for day one of term one next year—to meet with a couple of students that are about to start their high school education at Shirley Smith High School in Kenny and to announce the new school uniform. The new school uniform resulted from a process that we went through with the school students and their families and the broader community to choose a school uniform that they wanted for their school. There were three colours to choose from. I think it was a purple, a burnt orange and a green with a curly S on it—well, we have been describing it as a curly S. The uniform that the students and the community chose was the sort of bright green with the curly S emblem on it. It really fits in with the name of the school, Shirley Smith but also the Sullivans Creek that runs nearby. So there is a real story that is already evolving there even before anybody gets to come along to that school.

Some of the new teachers that will be working there got their first chance to have a look inside the school as well this morning. That was exciting for them as well, and I imagine that they now have a lot of ideas in their minds about what the move is going to look like and how they want to really build a strong culture at that school. They have about 80 students enrolled so far. So it will be a good start to the school year next year with a group of students to start working on building a culture for a new school. The infrastructure is important, but what happens once the humans get there is also a really important part of that. So that was a really lovely start to today.

Other works that have been happening in Gungahlin include the delivery of four transportable classrooms to Gungahlin College. Those transportables will provide I think eight learning spaces. In addition, the directorate is working on different upgrades within the school space to make more space while we design work for a new college in Gungahlin, which I know is something that you are particularly interested in, Mr Pettersson. I might pass to Mr Matthews, as there are probably a few things I might have missed in amongst that because there is a lot of work happening.

Mr Matthews: Thank you, Minister. The minister has referred to the Shirley Smith School. We are very pleased to see that opening next year as our 91st public school. This year also we have completed the expansion of the Margaret Hendry School. That provides enhanced infrastructure for that school community. As you would be aware, Mr Pettersson, we have a neighbouring school, which is the new high school at north Gungahlin, that is well under construction and has an opening date of 2025.

In addition, as the minister pointed out, we have made some additional capacity increases at Gungahlin College. Really, it is about maximising the use of that space. We have been working with the principal and the P&C and other stakeholders to look

at options to provide not only more learning spaces, which the minister has referred to, but also more socialising and study spaces for the students. We have been doing all of that work. So there has been retrofitting as well as the additional relocatable learning units.

Of course, in the most recent budget, the funding was provided for the second college in Gungahlin. We have an identified site adjacent to the current Gold Creek senior school campus, and we are doing our further due diligence and planning work on that with an aim of going to market for a head contractor of that next calendar year.

THE CHAIR: Very exciting.

MR HANSON: Where are we at in terms of planning for the next Gungahlin college? There is talk about a second Gungahlin college.

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, as I just mentioned—but I will expand on that a little bit further—funding was provided in the most recent ACT budget for the school. We have obviously been working on the second college for a period of time now, but what that has given us the funding to progress the master planning work, the design work and things—

MR HANSON: Where is that at? Have we identified a location?

Mr Matthews: Yes, the location will be in Nicholls adjacent to the Gold Creek senior school campus. So we have a site. It is land that is owned already by the Education Directorate and is under our control. The early due diligence work suggest that that site is reasonably straightforward compared to some other sites. So we will be trying to progress that project in a timely way.

MR HANSON: What is the time frame on that? Is there an identified time frame for delivering that college?

Mr Matthews: The announcement included in the budget papers, Mr Hanson, was before the end of the decade. Once we have gone to market and engaged a head contractor, we will have a construction timetable.

MR HANSON: What is the current attendance at the existing Gungahlin College?

Mr Matthews: On the current enrolments, I might rely on a colleague to dig that out for me, Mr Hanson, but around a thousand students have been attending the current Gungahlin College for a number of years now.

MR HANSON: Has there been any demographic analysis done of where that is heading? Is that going to be increasing significantly or is it stabilising? What is happening?

Ms Berry: I think I might just pass to Ms Efthymiades to answer that. We have been monitoring this school very closely, Mr Hanson, for several years.

Ms Efthymiades: We are continuing to anticipate growth; however, that growth has

not been materialising. It has been incredibly stable. The extra relocatables and the social spaces and learning spaces that have gone in there will definitely see us through at least the next few years.

MR HANSON: Is there any understanding of why that growth has not occurred? Are students choosing to go to non-government schools or going out of area? What is happening?

Ms Efthymiades: The college enrolments are a bit more fluid because students go where the colleges have particular emphases or strengths. It is the sector with by far the highest proportion of out-of-area enrolments, but there are curriculum reasons for accessing those enrolments. So it really just typifies that. But, because of the burgeoning population, we do monitor it particular, but it is playing out fine so far.

MR HANSON: How many relocatables have you got there now, in terms of demountable classrooms?

Ms Berry: There are four new ones with eight learning spaces. I am not sure whether there others besides those four.

MR HANSON: How many have we got in total?

Mr Matthews: At that particular campus, I think that is all of them, Mr Hanson. But, if that is not correct, I will provide additional information after the hearing.

MR HANSON: Is there capacity to grow further? Is there space, if you need to?

Mr Matthews: The space is tight in the Gungahlin College campus. There is absolutely no doubt about that, and we have worked very closely with the principal and the school community. The relocatable units are on a tennis court but there is a good level of proximity and amenity for the school to do their timetabling and their class.

We are monitoring the situation, as Ms Efthymiades said, in the lead-up to the second college opening. Obviously, that new college will have initial capacity for up to 800 students on day 1. That will relieve the enrolment pressure on the current Gungahlin College campus. We are reasonably confident that we have got the infrastructure in place for the next couple of years at least, as Ms Efthymiades said. But we do look at it year on year, and it is one of the schools that is on my list, and we do go out and talk to the principal and the community and check to make sure that the infrastructure is appropriate.

MS LAWDER: I wanted to speak a bit about teacher numbers, including attraction and retention. Can you tell me how many teachers have joined this year in the ACT government education system?

Mr Matthews: Ms Lawder, as you know, we report in these hearings on a financial year basis, and schools operate on a calendar year basis, and that is one of the factors with our numbers. But, if we look at the actual difference between the last two financial years, or the annual reports, there have been another 126 staff between what

was reported in the 2021 annual report and what is reported in the 2022-23 annual report. In all of the annual reports, there is a breakdown of that workforce profile by things like gender but also classification. So, within that breakdown in the annual report, there is a breakdown of school leader numbers and classroom teacher numbers, for example.

MS LAWDER: Is that new people joining? Is that 126 more taking into account those people who have left or is it just that 126 have joined but another number might also have left?

Mr Matthews: That is a net number, Ms Lawder. That is between one year and the other. But, of course, as you point out, that does involve people leaving and people arriving.

MS LAWDER: How many separations were there in the two annual report periods?

Mr Matthews: Again, I might ask my colleague, Mr Ackland, to come and help me if we need further details. But, again, in the annual report we do report on the separation rate every year. What we have reported on in this annual report is that our separation rate was a bit higher than it has been in the past, and there are a range of reasons for that.

We have certainly found in a post-COVID environment that many people postponed decisions around retirement or taking longer-term leave and all those sorts of things and some of that been brought forward. We have also done some technical work around something which is called forfeiture of office. If you are no longer working but you have not resigned, you are still technically on the books. We worked through a number of those matters, and what that did was increase our reported separation rate in the last annual report. The indication certainly is that, since that time, our separation rate is easing off and going back towards more historical levels.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned post-COVID and that there are a range of reasons. What were the top three reasons for separations?

Mr Matthews: I can give a general impression, Ms Lawder. Obviously, if you wanted us to do a bit more analysis, we have some exit data from teachers but not everybody does complete an exit survey. The sorts of things we look at include the age of the person—so if they are towards the end of their career and are looking at retiring or transitioning, versus younger staff.

There is no doubt that there are a range of reasons why, one of which are those personal decisions that I am sure we have all experienced through and after COVID. There is certainly some additional pressure felt by teachers in the workplace, and that has been represented by the union publicly and in other sorts of forums like the national work that is currently taking place on teacher recruitment and shortages. There are range of different factors that go into this, and I would suggest that that is broadly representative of it, as well as some individual—

MS LAWDER: Perhaps you could take it on notice: what are the top three most common reasons? You have given a range, but I am interested in the most common

ones. If you do not have that right this moment—

Mr Matthews: Ms Lawder, we can see what we can provide, but it will not be complete data, as I was referring to earlier.

MS LAWDER: We know that next year there may be higher demand in the early education section. We talked a bit about early education in a previous hearing. Will that affect the number of teachers or educators that you are going to need next year? How many more will you need next year?

Mr Matthews: The way that we calculate our requirements for teachers is through the Teacher Attraction Retention Plan, which has been tabled in the Assembly, and we report on in each financial year. At a very general level, we have a ratio of one teacher for every 13.3 students. That is a general average across our system, and that represents the overall numbers.

The requirements in different sectors, and also with different subject areas and specialities, can vary, of course, from year to year. So there are details behind that. What we do is essentially take student enrolment numbers and then multiply that by the 13.3 to have a target, and that is essentially our minimum requirement. That is what we are looking to recruit to be able to staff at that agreed ratio. The ACT student-to-teacher ratio is very competitive nationally. It is equal to or better, generally, than the other states and territories. Teacher-student ratios are important, but, of course, there are a whole lot of other factors involved.

Ms Haire: I might just also cover the part of the question that you asked, Ms Lawder, about the impact of the three-year-old preschool. As discussed at the hearing on Monday, in the ACT, four-year-old preschool is part of the public school system and the teachers in that system are employed by the Education Directorate and are part of the calculations that Mr Matthews has spoken about. However, the program for three-year-old universal preschool is being delivered through the existing early childhood education and care services. The staff are already in place in those services, and the additional funding will support those services to employ more staff, or different staff, if they are needed. Ms Efthymiades, did you want to speak more about that?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes; only to say that they are not our staff; they are employed by the broader sector. That is why they are not in our count.

MS LAWDER: We spoke earlier about the additional 126 teachers who have joined from one annual report to the other. What has been the progress generally in attracting teachers or educators during this year or the next coming year, given the inquiry and the report that we have had since last year?

Ms Berry: I will get Mr Matthews to get the correct data on the moment in time that we are at as far as the recruitment of teachers, the number of positions that we still need to fill et cetera and just talk about the program of work that the ACT government Education Directorate, schoolteachers, and the Education Union are doing in response to the teacher workforce shortage report, which was delivered to me and accepted by me in November, I think, last year.

We have been working on what things we need to do to address ongoing recruitment for teachers into the ACT as well as what we are doing around working on work reduction issues that have also been raised as part of those issues. The directorate has a continuous recruitment program, which occurs on an ongoing basis monthly, I think. For example, today we have opened up a recruitment for the inclusion coaches—which Mr Hanson might have some questions on—that will be delivered in Tuggeranong, but we can talk about that as another issue. But they continually, monthly, have a recruitment campaign out in the community and across the country, and I think internationally as well, to encourage teachers to come and work here in the ACT.

