



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

(Reference: [Inquiry into E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School](#))

Members:

**MR T EMERSON (Chair)
MS C BARRY (Deputy Chair)
MISS L NUTTALL
MS C TOUGH**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2025

**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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.01 pm.

ROBERTSON, MR JOSÉ, President, Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for its inquiry into e-petition 007-25: build a new gym for Lyneham High School. The committee will today hear from the Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association, Basketball ACT, individuals, and the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the 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.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself; therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is 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," which will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome José Robertson, from the Lyneham High School Parents & Citizens Association. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. I have your opening statement in front of me; would you like to deliver this statement?

Mr Robertson: I would like to deliver a form of it. I thank the committee for its invitation for a representative of Lyneham High School P&C to attend this hearing. I am attending as president of the association, having been asked to do so by the group.

Endeavouring to best represent the association, I have contacted all primary schools in the Lyneham High School feeder area, multiple sporting organisations with an interest in hiring a new facility, individual members of sporting organisations, leading members of the Canberra construction community, and senior people in each of the political parties represented here, all of whom have agreed with the content of the submission I made to this inquiry. I am very pleased to be able to participate in this democratic process, and I thank the Assembly for inventing and abiding with this process.

I live by the mantra "collaborate or fail" and, in that spirit, I would like to begin my remarks by taking the radical step of stating that I believe everyone participating in this process is doing their best to achieve the best outcome.

To start with, I will list some areas where I agree with a range of people, while somewhat tempering those agreements in places. I agree with the minister for education on the statement that a new gymnasium was not promised at two elections. I agree with Parents ACT that parents, carers, staff and students have valuable insights, and that the education budget should be allocated in a fair and transparent manner.

I agree with Rob Emanuel that immediate investment is required to build a new gymnasium. I agree with Shasta Bignell that the promise made by the government in 2020 to update the gym was a recognition of a problem and offered some hope in addressing it.

I can go on with the list of people I agree with, but I will move on. I agree with the CEO of Basketball ACT that the existing sports hall is no longer able to meet the growing demand for safe, modern and inclusive spaces for physical activity. I agree with the Education Directorate, whose diligent bureaucrats worked hard with the school to create a sensible master plan for delivering a new gymnasium and retrofitting the old sports hall for continued effective usage.

Having agreed with the minister for education that a new gymnasium was not promised at two elections, I have to say that the spirit of a promise is what makes it important, not the letter of it, and that there are many examples in Australian political life of an electoral promise being modified for the better post election. What matters is not what was promised, but what can be extracted from the funding envelope that the promise was tucked into when it was delivered.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Samuelson once said, and he is quoted in many places, “When the facts change, I change my mind.” The quote is a powerful statement about intellectual flexibility and the importance of being open to new information.

According to the canberra.com.au website run by the ACT government’s Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, Canberra was the third smartest city in the world in the 2024 Smart City Index. When the collective wisdom of a city so smart is suggesting a rethink on a political position, it is worth considering.

The government’s commitment to light rail shows it understands how to develop infrastructure based on long-term returns on investment. Such thinking should be extended to other areas of infrastructure development, regardless of which directorate’s budget is funding the infrastructure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you; well said. Can you walk me through this, please? The school community had this understanding that a new gym was coming. Whether it was promised or whether it was not promised, that will form part of today’s inquiry. What I am also interested in is the point at which it became clear that that was not the plan. What is your understanding of that point in time?

Mr Robertson: As president of the P&C, I received a letter that was sent to the Lyneham High School board and the P&C on 27 June last year. That was from the minister, and it outlined that \$5.746 million was going to refurbish and modernise the

gymnasium at Lyneham High School.

I did not know anything at all at this point about any plans for the gymnasium. I was quite new to the job, so I spoke to the principal and I said, “What’s this about?” She said, “Essentially, we’ve been in discussions with the Education Directorate around this issue for some time.” I think it came as a bit of a surprise to her that those discussions that had been developed in detail would not now proceed to mean that a new gymnasium was going to be built.

Rob Emanuel, as the ex-principal, has made a great submission on that score. He is probably in a much better position than I am to talk to you about the history of that conversation with the Education Directorate. I do think that, certainly, the minister is slightly obsessed with this word “upgrade” and what it means. As I have said in my opening statement, I think that it can mean multiple things.

If I went to a hotel and they offered me an upgrade to my room, I would not be expecting to wait for two years while they removed the asbestos from the room, repainted it, and put a new floor in it. I would be expecting a new room right then—a bigger room, one that suited my purposes.

THE CHAIR: What kind of consultation has the P&C been engaged in since last June? Are you able to walk me through that? And with whom? Have the conversations been with the directorate officials? Have they been with the minister or the minister’s office?

Mr Robertson: Can you repeat the start of that question?

THE CHAIR: Since that letter last June, I am curious about the P&C’s engagement with government. How many times have you had conversations? What has been the nature of those conversations?