We have a great work agreement that we have just finalised this year with the Education Union, really good working conditions and a great city to live in. So, in my view, we have a head start and a great education system to be part of. Certainly what we hear when we hear from people who move to the ACT from other jurisdictions is that they have chosen Canberra because they have heard such great things about working in our public schools.

We continue to work with schools and senior leaders around how we can facilitate appointments through networking and early career engagement—so beginning teachers—and also encouraging people who are working within our schools or within different sectors who might want to take up education as a career or who want to change careers and become a teacher within our schools. New Zealand is another area that we are focusing on as far as recruitment and continuing to work with local and interstate universities to engage as soon as we possibly can graduate teachers to ensure that they get the chance to consider and choose our public schools as a place to work in following their education through their degree qualifications. Mr Matthews, do you have the actual numbers?

Mr Matthews: I do, Minister. As of 7 November, the directorate had 52 vacant teaching positions, of which 31 were permanent. When I gave evidence in the budget estimates in July this year, that number was 111. So that number does go up and down a bit. It is a very competitive environment to be recruiting for teachers. I think everybody knows that now. It is a national issue and ministers and officials are working very strongly on the pipeline, because one of the effects we have seen over the past few years is a reduction of students enrolling in initial teacher education. So the pipeline of people that go into universities and therefore graduate and then come into the profession has not matched the requirements of the growing systems across the country.

So there is a whole lot of work that needs to be done. The minister has provided a really good overview of some of the local strategies that we are using. Ultimately, we want to be an employer of choice; we want to value our workforce; and we want them to be well remunerated and supported. We are also doing systemic work on workload issues. As part of our agreement with the Australian Education Union, through the enterprise agreement, is a Sustainable Workload Committee. I would say that is a nation-leading process at this stage in terms of the way that the principals, the union and the employer are working together to really look at the drivers of workload. There are really complex issues there around what is creating workload for teachers, but it is

really very much at the heart of making teaching an attractive profession.

The minister also referred to nabbing those graduates that do turn up. We have been doing early offers to students and we have been utilising the permit to teach arrangements that exist under the Teacher Quality Institute to again support trainee teachers to be able to work in our schools. There are a whole bunch of strategies. I am sure you know that I could go on about this for some time. So, if you would like any further information, please let me know.

MS LAWDER: I asked how many teachers had left this year and you talked about some of the reasons, but I failed to write down the number of teachers that have left this year.

Mr Matthews: Do you have that information, Mr Ackland?

Mr Ackland: I have a percentage. The percentage separation rate was 7.3 per cent, as reported in the annual report. But, as Mr Matthews said, we have already seen a reduction in that number, because that number was higher due to the administrative process undertaken by the directorate for forfeiture of office.

MS LAWDER: Just so I can compare apples with apples, is there a number for that 7.3 per cent, or can you give me a percentage for the 126 net increase?

Mr Matthews: We will have to take that one on notice, Minister, to give you an exact FTE number of teachers who have left.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

Ms Berry: If you could indulge me for a moment longer, Chair and Ms Lawder: the national campaign on recruitment in the teaching space has been a really powerful message to the community. I do not know if you have had the chance to go online, but there is a website, bethatteacher.gov.au, which tells the stories and experiences of inspiring teachers and students' relationships with teachers and why they felt inspired and why teachers do what they do and why they love their job.

One of the teachers in the ACT who is part of that program is Mr Sam Davies. He is at Lake G Senior Secondary College. He said that we should talk more about the value of this job and how enjoyable it is and how much more enjoyable being a teacher is than some of the hard things that come with it. In fact, while we were standing there, one of the students in his class decided at that moment that they were going to be a teacher and decided to participate in the interviews and everything as well, because he was listening to Sam Davies telling his story.

Those stories are really inspiring. When you hear them, if it does not bring a tear to your eye I do not know what will. We all remember the teachers who have inspired us to get to wherever we wanted to be, and hearing these stories and making that connection with what teaching really is and what it means to people and how it changes lives is really inspiring. So I encourage you to get onto that website for a good news story. It is a really powerful tool as a nation that we are using to encourage people to choose teaching as a career.

MR HANSON: You said the separation rate was 7.3 per cent. I am just looking at page 215 in the annual report where it says the separation rate increased to 7.9 per cent. What is the difference between the 7.3 per cent that you are saying and the 7.9 per cent figure in the annual report?

Mr Ackland: Mr Hanson, on page 216, you will see the 7.3 that I was referring to. I was referring specifically to classroom teachers, which I thought was the question that was asked.

MR HANSON: Right. So 7.9 is overall staff?

Mr Ackland: That is correct, yes.

MR HANSON: And 7.3 is classroom teachers.

Mr Ackland: That is correct.

MR HANSON: Great. That explains that; thanks. On page 215, in the second and third paragraph down, it refers to a decrease in the paid workforce, a decrease of 110, but that the FTE has increased. So you have got less people but more FTE. Does that mean more vacancies or more part-time employees? What does that mean?

Ms Haire: That is right, Mr Hanson; it is about the fractions of work that people use. It is easier to talk about the FTE because that is the actual job. I will ask Mr Matthews to explain. But we do use both FTE and headcount across all of our tables just to try to make that a bit clearer—the difference between the people and the positions.

MR HANSON: Sure, positions without people in them or positions that are only filled an hour a week or something. But you have less people than you did. Is that a reduction in teachers or is it admin staff or—

Ms Haire: No; we have actually got an increase. I will ask Mr Matthews to explain better than I just have, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: It says here you have 110 less employees.

Ms Haire: It also says in the following sentence that we have got 126.5 more FTE. That is the difference between a headcount and the full-time positions.

Mr Matthew: Again, as Ms Haire just explained, we report on headcount, which is numbers of bodies and full-time equivalent, which essentially means that we do not double count part-time staff, if you like. Of course, we support flexible work arrangements in a sector like education. It is a really critical part of our workforce management to support people to work part-time—people returning from paternity and maternity leave and the like.

In general, though, one of our workforce strategies is to provide secure work. So, wherever possible, we are working through a process of converting casual and temporary staff into full-time staff. That is a really critical retention strategy. Of

course, if part-time workers want to work additional hours, we would support that as well. So this is all essentially about flexible workforce management.

MR HANSON: Let us go to page 208. You said that there had been an increase in the number of teachers, but it says that, as at 21 June 2023, the directorate’s teaching workforce—that is, classroom teachers and school leaders—represents a decrease of 29.1 FTE in a calendar year. You were saying before that there had been an increase in teachers, but the annual report reflects a decrease in FTE, which is what you say is what you use as your metric. So why has there been a reduction of 30 FTE in teachers?

Mr Matthews: Mr Hanson, I will correct the record if needed but my earlier comments were about the directorate’s FTE count. So I did not make that comment about teaching. When I mentioned the actual outcome between 2021, 2022 and 2022-23 that was an overall directorate, not—

MR HANSON: Sure; but I think Ms Lawder’s question was about teachers, not about other staff.

Mr Matthews: We do have that breakdown, but I just wanted to correct the record if there was any doubt about what I mentioned earlier.

MR HANSON: Sure. The focus here is, I think, on teachers and classroom teachers, and there has been a decrease of 30. What is the explanation for that and how does that then relate to a workforce strategy that is meant to be recruiting and retaining?

Mr Matthews: We have had a decrease in enrolments in 2023. As I mentioned before, the way we determine our staffing numbers is by numbers of enrolments versus that ratio of 13.3 students for every teacher. That is the minimum requirement, as I said, in terms of the staffing of our schools. In terms of teaching numbers, I think you would acknowledge that we are talking about relatively small variations as well, but that is against the enrolment requirements of the individual schools.

MR HANSON: So, because there has been a decrease in enrolments, you are saying that you have then actively reduced the teaching workforce by 30?

Mr Matthews: I think it is fair to say I did not say that, Mr Hanson. What I said is that we set a target and a requirement through the attraction and retention plan. We will recruit as many teachers as we can. Again, it is a standing offer with the community—

MR HANSON: Yes, okay, there are enrolments and numbers per enrolment, but I thought the strategy was to increase more teachers, not to then try to justify a reduction by saying, “Well, enrolments have gone down.” The point is that we are trying to increase teacher numbers and teacher numbers have gone backwards. Is there an explanation for that?

Ms Berry: I think there are a couple of explanations for those numbers, for the 30 FTE. One of them would be the enrolment decrease. Some of those teaching positions might be specialist positions and, correct me if I am wrong, officials, but

positions—

MR HANSON: But Mr Matthews just said that the enrolments are not related to this. We are not decreasing the efforts on recruitment or retention because of enrolments, so what have reduced enrolments actually got to do with the fact that we are reducing the number of teachers?

Ms Berry: If you will give me a chance to answer, I said it could be because in a school there might not be a full class that needs an additional teacher. We might be able to describe that perfectly for you. The other reason for that could be some specialist teacher positions which I am aware of, and which I think you may be aware of, Mr Hanson, that have been unable to be filled. Those are particular positions like language teachers where we have not been able to find a teacher who is skilled in delivering a particular language. There could be some other reasons. We could probably take that on notice and really identify what that means, but it is really a—

MR HANSON: But, Minister, we had a taskforce set up that was aiming to increase the number of teachers, in terms of recruitment and retention, and you are saying it might be because of enrolments and it might be because of some other reasons. It is not working; right? I mean, what is going wrong?

Ms Berry: I do not think that is the case. I think what we are—

MR HANSON: That is what you said.

Ms Berry: No. You are completely misrepresenting what I said, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: No. That is a quote; it is not a misrepresentation.

Ms Berry: No; you are misrepresenting me. We are trying to provide some information on a particular number in the annual report and we can say that there could be a range of reasons why there are particular shortages over a period of time. The decreasing number does not mean that there is a shortage of teachers within schools per se. It is just a decrease in the number of staff that we have over a period of time.

MR HANSON: You went to the last election with an announcement that you were going to increase the number of teachers by 400 and what we are seeing is an actual reduction in the number of teachers. So there is a bit of a dis-link going on here.

Ms Haire: I might ask Mr Matthews to cover that question about the election commitment, Mr Hanson. Mr Matthews, could you also explain the methodology behind the attraction and retention plan, which I think goes a long way to answering the questions that Mr Hanson is asking and demonstrates the value and the purpose of the work that you have led, in conjunction with the Australian Education Union, which goes to how we calculate the number of teachers that are required. But the first point—

MR HANSON: But the point is that we have all agreed in the Assembly and in announcements that we are going to increase the number of teachers.

Ms Haire: If I may, the—

MR HANSON: We have got the strategy to increase them.

Ms Haire: Yes, and we have increased them.

Ms Berry: Just a moment. Mr Hanson. When you interrupt like that it is hard for the officials to gather themselves to get the detail to you that you want. Could you just let Mr Matthews answer the question in as much detail as possible, if we can. If we need to take any detail on notice, we will and we will provide that information. Mr Matthews, can you talk to the numbers that we have been aiming to recruit and the numbers that we talked about earlier in this session that we calculate based on enrolments?

Mr Matthews: Again, I will put my colleague Daniel on notice about the attraction and retention plan. The government's commitment was "to hire more than 400 teachers and support staff for ACT public schools over the term of the government". Between the last pay period in June 2020 and the last pay period in June 2023—a three-year period—there has been a net increase of 521 staff in the Education Directorate, of which 116 are teachers and 250 are school assistants. In that three-year period, the net increase to staff has been 521. That number does change and vary. I explained before that enrolments do drive the number of staffing requirements within schools, but over that three-year period that has been the net increase against that commitment to hire more than 400 teachers and support staff for ACT public schools.

Ms Berry: I would note that in the paragraph that you are referring to, Mr Hanson, these numbers are a single point in time and they do fluctuate, because of all the reasons that we talked about earlier, in answer to Ms Lawder's previous question.

Mr Matthews: I gave that evidence that the number decreased, from 111 to 52, between July and this year, so the numbers do change. Again, this is against a total teacher requirement of around 3,800, so we are talking about a relatively small number of variations in that workforce.

MR HANSON: Sure, but you have a teachers' union that is saying that schools are desperately short of people and we have all agreed that we need more teachers, and this annual report reflects a decrease of 30 teachers, so—

Ms Berry: No. I just met with the teachers' union yesterday and they have been very pleased with the way the teacher shortage workforce work is occurring and the really strong collaboration to try to overcome the issues. It is a national concern that we are all trying to grapple with, but we have certainly put the conditions in place in the ACT to make this an attractive place to work. We are not backing away from our responsibilities and we are making sure that, whatever happens, our schools are as fully staffed as they need to be for children to get a good education across our system. That has continued across a number of challenges, and another one that has arrived on our doorstep, another wave of COVID, which is also providing other challenges within our school community. We are doing everything we can within the realms of possibility and we will not stop from doing that. We have put a whole lot of—

MR HANSON: You are saying that you are doing everything you can and you have got a report, but it is—

THE CHAIR: Just let me jump in for one second. People are jumping in on top of each other on both sides of the table. I am happy to let this debate continue. There is no time limit on this, so I do not think we need to jump in on top of each other. That being said, Ms Lawder has asked for a supplementary question.

MR HANSON: Sure.

MS LAWDER: I just want to follow up. Mr Matthews talked about understanding the single point of time and, in the past three years, a net increase of 521.

Mr Matthews: That is right; yes.

MS LAWDER: How many departures or separations were there in that three years, as a point-in-time number?

Mr Matthews: I do not have that for every year, Ms Lawder. We can get that, but—

MS LAWDER: The comparable three years that you just quoted the 521 for.

Mr Matthews: Yes. But, Ms Lawder, of course we would expect some separations and turnover, not the least because each of us wants to retire at some point in our lives.

MS LAWDER: Sure. I am just interested in the context. Thanks.

Mr Matthews: Mr Ackland may have supplementary information going to any of those earlier questions.

Mr Ackland: I do. On that particular question that you have just asked, Ms Lawder, I can confirm that—and this was published in the original attraction and retention plan—there are the separation rates for the previous three years, specific to classroom teachers, within there. In 2022 there were 201, in 2021 there were 154 and in 2020 there were 165. That is on page 5 of the attraction and retention plan.

To come back to Mr Hanson's question about the reduction of 30 and the way that the enrolment impacts that overall number, I can confirm that—and this was in the annual report as well—the attraction and retention plan had originally projected, based on enrolments, that we would need 3,841 FTE this year. That has been revised to 3,801, so at a system level there is a reduced need of 40 classroom teachers across the system. To your point, Mr Hanson, we are still 9.1 FTE lower in the annual report, so we have reported 3,791.9, which is 9.1 less than the system need.

MR HANSON: Do you have a target for next year, for both retention, to get it down from the 7.3 to something, and also for the number of teachers that we are seeking to, in net terms, I presume, increase?

Mr Ackland: We have projected targets, but as I have just explained, Mr Hanson, the

difference between those projected targets this year has been 40 classroom teachers. Again, those numbers are described within the attraction and retention plan. For 2024, based on the enrolment growth that was projected, noting that that is going to change, there is the overall need of 3,915. If that information is wrong, I will be happy to provide more, but that was what was published within the attraction and retention plan.

MR HANSON: Can I follow up on the enrolment issue, then, because obviously it is interconnected. There has been a decrease in enrolments. I remember that we discussed this last year as well.

Ms Rule: For the rate, yes. Was it the rate or the actual numbers?

MR HANSON: The actual numbers of students projected to be enrolled, which relates to the ratio for teachers and so and so. Where has that decrease occurred? Is there any change from that decrease, because that occurred last year as well, didn't it? There has been a sort of ongoing decrease in enrolments.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes; that is right. There were two years. There is quite a lot of information on this from the budget estimates hearings that we had in July. There were two consecutive years where the number of little people that were ready to flow into preschool was lower, to the tune of about 500 and then a couple of hundred. So the net change in public school enrolments between 2022 and 2023—almost all accounted for in preschool and kindergarten, which are those two years—was 532. If you divide that by the 13.3 kids per teacher ratio that Mr Matthews shared, that is exactly 40 teachers, so it exactly explains the difference that Mr Ackland mentioned.

MR HANSON: Have you seen any increases or reductions in enrolments in other school years or is that all—

Ms Efthymiades: No, it is preschool and kindergarten essentially. While we do not have the final numbers—they will not be known until the next February census—we already know we have more confirmed enrolments for 2024. There has been the uptick that we anticipated because the number of preschool aged children has picked up again. So it is as we projected.

MR HANSON: Margaret Hendry School has been a school with a particular focus, given some of the reports there. Can you give me a bit of an update on how that is progressing?

Ms Berry: Yes, I can. Mr Huxley can provide some information about what we have been working on with Margaret Hendry School and their school community.

Mr Huxley: Thanks, Minister. I have read the privilege statement. We have been doing a lot of work at Margaret Hendry School this year, in response to the special purpose review which occurred, and which is now publicly available on the school's website. We have added additional deputy principals to the school. They are, in effect, leading a significant amount of change at the school that was foreshadowed in the report. We are focusing on two key areas for those additional school leaders: positive behaviours for learning and literacy practices in the school. They are the two major areas of focus of the work so far this year.

We have implemented literacy blocks across the school. They identified, through the analysis of the data that was occurring at the school, that the transition between home and school, especially for the younger children, was a point of issue at the school. Some of the behaviours were escalating at that point, so having those literacy blocks at the start of the day, with the structure that the teachers are providing, has been a really good transition point which has also been—

MR HANSON: It is working?

Mr Huxley: It is having an effect. We are seeing, through the classroom data that is being reported by the teachers, that they are seeing progress with students in those literacy blocks. That has been supported by ongoing professional learning for teachers to make sure that we can upskill and make consistent the quality of practice across that period of time. One of the deputy principals is leading that improvement area across the school. It is in its early stages, Mr Hanson, but we are seeing and hearing from the school the positive impact of those additional supports.

MR HANSON: Are we going okay in terms of recruiting staff to that school?

Mr Huxley: It is an ongoing focus for us. It is definitely one of the schools that is getting priority assistance from the directorate for recruitment and ongoing activity in ensuring that the school is staffed for next year.

MR HANSON: Have we got enough staff or have we got vacancies?

Mr Huxley: At this time of year we are always in full recruitment. It is common for schools to foreshadow their estimated vacancies for next year, and Margaret Hendry is one of those schools that we are prioritising placement to.

MR HANSON: How many vacancies are there?

Mr Huxley: I would have to get back to you on that. I will take that on notice.

MR HANSON: Could you? I have heard that the school is having a bit of trouble attracting staff because of reports and other issues, I suppose. What is the plan to check the progress on whether this is working or not? Is there another report that then comes out?

Mr Huxley: We offered differentiated support for schools that are receiving this additional support, Margaret Hendry being one of them. The Director of School Improvement is overseeing the implementation of the support plan with the school. They are on site at the school every week. They have a meeting with the principal and the leadership team to assess how the implementation plan is tracking, and then they report back centrally in the office and we have internal reporting back up and through every term.

MR HANSON: When you have looked at Margaret Hendry, is it an outlier and is there something specific that has gone wrong, or is it consistent with a number of other schools? What is the issue?

Mr Huxley: I think it is a number of schools. I do not want to make generalisations, but when we look at some of the factors that can impact a school, geographic location can be a factor. It is hard to picture in Canberra, but schools that are on the periphery of the city are often harder to attract people to, and that has been a factor in a number of schools. Obviously, in the context of a national teacher shortage, while generally we are doing well in those individual schools, they can feel that more than others because of their geographic location. Often it is also because the last few years have been a challenging time for schools generally. It is not uncommon for us to identify where schools need additional supports, conduct a review to assess that and look at what additional supports we can help the school with.

MR HANSON: Sure. Can I ask about Calwell and how that is going, please?

Mr Huxley: Calwell High School is seeing a significant improvement. We have seen some very good data on the change from those supports that have been put in place for Calwell High School. We have seen a significant turnaround in staff wellbeing and perceptions at the school. We are definitely seeing that beginning to turn for students as well, in terms of their engagement. We have seen a reduction in significant incidents and overall have had very positive feedback from the school in its current trajectory, post the work that we have been putting in place at the school. A very big factor in that was increased student voice and getting the students involved in the decision-making, in the governance of the school, and making sure their voice was heard. Walking through Calwell High School today you can definitely see the impact of those additional supports and the work that is under way.

MR HANSON: Right; so the number of incidents have dropped?

Mr Huxley: We have seen a reduction in significant incidents at the school, absolutely, and we are definitely seeing that it is on the right trajectory. It is still relatively early days for Calwell High School, but what we have seen has been very positive in the time that those supports have been in place.

MR HANSON: More generally, across other school communities, is the issue of school violence being monitored? Obviously, it has been an issue. Is there a reduction in reports or an increase?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, I will ask Ms Kate McMahon to join us, who is the executive group manager responsible for our Safe@School Taskforce.

Ms Berry: Whilst Ms McMahon is setting up, I want to add something about the work of the Child Development Service. This was in part of yesterday's hearings, Ms Lawder. It is one of the programs that we have been piloting, working with the Community Services Directorate and our child and family centres, and within some of our schools. We have piloted a program at Margaret Hendry School where students have been assessed as needing allied health screening supports, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech pathology. Those students, through the pilot program working across the Community Services Directorate and Education, have been getting supports in those areas. There are scheduled assessments and further supports being provided to them.

That is one of the schools, as well as Evatt Primary School, where we have been piloting this expanded Child Development Service support by embedding those supports within our schools. Schools may have a number of students that do not have the supports they might need to help them with their education, and to help the school understand those additional needs as well. That, I think, has been also contributing to the change that has been happening at Margaret Hendry School, and with the families and others at Evatt Primary School.

Ms McMahon: I have read and understood the privilege statement. As much as we still do have negative incidents happening in our schools, we are seeing that the severity or the impact on staff is decreasing, and that we are able to understand and monitor those behaviours to a much greater extent. I think I explained last time that we have new dashboards and new training for our schools who participate in Positive Behaviours for Learning. That allows analysis of what is happening on the school sites, to be able to determine what are the interventions and what are the structural changes that may need to occur at the school to support ongoing changes in behaviour.