Mr Robertson: That is an interesting question because the letter from June stated that “a representative from the Education Directorate’s asset management delivery branch will contact you in due course to discuss your needs”—this was the letter to me, as the president of the P&C—“and plan for the program of works”. Nobody has spoken to me since, except when, at meetings organised by Parents ACT, I have fed questions into the meeting to various representatives of the Education Directorate.

THE CHAIR: In due course?

Mr Robertson: In due course, yes.

THE CHAIR: Almost 18 months later.

Mr Robertson: Yes. When is “due course”? That is the question here. I have not approached the minister directly on this matter, but I have, as I said in my opening statement, consulted widely with what I would consider to be the list of stakeholders that you would expect the Education Directorate to speak to about a matter such as this, which is not just a matter about a school gymnasium. I think this is a really important point.

I did the sums yesterday. There are 1,200 hours when a school student attends a school in any year. A school gymnasium is used for about 40 per cent of its potential life by the student body. For 60 per cent of its time, if it is a good, modern facility that people want to use, it will be hired to the community.

I do question this obsession on the part of the minister and the Education Directorate to do with enrolment numbers at Lyneham High School. If you look at this matter in a holistic way, that seems to be a minor issue. It is about 40 per cent of the issue, really, when it comes to whether or not a gymnasium should be built as a community-use facility.

I get it, when you are talking about funding of classrooms and other areas of the school that cannot be hired out to the community. I can understand being very careful with it—much more careful with the education budget, in some senses, with outgoings, when you are talking about that sort of infrastructure. But when you are talking about infrastructure that has the potential to make a profit for you and to ease the education budget's crisis, you do wonder what the thinking is around why such a narrow perspective is being taken on it.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the consultation, is that letter from June last year, 2024?

Mr Robertson: Correct.

THE CHAIR: Since then, you have not been contacted?

Mr Robertson: No.

MS BARRY: Just following on from that, you have not been contacted, as the school's parent body?

Mr Robertson: No.

MS BARRY: There has been no communication with the body?

Mr Robertson: No.

MS BARRY: From the education department; interesting.

Mr Robertson: No. Only when we have reached out and, as I say, asked questions in different fora.

MS BARRY: That is quite concerning and disappointing. This was a really useful statement, by the way. Thank you very much for that. I have a few questions, especially around, again, your experience regarding the engagement with both the education department and the minister. I know you say you have not written to the minister directly, but I do not think it is for you to do that. When there is a problem, the minister and the education department should be actively working with the community. Does this, in your view, speak to a broader issue around accountability and communication with the parents in terms of things that are of significant concern to the community?

Mr Robertson: To the best of my knowledge, there has been very little communication at all with parents directly about this issue from the minister or the Education Directorate—certainly, none during my time as president of the P&C, since last February. I cannot speak to what may have occurred prior to that. Rob Emanuel may be able to assist you in that area. That is not something that I know much about, prior to my term. Certainly, through my term, there has been no consultation at all with the parent body or the wider—

MS BARRY: The wider parent community?

Mr Robertson: Yes.

MS BARRY: That is very concerning. From a parent's perspective, how has this affected the children's engagement, overall wellbeing and learning?

Mr Robertson: I do not want to speak too much about my son. He loves football. He loves indoor soccer and futsal. I will use him as an example. We drive to Weston every Saturday morning to play indoor soccer in a converted indoor cricket centre. He has played futsal before, but we have had to go to Throsby to do that, in an indoor setting. There is nowhere in the inner north where futsal can be played. That is a popular sport.

I am here to represent the broad community. What I am hearing from Basketball ACT, the badminton people, the volleyball people—every sporting association in Canberra that is an indoor-based sporting association—is that they are crying out for facilities to be able to use.

To give the minister credit, in my submission I have quoted her, when talking about the need to address this issue. She said:

We have had, for many years now, the highest rates of sports participation across the country, and that continues.

All our sports are being stretched, and we need to make sure we've got facilities that are fit for purpose to meet all of their needs.

In addition to the work we're doing here with Basketball ACT to expand the stadium, we're also making sure schools have courts that are appropriate for teams to be able to train on.

In public, the minister is making statements that I massively agree with, but they are not being followed through.

MISS NUTTALL: I appreciate that the submission and, indeed, your opening remarks, reflect that this issue should not necessarily be an issue of school capacity. In the ACT government submission, they refer to the utilisation rates of the whole school sitting between 92 and 96 per cent of the whole school's capacity, compared to their current enrolments, and consider that as a reason not to consider an expansion now. Do you think that that calculation of capacity is a particularly good measure of calculation of capacity within the school gym itself? Do you think it is a good measure of need?

Mr Robertson: Clearly, it is not. There are various other submissions that I have

enjoyed reading and that have taught me something that I did not already know, and they were not in my submission. Some of them related to the National Construction Code guidelines about safety with numbers.

A couple of submissions talked directly about the way that, on a day like today, kids would not be able to participate in PE. Even with enrolment numbers sitting in the 90s, there is a huge number of kids who cannot participate in physical education while there is rain falling. At a time when we, as parents, are all collectively interested in how screens are taking our children away from the real world, surely, it is incumbent on us to try and help them to engage in physical activity wherever possible.