MR HANSON: Have you seen an increase or a decrease in suspensions?

Ms McMahon: It depends on the year levels. We have seen a decrease in suspensions for primary, a decrease for colleges and a slight increase for high schools.

MR HANSON: Is there a suspension policy that is directorate-wide or is it managed at school level?

Ms McMahon: There is a directorate-wide suspension policy, which is currently being reviewed and updated through consultation.

MR HANSON: When will that be updated? When does that get formally released?

Ms McMahon: I am not sure of the date. It will be early next year, though. There is an interim policy in place, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Is there? Could you provide that to the committee?

Ms Haire: Certainly. It is available publicly, but we can provide it, very happily. The Education Act was amended last year, as you might recall, through the Assembly, in relation to suspensions. Following that, an interim policy was put in place. Throughout this year, we have been consulting with stakeholders, teachers, principals and parents to turn that interim policy into a final policy to reflect the changes to the act that came into effect on 22 December 2022.

MR HANSON: Is there going to be much change from the interim policy?

Ms Haire: I might ask Ms Angela Spence to come forward.

MS LAWDER: Mr Huxley, sorry; I have a supplementary.

Ms Haire: I think that means you have to stay there, Mark. We are just gradually

filling up these chairs! Ms Spence has been leading the work with stakeholders, teachers, principals and parents to look at the interim policy, which came into place on 22 December, and to test its application. We have been working to see what changes, if any, and what modifications might be made to that policy, with the goal of having a final policy in place for the start of the school year 2024. Ms Spence, would you like to describe that process you have been going through?

Ms Spence: Thank you, and I want to acknowledge the privilege statement. The interim policy is in place currently, and we have been going through a consultation process with all the stakeholders, as Ms Haire described. The final policy, which is in the final stages of consultation at this particular point in time, is really addressing the tools and supports for our schools and our community to understand the intent of the legislative change that came into effect, as described previously.

In order to strengthen the implementation of that policy, it was really important, as part of that consultation process, to help everybody understand the importance of all of the decisions and considerations that need to be put in place before a decision-maker, ultimately, makes a suspension decision. As we have progressed through the consultation, that is a key area, as part of the final policy and procedures and supporting tools that have really been strengthened, to help a decision-maker and help, obviously, our parents and young people understand the way in which those decisions are made.

MR HANSON: Who makes the final decision? Is that the principal of the school?

Ms Spence: The principal of the school has the delegated responsibility for the decision.

MR HANSON: Do they have to consult? Have they got some mandated consultation as part of that process with the classroom teacher? How does that work?

Ms Spence: Before they make a decision, they absolutely have to gather a whole heap of evidence. They need to have an opportunity to work with the young person and the parent, carer or representative of that particular young person, to understand the context and what might be going on, as part of a decision-making process. That has to happen before a decision is made, and that is probably the area that has really been strengthened.

A principal is required to make contact with a family—a parent—as part of their due diligence, to make sure it is fair and equitable and to gain a perspective from the family around what may be contributing to a behaviour that is considered unsafe or causing some kind of risk to the safe and inclusive learning environment at the school. That is a part of the decision-making process.

MR HANSON: That is a requirement to consult; but, fundamentally, the principal can make the decision autonomously in the sense that they do not have to get agreement from the directorate, or a parent does not have to sign-off or anything like that?

Ms Spence: Up to 20 days the principal has delegation to make that decision. It is

consultation to gather the relevant information that may inform the decision. Anything beyond a 20-day suspension needs to come into the directorate for the director-general, who has the delegation for that.

MR HANSON: When that child or student is suspended, what happens? Is there some action from the school or the directorate to monitor what is happening with that student so they are not just roaming wild? Or is there some sort of control on that student?

Ms Spence: The duty of care, of course, during a suspension period sits with the parent or carer. There is an obligation under the policy to provide a continued educational offering while the suspension is taking place. As for a duty of care, Mr Hanson, I am not sure if that is what you are implying. The school does not have a duty of care responsibility for a young person who is suspended, but they do have an obligation to provide continuing education.

The other thing that the school and the directorate are responsible for is to use that time to review appropriate plans and to look at what it would take to ensure a safe return to school so that young person is engaged and can engage back in the learning safely.

MR HANSON: Beyond the 20 days, it then goes up to the directorate. Who has got the delegated power for that—to suspend someone beyond 20 days?

Ms Spence: Suspensions beyond 20 days are with the director-general as the delegate. It cannot be delegated to a school principal.

MR HANSON: How long have you got? Can you suspend indefinitely, or do you have a period, or—

Ms Haire: I would have to check that, Mr Hanson. The reason I would have to check that is that I have not had to use that power at all—I am very happy to say.

MR HANSON: Which is good to hear.

Ms Haire: There have been no requests for suspensions of greater than 20 days, which I think is a testament to the work of teachers and principals in managing risky situations and supporting children and families really well. It would be a very serious matter for someone to request a suspension period for that time period.

Ms Berry: I am having great difficulty recalling any suspension of that length of period since I have been the minister, so it would be extraordinarily rare.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary, Ms Lawder?

MS LAWDER: I just wanted to go back to some comments we heard about Margaret Hendry School and the special purpose review. You mentioned that there were some additional deputy principals brought in. Do they have any classroom teaching responsibilities?

Mr Huxley: Deputies do have a level of classroom teaching responsibility, but it really depends upon the school and how the leadership structure is operating with the teaching workforce. They often do carry some sort of teaching load as part of that work—

MS LAWDER: But in the Margaret Hendry example?

Mr Huxley: It is usually less than it would be in another school, because of the reform works and the improvements that we are asking them to do.

MS LAWDER: If we found in the report that there was, on average, four FTE short in the staffing level, what is the effect on the classrooms? Are there more combined classes? Are there bigger classroom sizes? What happens?

Mr Huxley: Schools will get what their operational needs are normally, but then they adjust that every day depending upon the availability of staffing on a day-to-day basis. So it is common for a school to use a range of supports and controls—

MS LAWDER: But in the Margaret Hendry example?

Mr Huxley: Margaret Hendry would use a range of supports and controls, as other schools do, which could be the combining of classes, it could be access to remote learning in larger group sizes, it could be access to the library for groups of students. They would be common strategies that a range of schools would use.

MS LAWDER: With the additional deputy principals and their classroom load, although perhaps less than previously, how much has that contributed towards reducing that feeling that staff described of being overwhelmed, which I presume is perhaps related to bigger classrooms and combined classrooms? How much of a contribution is the additional teaching time from the deputy principals?

Mr Huxley: The work the deputies have been doing has actually been around looking at the structures, the processes and the systems at the school, and the staff have been feeding back to us that that has been really effective. So it is not so much the relief from teaching that the deputies have been covering; it is the additional leadership capability they work on. Are the resources being utilised to their full advantage? Is the timetable optimised to make sure we get the best use of the available teaching staff across the physically different locations? Do we happen to have the need for more peer-coaching supports for teachers who might need to be upskilled, if they are feeling a little bit overwhelmed? And actually doing that to ensure they have got the current skills to execute the sorts of practices in the classroom that they are asked to. That has really been the impact of those additional deputies—on the structures, the processes and the supports for other staff in the school.

MS LAWDER: I could keep asking questions, but I will stop there.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I was hoping the committee could get an update on the inclusion reforms that were funded in the most recent budget to strengthen the inclusion of students with disability in public schools.

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question, Mr Pettersson. In the 2023-24 budget there was funding provided to Education to provide the engagement of eight inclusion coaches, which is what I talked about earlier in the session—that this was a major announcement of this year’s budget with \$9 million invested into this. We started the advertisements for those positions today, so we are hoping to have those filled by the end of the year for the start of next year.

The inclusion coaches will be led by a senior inclusion coach, who will work with Tuggeranong schools, so we are, kind of, piloting this inclusion approach in our Tuggeranong school network in 2024 with the hope that we can make sure that we are getting it right and that it is working appropriately, and we can then expand it to other schools and colleges.

The work of the inclusion coaches is with schools around transitions and careers—transitions for Tuggeranong high schools and colleges. It provides professional learning in universal design for learning, in managing complex behaviours and in understanding neurodiversity—so particularly with those families. We have heard that they are really wanting us to focus on their young people’s transitions across the years, and particularly into employment and what they do after they finish school.

They will form formal partnerships with our special schools and local public schools to make sure that those programs and practices are shared, and the expertise in delivering education across those school systems is shared and everybody gets to understand the best possible practices—and that, of course, is around working to develop new strengths and needs-based funding models for students with disabilities.

We have had really good feedback so far from the disability reference group—the education disability reference group—in understanding what this program is going to look like and what it will mean for students in Tuggeranong to start with. It is part of the inclusive education strategy, which we hope to release before the end of this year, but this funding gets us going with the work that we have been asked to do to support these students and other students across Tuggeranong. Did anyone have anything more to add to that, or have I covered it well enough?

THE CHAIR: These are new roles. What sorts of experiences or qualifications would make someone a suitable candidate?

Ms Berry: Now somebody else can answer that.

Ms Efthymiades: I am happy to pick that one up. The coaches’ experience in working with children and young people with disability is obviously going to be key. These are senior-teacher level positions, so we anticipate that there will be multiple pools from which to draw these people. We anticipate that there will be some people that are currently at a senior teacher level within our system who might already be, say, a disability education coordinator within their school, who may be interested in this kind of role.

Likewise, there could be people at classroom teacher level who have had a similar role in their school that may be interested, or maybe they have been working extensively with students with disability within small group programs or connecting

with specialist settings, for example. And we also anticipate there will be interest from outside our public education system, both within the ACT and beyond the ACT. so there are a lot of areas for drawing possibilities.

The expertise is, absolutely, in working with children and young people with disability but also in being able to work with colleagues to uplift capability. They need both: they need to have a disability background, if you like, but also to have the capacity to build the capability with their colleagues and to support them in being able to meet the needs of children and young people.

THE CHAIR: I remember having this conversation in estimates, but I cannot remember if this question was asked or if there was an answer. Is there a particular reason that Tuggeranong is where this is getting launched—sorry, piloted?

Ms Efthymiades: Tuggeranong actually has the highest proportion of students with disability—so, not the highest number, because it is not our largest network, but the highest proportion. I think I did give this answer, so we might check against my earlier words. In Tuggeranong—because, as the minister says, this is, notionally, a pilot, or a model like “test, try learn”—there is some excellent practice in some Tuggeranong schools that we are seeking to build upon. And I have to say, the principals in Tuggeranong have been phenomenal at getting around the table and working together in the co-design approach to say, “Alright, what is the position description going to look like? What processes are we going to go through to work out who gets what?” Because there are different needs. There are schools that might want to work together, because they have common needs, and have one person that they share and those kinds of things.

The Tuggeranong principals have been phenomenal, and I think that is borne out in that it was a good selection because there is already high interest in engagement from those schools overall.

THE CHAIR: Great.

MS LAWDER: I just want to check—I think it was a recommendation from the disability royal commission. Is the ACT government going to close the special schools?

Ms Berry: No, there is no intention for the ACT government to close the specialist schools. That was half of the representatives on the disability royal commission. What we are focusing on is strengthening relationships between our specialist schools and our mainstream schools to share that expert knowledge and expertise and to ensure that all of our children, regardless of their abilities, their backgrounds or where they come from, have a place at their local school—whether that is a mainstream school or a specialist school—and to work with families and students on what best suits them.

THE CHAIR: Any supplementary questions?

MS LAWDER: I want to ask about the literacy review that was agreed on recently. Have you decided who will be conducting the review?

Ms Berry: We are still finalising the people who will be involved in the review. It has to go through a cabinet process, and we will make sure that everybody understands and knows what the review will look like and who will be represented on the panel. We are keen for that work to go ahead. We are trying to find the right people to make sure we have good diversity on the panel to cover all of the issues that we think need to be covered. The intention is that it will be quite short, with a fairly narrow focus, and it will be as concise as we can make it. I think it is for a six-month period. I hope to have it started, at least, regarding whatever needs to be done as far as planning goes, to get the work rolling as soon as possible from the start of next year.

MS LAWDER: There was some talk about extending it to include numeracy. Is that part of the plan?

Ms Berry: Yes. They both go together, so excluding one will not give us fulsome recommendations or ideas.

MS LAWDER: Will there be public hearings?

Ms Berry: Yes, I believe so; or opportunities for the public to engage in the process. That is the plan.

MS LAWDER: Presumably, at the end, which might be six months from—

Ms Berry: In six months; that is the plan.

MS LAWDER: Will the report be publicly available?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: We are heading into an election after that. When will government provide a response, given the proximity to an election?

Ms Berry: I will have to see what the review tells us, and we will provide a response before the election period. But I would not want to promise anything that I cannot deliver.

MS LAWDER: Are you looking to include stakeholders like the Catholic Education Office, the independent school sector, community advocates, parents and students?

Ms Berry: Yes. Everybody who has particular feelings about literacy and numeracy and wants to provide—

MS LAWDER: Mr Hanson, for example.

Ms Berry: Mr Hanson can, of course. It will be open for public submissions, for people to be able to provide their thoughts and ideas on how we can make things even better for our students and our teachers.

THE CHAIR: Can the committee get any details on the literacy champions initiative?

Ms Simmons: In the ACT we have 118 literacy champions. That represents about 88 per cent of our schools P-6, so that is our primary schools. Literacy champions work with schools; they also work in partnership with the directorate. They work in schools to build capability and work with teachers across the school to support strategies and look at the overarching program in relation to literacy in the school. They have a strong relationship with how the professional learning communities work in the school, and that also contributes to the overarching program. Mr Huxley mentioned periods of time when students are undertaking literacy. They contribute to whole-school programs around literacy. I am not sure whether Ms Spence can add anything to that, but that is the role of the literacy champions.

MS LAWDER: Is that another teacher? Who is a literacy champion? Is it a student?

Ms Spence: The literacy champion is an identified literacy expert, so it could be a teacher or it could be a school leader in our schools. They are the champions, so they are what we would call a middle leader with expertise that support the implementation of literacy practices. They are identified and recommended by the school, and our ESO support team in the Education Directorate work with those literacy champions to support the implementation in schools.

MR HANSON: With respect to Farrer Primary School, I have received correspondence and I have forwarded it on to you, Minister, about the fence. Can somebody give me an update on what is going on with the proposal for the fence? If it is going ahead, why, and what consultations occurred with the community?

Ms Berry: Having been at a school myself where a fence was put around the school at the request of the executive schoolteachers and the P&C, I know that this can be an issue about which school communities get particularly vocal, in some cases. Sometimes there are people who are very much on the side of a fence and some people who are very much not on the side of a fence—

MR HANSON: Fence-sitters as well?

Ms Berry: And there are fence-sitters. Generally, the population will agree that the purpose of the fence is for safety of the students, for protecting the school infrastructure as much as possible. It provides a workload reduction for teaching and school staff because it improves their ability to supervise students in a safer and more comprehensive way, when there is a fence around the school.

I know, as I said, that there are people who are particularly opposed, usually smaller groups, and we work really hard with communities to try and bring people together to reach a consensus. Of course, access to school facilities outside school hours, school being the priority, is one of the reasons that communities are concerned about fences. We are piloting a project for access to schools through a PIN pad on a gate that can be accessed outside school hours. The gates can be opened without having to tell anyone, ask anyone for a key or whatever, or they have an automatic opening after school hours so that the school spaces can be accessed by the community.

That, in itself, will provide opportunities for more safety for the infrastructure, where there is more activity and movement around the school by the broader community. It

is almost as though, when you put a fence around something, more people want to access it. That, in itself, provides opportunities for protecting the infrastructure.

With a particular focus on Farrer, Mr Matthews can tell us where that engagement is up to, within that school.

MR HANSON: Before you get to Farrer, you made the point about trialling opening essentially after school hours. Will that be applied retrospectively? I know there are a number of other school sites where fences have gone up and the community cannot access them at any time. At Duffy, which is up the road from me, we used to use those facilities with our kids—the ovals, playgrounds and things like that. It was great. Now it is fenced off and no-one can go in there anymore. Are we going to look at opening that up?

Ms Berry: It is about how we are going to open it. That is why we are piloting a program at Charles Weston School. I think that is the only school at this stage with an automatic opening mechanism. If the gates are closed, you do not have to think that they are locked; the gate will open automatically.

Some schools, for a variety of reasons, have had their assets open to the community for a period of time; maybe something has occurred and they have made the decision to close the gates and keep the school closed. It is not the intention of the Education Directorate for that to be the case going forward. That is why we are trialling this automatic opening and closing of school gates so that the site is accessible but it is closed for periods of time.

MR HANSON: You are only trialling that at Charles Weston, though?

Ms Berry: Yes. Mr Matthews might be able to describe how it works in more detail and give a more technical response.

Mr Matthews: The pressure is on me to give a technical answer then, Minister! Essentially, the dilemma for a school is that they want to protect their assets, and there is the issue of community use. The technology that the minister is talking about means we can automate the opening of the gates so that there is less labour involved.

The Charles Weston example is the live one at the moment, but recently we have been engaging with the Aranda Primary School community as well, and we have reached an agreement with them, as part of the installation of a school fence there, that there will be a number of community access points, with timed gates. Effectively, they can be programmed by the school to open and close at certain hours. There are fail-safe mechanisms in case people get caught on the wrong side of the gates and the like.

It is a way of reducing the manual labour involved in physically unlocking the gates. Once we roll that out a bit more, we will look at the wider application of that. It is about doing anything we can to both increase community access and reduce the workload of our building services officer, who has to hop in the car, drive to the school and open the gates. That is what we are aiming to do.

With Farrer, if I can complete that answer, we have recently finished the community

consultation process. There is a proposal for a school fence that was generated by the school community. That is the way that the process works. The principal, the P&C and the board normally provide a recommendation to the directorate that they would like a fence. We then do community consultation.

In that consultation we have been saying that we are proposing to put in a fence, and looking at issues like design, placement and community access. That closed a week or so ago. From that we will producing a listening report, so we will document and be transparent about all of the community feedback that we have received.

Depending on the response to that, we might do some more targeted consultations, but we would then move to the decision-making part, around saying whether the fence will go ahead or not, and that it will be in this location, with this type of community access. I reiterate that the principal at that school has committed to community access, as part of the proposal to install that fence.

MR HANSON: Do you know whether the principal has raised a concern about wanting a fence in order to protect the students, protect the asset or both? Is it because there are concerns about the kids or the buildings?

Mr Matthews: Principals are primarily, of course, concerned with what happens during school hours. That is their core business, and they have a duty of care to the children, as has been mentioned earlier. Their main motivation is making sure that we can keep children safe. You would be aware, as would all committee members, that we have schools in different locations. Some of them are deep in the suburbs, some are closer to roads, and some have multiple access points or adjoining ovals. There are a lot of different spatial requirements for schools. A fence helps with—

MR HANSON: What about instances of vandalism or—

Mr Matthews: That is not the primary driver there, but the issue around a fence, Mr Hanson, is that it can provide multiple benefits. Obviously, during school hours, it does help to manage who comes on and off the site, and particularly children and the requirement for teachers to supervise children. That does not, of course, get eliminated by having a fence; it just supports that. It helps them to supervise and keep children safe.

After hours, and Aranda is an example that may be referred to, the agreement has been that there will be access to the community after school but in daylight hours. The actual gate will be locked during evenings, and that will also help with asset protection. When we talk about asset protection, that can be graffiti and vandalism, but there are other examples like syringes and broken bottles. All of those sorts of things provide a safety concern or impose on the way that a school can operate.

There is a balance in all of this. Asset protection, of course, is an important part of it, but child safety is the primary thing that most principals are talking about or thinking about when they are thinking about a school fence.

THE CHAIR: I acknowledge that it is a trial. Do you have the opening hours and the closing times for the gates?

Mr Matthews: Are you talking about Aranda, Mr Pettersson?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Matthews: I think that is to be confirmed. Essentially, it is daylight hours. Of course, with daylight saving, that can vary as well. Effectively, it is when the sun sets and when the sun rises. That is the general principle.

THE CHAIR: Can I get an update on the Future of Education Equity Fund? How many families have been assisted this year?

Ms Berry: This has been a hugely successful announcement by the ACT government. We know it is helping people, particularly during a difficult time when people are experiencing real challenges with financial disadvantage and the cost of living is continuing to rise. \$2.8 million has been provided to low income families across this year so far, which is excellent. 4,777 students have accessed the fund, and 2,322 families have been assisted. That is across our whole school system—public, non-government and Catholic schools. The payments are \$750 for high school, year 11 and 12, students, \$500 for primary school students, and \$400 for preschool students attending a preschool attached to an ACT public school.

We are hoping to make a real assessment and unpack all of the ways that families and students have used the fund so that we can understand where the fund is going, and whether it needs to be adjusted or changed in future time frames. We will do that over this year—have a look at where the funding has been going and what it is being used for—and get some feedback from the community about how it is going. Certainly, so far, the feedback that I get from parents in particular about how it has helped them and their families, and particularly their children, to access what they need in their education, has been really great.

THE CHAIR: Could you repeat that for me? How many families have been helped?

Ms Berry: 2,322 families and 4,777 students.

THE CHAIR: Has everyone that has applied received—

Ms Berry: Pretty much everybody. We can get a little more detail from Ms Spence, but I do not think there have been too many knocked back.

Ms Spence: As part of the application process, people have to demonstrate eligibility based on income and residency. Some people may apply and not meet the eligibility requirements. However, all of those that meet the eligibility requirements of residency and income are provided with that particular grant. There is a small proportion of people that do not meet eligibility requirements and are not successful in that application.

Ms Berry: But they might be able to get other supports from their school as well.

Ms Spence: Yes.

Ms Berry: Or from other organisations that they might be hooked up with. It is also not just a “prove you’re poor” kind of process. If, at a particular stage of this year or last year, you experience financial difficulty—your car needs rego, it has broken down, your fridge is gone, your drier or whatever—that is the moment when you are in desperate need. That is the kind of story; we need to understand that is the difficulty that you are going through, and we can support parents and children in that way.

THE CHAIR: For the people that were not eligible, were there any trends or recurring reasons why they were not eligible that stand out?

Ms Spence: I do not have that specific data with me. However, most of the assessments, where they are not successful, are generally around residency, because they are not actually residents of the ACT or attending an ACT public school. There are, as the minister talked about, complex cases. As part of a complex case assessment, when we look at all of that extra information, sometimes there is a lack of information being provided, and we are exhausting all options to get information. But it is not necessarily a trend; it is a small proportion of applicants.

Ms Berry: Just to clarify, it is all schools, not just public schools.

Ms Spence: Yes, that is right.

MS LAWDER: Could I ask about Whitlam school, where the opening has been delayed. Has it been delayed by one year?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: In the annual report it says, “due to unavoidable delivery delays”. What does that mean? What are the unavoidable delays?

Mr Matthews: Ms Lawder, the main challenge with Whitlam is that it is a new subdivision and the civil infrastructure is still being constructed in the community. For us to build a school, of course, the site has to be established and infrastructure has to be in place to do so. There is also the planning process itself. The estate development plan application, the amended DAs and the approval process for that have been taking longer than expected, as we have been working through that process.

Again, a project like Whitlam is a complex project because it involves multiple agencies. The Education Directorate works very closely with not only the Suburban Land Authority but also regulatory bodies, whether it be flora and fauna, emergency planning, EPA and a range of different things.

MS LAWDER: Are you saying that those specific ones you have mentioned were in play for Whitlam?

Mr Matthews: Yes. The specific issues with Whitlam are primarily around essentially getting the suburb fully established and all of the prerequisites around the planning and infrastructure requirements for the school. Notwithstanding that, we are obviously progressing the design of the school, both at a master plan level and at the detailed design level. We would be expecting to go to market early in 2024 to appoint

the contractor to build that school.

MS LAWDER: Based on your experience with other new schools, is two years enough time to deliver that school?

Ms Berry: Usually, unless there is an international health pandemic, a La Niña or an infrastructure and workforce supply crisis. Usually, two years is about the time frame we need, as long as nothing else interferes with it.

MR HANSON: The secure local jobs code—

Ms Berry: That has actually not been a problem.

MS LAWDER: It also says at page 94 of the annual report that established schools in the Molonglo region will accommodate students in the interim. Which schools will they be?

Mr Matthews: Ms Lawder, obviously, we have the Evelyn Scott School, which is a P-10 school, so it provides both primary and high school infrastructure. That is new infrastructure in Molonglo. We are very pleased to see that established and be able to offer those full P-10 options for families.

MS LAWDER: Is that the only one—Evelyn Scott?

Mr Matthews: It is a primary one, but—

Ms Rule: Charles Weston School is also out in Molonglo, so it will depend on—

Mr Matthews: Yes, two schools there.

Ms Rule: Yes.

Mr Matthews: We already have one high school and the two public primary schools in Molonglo.

MS LAWDER: For those schools, what will the impact be? Do they have adequate facilities and staff to accommodate that extra—

Mr Matthews: They can accommodate expected enrolment numbers in 2025. Again, as we keep talking about, it is not an exact science, but we believe that there is enough capacity, particularly in the Evelyn Scott School. It is a fairly newly established school. The high school only commenced operations this year, so there is room in that school in particular.

MS LAWDER: When you say there is room, is that additional classrooms or will it be bigger class sizes?

Mr Matthews: We have space that we are not currently utilising in that school. It is under capacity. When all new schools start, they start with smaller cohorts, generally at the lower end, so at the year 7 end, in the case of a high school, and they fill up

over time, as kids progress and graduate from that same primary school. At this stage there are actually spare classrooms, just to be very specific, in those school facilities.

MS LAWDER: To be clear, there are additional classrooms that will be utilised and there will be adequate teaching resources to accommodate those additional classrooms?

Mr Matthews: Indeed, Ms Lawder, because we fund on the basis of enrolment. In this example, if Evelyn Scott have an increase in enrolments, they will get an increase in funding to match that.

MS LAWDER: If Whitlam is delayed again, will those classrooms continue at the other schools nearby?

Ms Berry: We will consider that if that unfortunate circumstance should arise. However, following the work that has already happened with Whitlam, the design option studies are there, and the contract will go out for procurement next year. We should be on track to deliver Whitlam in the delayed time frame.

THE CHAIR: With that, we are out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you, Minister and officials, for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. The committee will now suspend the proceedings for a short break.

Hearing suspended from 2.33 pm to 2.50 pm.

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Jeffrey, Mr David, Senior Director, Planning and Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation

Rynehart, Mr Josh, Acting Executive Group Manager, Property and Government Insourcing, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing for the committee’s inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words, “I will take that question on notice.”

We welcome back Ms Yvette Berry, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, as well as officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. Could you confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it? Thank you.

I will lead off with questions. Minister, can the committee get an update on the progress of the Amaroo tennis centre?

Ms Berry: Yes, thank you, Mr Pettersson. This is another area in your electorate in which I know you have a particular interest. The estate development plan, I understand, has been conditionally approved. There were some environmental considerations that needed to be considered before the development application process commenced, but I understand that is all underway. There has been a bit of a delay through weather and the development application work, but it is still progressing.

Mr Jeffrey: The estate development plan has been approved, with some conditions. We have been working with the Conservator of Flora and Fauna in terms of some of the conditions that have been raised with respect to the feedback on that DA. That is looking positive and we are working through that process. The next step moving forward with the estate development plan DA was for the overall block and siting requirements associated with the development. We are in the process now of preparing a subsequent DA that will be related to the tennis infrastructure—the courts, the pavilion, the sportsground lighting and the like. That submission is due to be lodged in the next week or so, and that will obviously go under assessment. All going well, we will have DA approval hopefully early next year, and we would then look to move to the next phase of going out for a construction tender contract.

Throughout the process we have been working closely with representatives of Tennis

Australia and Tennis ACT in respect of the design requirements to meet their requirements—specifically, International Tennis Federation standards and the like. They are comfortable, in terms of where the design is progressing towards, and looking forward to moving to the next stage of construction.

THE CHAIR: All things going well, when can local residents expect to be able to use the facility?

Mr Jeffrey: Going well, basically we would be starting construction mid-next year, in the first or second quarter, and there are some weather dependencies in relation to construction. The actual flexi-surfaces that go on top can only be done in the warmer months, so our program will be a little bit contingent on weather requirements. With the construction program, we would likely see completion in 2025.

MS LAWDER: Relating to tennis, there was also a request from Tennis ACT for a larger indoor facility. Has there been any consideration or decision made about that?

Ms Berry: I would start by saying that we have been working with all sports organisations to understand what their priorities are, and Tennis ACT have been involved in those conversations. We have had a significant number of aspirations provided to us for all of the sporting clubs and communities in the ACT about their priorities. We are trying to collate that in a way that is more user friendly and so that we can navigate that and communicate that a little bit better. I am aware that, with Tennis ACT, that is one of their requests.

Mr Jeffrey: Yes, we have been working through them. That is specifically in terms of the size of the clubhouse facility, to service the Gungahlin tennis centre. With the DA documentation which they have seen in the last week or so, they have signed off on that, in terms of the design. It provides around 150 square metres of pavilion space, which ticks off their requirements in terms of change facilities and toilets; there is an opportunity for a kiosk and a multi-use space. It definitely provides the key requirements.

With the design, subject to future considerations and demands, there is opportunity to expand the facility on that existing footprint. The design has considered that 150 metres square, but, where it is placed, there is capacity, should there be a need to increase in the future; so that can be done, and they support that position.

MS LAWDER: Can we talk about aquatics, swimming pools et cetera?

Ms Berry: That is my favourite subject!

MS LAWDER: We are approaching that time of year where it is a very hot topic. We heard in a select committee that a dive pool was recommended for Stromlo pool, or at least a feasibility study. Is that in progress or has a report been completed? If it has been completed, when will it be released?

Ms Berry: I do not think the report has been completed but funding has been provided for feasibility work. I am not sure of the time frame.

Mr Rynehart: I would anticipate the report being provided this financial year. We are actively working through that process for the feasibility.

MS LAWDER: That was during the previous select committee, more than a year ago. How come it has taken so long to get us to this point?

Mr Rynehart: I am not sure I can speak to previous delays. We are working through a process to get the feasibility done and to provide advice to government about what the future options are for the feasibility of a dive pool.

Ms Berry: I will confirm, but I think, on that one, we agreed to do the feasibility work. We were going to do it. The funding for the work came out of this funding round.

MS LAWDER: You had to get the funding first?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Recently, the agreement for a new pool manager was announced. What about the Civic pool? Will that remain open as part of that new contract?

Mr Rynehart: Yes. The Civic pool is incorporated into the contract. It is one of the pools.

MS LAWDER: What about Erindale?

Mr Rynehart: Erindale is managed by Education, I believe.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: So, if there are issues about the conditions at Erindale pool, like the change rooms et cetera, they should be taken up with Education?

Ms Berry: Yes. It is actually managed by the P&C, but, if you have issues, just send them over to us and we will work through them.

MS LAWDER: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you, Mr Chair. In the CMTEDD annual report—I think it is at page 90—it states that the ACT government has finalised a 10-year agreement with AFL's GWS. I hope that you might be able to answer this and it does not come under the Chief Minister's department.

Ms Berry: The Chief Minister's. There is the—

MR MILLIGAN: And the Raiders and Brumbies—

Ms Berry: GWS, the Raiders, the Brumbies—yes, it is all—

MR MILLIGAN: The Chief Minister's as well.

MS LAWDER: It will give you the opportunity to rephrase your question.

MR MILLIGAN: I will rephrase it slightly, out of my 72 other questions. Regarding supporting infrastructure and facilities, on page 29 it states that the ACT government will progress key infrastructure projects, including the expansion of basketball facilities. Which facilities is this in reference to? Is it just Belconnen or does it include other facilities?

Ms Berry: I will start with Belconnen. I am not sure if I said in previous committees that we were working with Basketball ACT around opportunities to expand Belconnen. We are still in those conversations. I do not know that we have an update at the moment that we can provide, but, as soon as we have any more information on those conversations, we certainly will update. Sport and Rec have also been working very closely with Education around making sure that our schools have facilities for basketball and other indoor sports to access. Education now has a policy that all primary schools have at least one gymnasium and that all high schools have at least a double gymnasium, and that the gymnasium is suitable for training but also for competition.

We have worked closely with Basketball ACT to ensure, on the courts themselves, that the rings are sprung and that all the other facilities are available for sports like basketball, but also that other sports are able to use the facilities. That has been a really important collaboration. It is not the answer, but it is certainly more useful for community use of spaces within our schools when our schools are not operating as schools. It has been a really great collaboration between Education and Sport, but also all the sports themselves, to make sure we meet their needs.

MR MILLIGAN: You do not have a final figure yet for basketball in Belconnen, in terms of how much investment will be spent there?

Ms Berry: We do not even have an agreement on what it might look like yet. We are still in those discussions.

MR MILLIGAN: So you are right at the very initial stage.

Ms Berry: Not at the initial stage but at the middle of the initial stage.

MR MILLIGAN: Is the government considering investment in standalone basketball facilities anywhere else in the ACT?

Ms Berry: There are no specific commitments to that, but those are the kinds of conversations that we are having with Basketball ACT and the community. Specifically around the Belconnen Basketball Stadium, we have been having some really positive conversations with Basketball ACT about what that might look like. Do you have anything to add?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes. They are currently doing some further due diligence. Earlier this

week, they anticipate getting some feedback to us in the next week or so. Once that feedback comes in, obviously the government will review it and then brief accordingly.

MR MILLIGAN: What is that feedback on?

Mr Jeffrey: Just some of their requirements in terms of design—what they want to look for in the arrangements moving forward for the site. We had previously given them some support to do an options study around potential design solutions and things like that. As I said, the Basketball ACT board and the CEO have been working through some of that and they anticipate getting some information back to government in the next couple of weeks.

MR MILLIGAN: I would assume you do not know at this stage any dollar amount Basketball ACT might be willing to invest themselves?

Mr Jeffrey: That is some of the contemplation that they are looking at, in terms of whether they have capacity and those sorts of things. They are looking broadly around what the future facility requirements are for themselves and then what and how that leads to any potential contribution or what that would look like moving forward around management and operation.

Ms Berry: I should mention that there was the funding that was provided by the federal government for the University of Canberra around their master plan for facilities, which includes basketball facilities, so we will keep having conversations with them about what that looks like and what opportunities there might be for the ACT government.

MS LAWDER: I have a supplementary. Was there an ACT government contribution towards the Southern Cross Basketball Stadium in Tuggeranong originally?

Ms Berry: There is a bit of a story. I am not sure if you have a story from the beginning of time to Southern Cross—

Mr Jeffrey: Yes—going back.

Ms Berry: But there was a contribution more recently because of the closure of the AIS Arena. We provided funding for the stadium to be modernised and made available for the University of Canberra Capitals, should they hold their—

MS LAWDER: When they were about to have their finals, which did not quite work out.

Ms Berry: Yes. That did not quite work out the way we would prefer.

Mr Jeffrey: The facility was originally developed with some support from the government. It was done on the premises owned by Basketball ACT at the time. They fell into financial difficulties, going back numerous years ago, and, as a result of that, there was a change of ownership and Southern Cross took over the operation, management and ownership of the facility.

MS LAWDER: You are now in discussions with Basketball ACT. Is there consideration of having similar discussions? For example, in Tuggeranong they got to the point of no women's games in the evenings—

Ms Berry: Is that right?

MS LAWDER: because it was more financially viable to rent it to the Roller Derby League. So the women, if they wanted to play basketball at night, had to go to Belconnen, which, of course, is not good for women's basketball in Tuggeranong. Is it something that you can put into your deeds of agreement—making sure about equity of access to the facilities? I know it is a bit complicated.

Ms Berry: No—that is fine. Roller Derby generally now run their competitions out of Evelyn Scott School because we have purpose built that facility so that it can include roller derby as a sport. I understand it is one of the best facilities in the country for roller derby. Who knew that we would have a facility like that in the ACT, in one of our schools, that people want to come to from around the country to do roller derby? That has taken a bit of pressure off Tuggeranong, I guess, although I do know they still use Tuggeranong on occasion. I was not aware that there were night games for women changed from Tuggeranong, because I do know—

MS LAWDER: It happened a couple of years ago.

Ms Berry: I know that there are teams from Belconnen that still go across to Tuggeranong to play basketball in the evenings. Definitely, those are the kinds of things. We have already done that through the work on boards—making sure that there is at least 40 per cent of female participation on boards of sports clubs that receive funding from the government. We have similar—although it is not in my portfolio area—with the Brumbies, the Raiders and GWS around support for women's sport.

Mr Jeffrey: Where there are future projects et cetera around particularly government owned assets, that is where there are mechanisms to control usage a little bit better. Obviously, the stadium down in Tuggeranong is now privately owned and operated, but, as the minister said, with the investment for roller derby et cetera, our current understanding is that utilisation by basketball in Tuggeranong remains very high. It has not been brought to our attention that particular groups have not necessarily been able to access it in recent times.

THE CHAIR: Was that a supplementary to—

MS LAWDER: Yes—on basketball.

MR MILLIGAN: Yes—to my substantive. Back to you.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Minister, can you tell the committee about the AIS roundtable you held on Tuesday?

Ms Berry: Yes. Thank you for that question. There has been a fair amount of anxiety

and nervousness around the announcement of the federal government's review into the future of the AIS precinct—whether it would be moved or whether it would stay here in the ACT. Under the previous review, the cost of moving the facility to Queensland was going to cost around \$1 billion, and the suggestion was that it would cost around \$200 million to modernise the facility. Having spent some time at the AIS and having been through the facility a number of times with different CEOs, I think \$200 million is not going to cover it, if that were the case, but the review is considering all of those kinds of things as well.

I thought it would be really important to bring the sports community and other community organisations together to have a conversation that would feed into our submission to the review process—to talk about, obviously, its big impact; why it has been important for us to have the AIS here in the ACT; what has been its use in the sports community; how have we used it; and what different facilities have been used by the sports community; but also our aspirations for what it could look like if it remained here, and the kind of investment that would need to be put into the facility, not just for us here in the ACT but for people accessing this facility from around our region, and then, at the elite level, for national and international elite athletes.

We have had a lot of people going through that facility in its 40 years. If you add it down, it equals around one elite athlete a year that has gone through the AIS and continued on to represent Australia. But, more than sport, it is about the connection that it has with the ACT community. It has been part of our ecosystem and our community for so long. It is used by not just sporting organisations but also schools. It is the fourth place that people will visit, or when school groups visit the ACT, as a national facility. The economic benefit that it has to the ACT goes well beyond what it provides as far as sports infrastructure and elite sport support goes.

We have our own ACT Academy of Sport where we support local athletes. Around 30 or 40 a year go through that facility, so obviously it would displace us if it moved. Our connections and working together with the AIS and the Sports Commission have meant that there is really great collaboration across those for both our local athletes and international athletes. There is the relationship with our schools. In particular, the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra has a really special relationship with the National Basketball Academy, where students attend that school and reside at the AIS.

About 15 to 20 sports groups came along and contributed to that conversation. It was a really positive conversation. They will put their own submissions in, I am sure, but it brought everyone together, having the same kind of aspiration for this facility and what it could be, for not just here in the ACT but our country. It was really great to have those sorts of thoughts and ideas put on the table.

THE CHAIR: You answered all my supplementaries.

MS LAWDER: I want to talk about Club Enhancement Program recipients. There are some listed in the CMTEDD book, page 202 and page 204. But, outside of those grant applications, there may be sudden and unexpected requests for financial assistance for repairs—for example, a leaking roof at the netball centre—and, whilst these may be owned by those clubs, it is perhaps something they are not financially able to do. Is

there a process for clubs to apply for assistance, or is it just an ad hoc thing?

Mr Jeffrey: The grants program is obviously an annual program, and we are just in that cycle where the 2024 program will open shortly. It has a variety of programs. It is in the order of \$3.6 million. The program that you mentioned is one of the categories that provides opportunities for clubs and for sport and recreation organisations to receive funding—

MS LAWDER: But, if they miss that funding round, is there any other opportunity?

Mr Jeffrey: On exceptions. There sometimes will be a request that is received, and sometimes that means that there might be an opportunity for a discretionary grant fund to be considered on a one-off basis.

MS LAWDER: What about not so much for emergency-type repairs but if there was a request for assistance to develop something new to attract more participants? Is that, again, just the established grant process; there is no other process outside of that?

Mr Jeffrey: In terms of our discussions with sporting organisations, it is about them looking to go through and understand their prioritisation and planning requirements et cetera. The grants program does support applications for future planning activities associated with infrastructure requests et cetera. There will be sport and recreation organisations out there that need to do that early work to understand exactly what the requirements of the facility are and what the potential costs, planning, requirements, et cetera are, so they can work with consultants to do that preliminary work as an investigation and a planning-focused project.

MS LAWDER: Recently I saw an announcement of upgrades, improvement and maintenance at, I think, five netball facilities. Are those netball facilities owned by the ACT government?

Mr Jeffrey: They are all individual Crown leases. That was a \$7.5 million package that has been managed through Netball ACT for improvements across each of the five district netball facilities.

MS LAWDER: So they would apply perhaps through this same grants process?

Mr Jeffrey: That was an election commitment.

MS LAWDER: Was there a reason it had to be done in a peak netball period, where they may be having competitions?

Mr Jeffrey: In terms of how they are looking to manage the works, the works there will be getting underway during their off season. There are some weather requirements associated with the court surfaces needing to be done in the warmer period. at Netball ACT, in collaboration with the five clubs, has managed for the program to be staggered. Two of the clubs are essentially kicking off the program this year and the three others to follow. That allows flexibility if there is a need to share facilities in that interim period. If there are any displacement issues et cetera they can manage that within that.

MS LAWDER: They are pleased to see the improvement, absolutely. I am not trying to imply otherwise.

Mr Jeffrey: The facility in Lyneham and the facility in Arawang, in Stirling, are the two first cabs off the rank and then the three remaining netball facilities will be the following year. They are very pleased and looking forward to the works getting underway and improving the court surfaces and associated amenities.

MS LAWDER: I am not sure if it was part of the same club enhancement program, but there is a facility at the Nicholls Playing Fields. The Redbacks Cricket Club store their equipment there permanently, but recently turned up and there is a new policy in place and they did not have access to the facility. There was a combination lock added to the door and the club had to contact the ranger, who told them there was a new policy. How come there did not appear to be any communication with the club about this beforehand?

Mr Jeffrey: That sounds to me that that is related to access to an ACT government sportsground. So I think that, in the next session, they should be able to provide some details in terms of any of that management and operational questions.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

MR MILLIGAN: You mentioned the discretionary fund. Are you able to take on notice—because I do not expect that you would have this answer—how many applications to government were made, how many were approved and how many were not approved? Are you are happy to take that on notice?.

Mr Jeffrey: Yes, we would need to take that on notice in terms of the specifics.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you. We have spoken about the Throsby Home of Football numerous times. Obviously, it has been delayed and costs have gone up. We have had federal support and then we did not and Capital Football had money but then they did not. The design has changed quite significantly over the years. It looks like they are doing it in two or three stages. Is that correct? Is it two or three stages of build that you will be doing it in? How much money has been allocated for the first build?

Ms Berry: I think there is funding available for a first stage and then there could be, should the government agree, through budget and other processes, to second stage developments as part of that project. It has been challenging and complex to deliver. It is still our intention to deliver. We are working closely with Capital Football to try and get it across the line and start the work. However, they have had some changes as well recently and other issues that they have been attempting to manage. We will continue to work through this with them. I think everybody can see that it has turned into quite a complex development, but it still our intention to deliver on it.

MR MILLIGAN: Correct me if I am wrong but was it not the end of 2024 when you hoped to have the first stage completed or was it early 2025?

Mr Jeffrey: In terms of the time frames, typically we look to understand and get

through the appropriate design and approval pathways first before locking down those programs. So, as the minister said, we have been working with Capital Football closely throughout the duration of the project. There are a couple of key components that they are now looking to address in terms of their contribution, discussions with the banks et cetera, to undertake those necessary financial checks so that we can be confident moving forward with them in that partnership.

The broader staging consideration was—like with large parcels of land and developments—that we undertake to masterplan to site in its entirety and then, obviously, the delivery of what components would come would then be subject to some of that budget appropriation and linkages. The site has been master planned and a state development plan has been approved. At this point in time, we are waiting for some additional advice from Capital Football to help us move forward with the next stages and, ideally, getting into some detailed design.

Ms Berry: It is progressing, just probably not at the speed that people would like.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the government or yourself, Minister, had discussions with federal colleagues about any financial support towards the construction or build?

Ms Berry: Not recently. I understand that Capital Football had engaged with the federal government.

MS LAWDER: Does the ACT government's commitment/promise remain the same? If there is additional funding required, is it Capital Football's responsibility to come up with the additional?

Ms Berry: No. At this stage, the agreement was for funding from the ACT government of \$29 million and then Capital Football was contributing \$4.5 million. That is the existing arrangement for investment in the first part of the government of the Home of Football.

MS LAWDER: Has there been some discussion that it may become more expensive because of the terrain?

Ms Berry: Yes. That is why we are delivering it as this first stage, and then—

MS LAWDER: So that \$29 million and \$4.5 million is the first stage funding only?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. I understand there has been an additional cost charged to Cavalry to rectify the playing fields from a month-long training session with an overseas team. They already pay ground hire fees. As part of supporting sporting clubs to host international teams and hold any event, is it normal practice that the ACT has to charge an additional fee on top of the ground fees to rectify playing fields once the sporting club has finished with its use?

Ms Berry: That will be with the next session.

MS LAWDER: Okay.

MR MILLIGAN: There was an announcement by the government that you are going to build some form of sporting facility in Casey or a complex or other. Just wondering if you have got any detail on that.

Mr Jeffrey: There has been some early engagement in terms of a potential indoor sports facility. But that is subject to a range of future government decisions. There has been discussion with some community stakeholders that involved the Gungahlin Community Council et cetera, and built on, I guess, their aspirations for an indoor sports facility to be provided in Gungahlin.

MR MILLIGAN: So you have raised the idea with the community.

Mr Jeffrey: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: I thought it would be typical of the government to go to the community with something. Typically, what you do with other proposals is you put it together and then go to the community. But you didn't with this one. Why was that?

Ms Berry: I think the community came to us initially with this proposal, and that is where it is sitting at the moment. It is being considered and then we will, like we have done with other facilities—like we did with the tennis facility—we will go back and engage with the community once we have made a decision and it has the funding.

MR MILLIGAN: Correct me if I am wrong, but was there not a parcel of land allocated in Casey for a sporting precinct and were there not plans and designs and a budget that the government did and put forward for it in Casey? I think that was back in 2012.

Ms Berry: Are you talking about the recreation park?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes. Is that not a similar proposal or concept to what you recently announced?

Ms Berry: No.

Mr Jeffrey: No. The recreation park is a project being led by TCCS. It is similar to the community recreation parks that are in Moncrief and Grace—so an outdoor mixed-use used recreation area. TCCS are responsible for the delivery of that project—and that was going back to a 2016 election commitment.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, it around that time.

MS LAWDER: We had some hotter weather recently and there was an issue at the Dickson pool. Does the government have any control over that sort of issue, or is it solely up to the new operators? Is that what we might see at other pools over the summer?

Mr Rynehart: Thanks for the question. With Dickson, obviously, we have the new provider who has taken over this year, and there is a transitional arrangement for the remainder of the pools over the next couple of months. There were two issues at Dickson over the weekend. One was that it was very warm. There are rules within the Public Pools Act that set the number of people that can be in a pool at any one time. That is partly driven by lifeguards but also by the size of the pool. There is a total number at Dickson of 250 people in the 50 metre pool at any one time, which is referred to as the maximum instantaneous bather load under the rules. That was triggered on the weekend.

At that point, the operator triggered what they call a one in, one out process, which is basically to restrict the amount of people coming in and going out to maintain that it was safe so they did not end up with thousands of people in the pool. At the same time, they were having some issues with the levels of chlorine in a couple of pools. Not all the pools were operational at the same time. So was an element of conflation of issues that happened on the weekend. We do not anticipate that to continue. The issue with the number of people in the pool is limited from a safety perspective. If that were to trigger again then they would trigger the same controls. But I would not expect that to be an ongoing issue relating to the management of the water itself.

Ms Berry: The Jamo pool was not open—it is supposed to open this weekend, I think—and, whilst Phillip had opened, I do not think people knew that it had opened.

MS LAWDER: Are you happy that the Phillip pool has reopened?

Ms Berry: Yes; aren't we all?

MS LAWDER: And there is a rosy future for the Phillip pool?

Ms Berry: It is privately owned, and they are complying with their lease requirements at this stage. The owners of the pool understand what their requirements are and they have no intention to close the pool—that they have described to me, in any case, and I have asked them directly.

THE CHAIR: I have a quick supplementary on that “one in, one out”. Maybe I have not been paying attention, but I am not aware of that having ever being triggered before. Has that been triggered before and I just missed it?

Ms Berry: I have a vague memory that it might have been, but it would have been a while ago.

Mr Rynehart: It is not something that I know. The advice from the operator is that that is how they are managing that. I do not know if it has been triggered before. I think the weekend did have a series of incidences that sort of came together, including—

MS LAWDER: Would the government normally be notified in some way if it was triggered?

Mr Rynehart: There are legislative requirements about controlling the number of people in there, and then there are contractual requirements for the provider to advise us, and they certainly did advise us of the—

MS LAWDER: Perhaps you could take on notice whether it has happened before and when—just so we can be reassured that it was not about the level of lifeguards.

Mr Rynehart: Yes. I am happy to take on notice whether it has happened before and when.

THE CHAIR: I find it curious that we get a new operator in and then all of a sudden there is this, I guess, public adherence to these rules that—

MS LAWDER: Which is good.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Berry: I think it was Mr Rynehart who said that, in the Phillip pool situation—where it was supposed to open and it did not and then it did open but did not tell anyone—there could have been an increase in visitors to Dickson. There was a reduction in pool space as a result of the chlorine issues in the pool, it was warm and Jamo had not opened yet. That all meant that there were more people and it had to be managed appropriately. I think that is the answer, but we will take it on notice.

Mr Rynehart: I am aware this has happened previously at Gungahlin. We will come back with some more detail on it.

MR MILLIGAN: Interesting. Earlier this year the government sent out their sports infrastructure survey. Firstly, how many responses did you get to that survey?

Ms Berry: There were lots of responses to that survey.

MR MILLIGAN: You do not have a figure in terms—

Mr Jeffrey: Two hundred and fifty.

MR MILLIGAN: Two hundred and fifty?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Out of that 250, how many successful applications were granted in terms of infrastructure investment and build?

Ms Berry: We have not got to that point yet. This was just a question for the sector to provide feedback to the government so that we could all understand what their aspirations were for each of their individual sports. We are still at the stage of trying to sort that out or understand the survey responses because it is significant across a range of different sports. Some have very big and lofty—I could say in some cases—ambitions and others have much more realistic aspirations for their sport.

We are just working through how we can put that in a way where it is more consumable, I guess. Then we will work out how we can talk with these sports about how that could be made public, or some way that it could be described to the public so that they understand what the clubs want. Then future governments can decide how those aspirations can be met or whether they can be met at all.

MR MILLIGAN: Has there been a budget allocated for this yet?

Ms Berry: No.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the government established a criteria in terms of picking the successful applicants as yet?

Ms Berry: No. This is not about picking successful applicants; it is more about understanding what a possible infrastructure plan could be for sports infrastructure—so a bit like the ACT government’s more fulsome infrastructure plan where you might have a five-or 10-year time frame for different things—and then talk to the sports community about what that might look like going forward and how what that looks like. We are still working through that. We have the data now, but we are still working through what that might be.

MR MILLIGAN: So we can expect some sort of announcements during the election year next year in terms of where money is going to be invested and who is going to get what?

Ms Berry: I am sure you might do the same, Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, maybe. We could share some information if you want to send it across.

Ms Berry: We will see.

MS LAWDER: Apparently we have an aquatic facilities strategy which is more than 10 years old. Is anyone familiar with that?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Are there any plans to update or review that? Or are you confident that it is still up to speed?

Mr Jeffrey: That is something that we are looking to progress as part of our forward program next year.

MS LAWDER: Updating it?

Mr Jeffrey: Yes, in terms of a review and updating it.

MS LAWDER: I have to confess that I have not actually read it. Does it include any

additional plans for the Woden area? Or does the Stromlo facility cover that in terms of aquatic facilities? What might happen once the ice ring is down in Tuggeranong? Will there be any changes in the Phillip area?

Mr Jeffrey: The Woden District Policy is part of the new Territory Plan. It provides details in respect of what needs to happen in relation to the existing site. Any future redevelopment of the site in Phillip requires a pool to be retained, and it has now got specific details in terms of what that would need to look like—so a minimum of a 25 metre pool, indoor and associated pool facilities that you find at other project facilities around the country and the ACT, including learn to swim, toddlers, associated splash park facilities etcetera. That basically outlines the requirements for any redevelopment, which obviously falls as a matter for Geocon to consider moving forward.

MS LAWDER: Is there also a requirement for the ice facility or is just the pool?

Mr Jeffrey: There is a requirement for the ice sports facility to be retained on the site, but it does forecast that, if the proposed facility in Tuggeranong is delivered and constructed, that requirement is something that the government would reconsider, because the requirement for two facilities in Canberra is not there.

MS LAWDER: If it is in their lease purpose clause but they were not available for the past two years, is there a financial penalty for the owner? I know they had some other issues during COVID, for example. What is the government's position on people having to fulfil those requirements?

Ms Berry: That is probably more a question for Minister Gentleman around the lease requirements.

MS LAWDER: Sure.

Mr Jeffrey: The original closure related to coming out of COVID and impacts associated.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials. You have taken some questions on notice. Could you please provide the answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practicable and no later than five business days after the hearing. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 3.59 pm.