MISS NUTTALL: I have a question that is ticking around in the back of my mind.

Mr Robertson: You can ask me later. You have my email address.

MISS NUTTALL: When it gets to an indicative capacity, there is research to the effect that that capacity formula essentially low-balls things. If you are consistently between 92 and 96 per cent, how does that work in terms of planning for future facilities? If you are hitting up against the maximum, is there any way to indicate demand that is higher than 92 or 96 per cent?

Mr Robertson: I have to admit that I am not a school planning expert. However, if you look at the Australian economy, people say five per cent unemployment is a good thing because it means there is flexibility in the economy and people can change jobs. I think it is a good thing if a school has not reached its capacity when it comes to number of students, because you do not want to be groaning at the edges, if you can possibly avoid it. But you cannot justify not constructing a gymnasium for the 980 kids that are there because there are not a thousand there. That calculation does not work.

Again, I return to my point that that is a calculation based only on student usage of the gymnasium, not the broader community's usage. Who is paying for a gymnasium at Lyneham High School? It is not just the parents of Lyneham High School; it is the citizens of the ACT—everybody. Why aren't we trying to maximise the usage of that investment so that everybody has a go at being able to hire that hall?

MS TOUGH: A few of my questions have already been covered. Is the existing gym being used for any external sports at the moment? I think Basketball ACT used to use—

Mr Robertson: The people that most used the gym until relatively recently were a basketball club called Canberra Stallions, but they have withdrawn all usage of the gym because it is unsafe. It is too small. You cannot spend \$6 million on that gymnasium and make it bigger.

Apparently, a discussion point with the directorate was: can we expand the floor plan of this gym? The decision that the directorate made—and I am sure there are smart people in the directorate who have thought this through—was, “No, it's not value for money to try to expand the floor plan of this small space. We need to build a new double gymnasium, and that's the way to make the most from this funding envelope.”

I have to say, before I finish here, with everybody that I have spoken to about this, when

I have told them that the cost of the Shirley Smith High School gymnasium was 25 per cent less than the minister is wishing to spend to refurbish the old gym at Lyneham, they are shocked and bewildered. They do not understand why, at a time when the ACT government has been involved in some procurement issues, value for money is not the utmost thing here, when it comes to the expenditure of public money.

Returning to the point, there seems to be an obsession with this idea that the election promise of an upgrade must be continued with at all costs, and that no other solution can be entertained, even if it is better and even if it is cheaper. With the Chief Minister, when he gets his ministry together after an election, one of the main points he makes is, “We’ve got to deliver on our promises,” and I think it is a great thing that he does that. But I am sure he does not mean, “We have to deliver on our promises, and only what we’ve promised, even if a better result becomes clear to us.”

MS TOUGH: When you say that the option to extend the floor plan was considered, was that part of the original discussions—expanding the floor plan?

Mr Robertson: That is my understanding. Rob Emanuel will be—

MS TOUGH: Yes, I will ask Rob.

Mr Robertson: My understanding is that it was part of the discussion and it was rejected as an idea, again, by diligent bureaucrats who put their minds to this issue.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for your input, for providing a submission and for being here today. On behalf of the committee, I thank you, Mr Robertson. No questions were taken on notice. Thank you very much.

EMANUEL, MR ROB

THE CHAIR: We welcome Rob Emanuel.

Mr Emanuel: I am a previous principal of Lyneham High School, between 2018 and 2021. I am someone with an ongoing interest in these kinds of proceedings.

THE CHAIR: Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement? It can be anything that is not covered in your submission.

Mr Emanuel: I do not think so. It is probably easier to go to your questions. I am sure I will be able to add to those questions.

THE CHAIR: That sounds good. One of the positions that has been put forward is that refurbishment of the gym aligns with enrolment projections. Ms Nuttall was asking questions along these lines. Apparently those projections are stable. Do you think this is an appropriate way to make school infrastructure investment decisions?

Mr Emanuel: Not at all. When I became the principal of the school, within my first year we were operating at, I think, 103 per cent capacity and we had over 1,100 students. About 1,119 or 1,020 was the size that we got to. Even though that number has likely come down, 1,060 or so are still there. Even if it has slipped below 1,000, that is 1,000 students who do not have a safe and fit facility for their education. That was the case for the four years that I was principal, and we could go right back to earlier times, when students did not have the facilities that you would expect them to have.

I have worked in seven schools around the ACT and it is easily the worst facility. The old Kambah High School, Melrose High School and Canberra High School all had a new gym built. While I was at Canberra High School, a gym was built there and, while I was at Melrose High School, a gym was built there. I am looking at a school that is 65 years old and has a building that is not fit for purpose. It is dangerous. The whole discussion around enrolment numbers is a distraction from the fact that a thousand students at the school at the moment and 250 to 300 students ongoing every year are not getting their education in a fit-for-purpose facility.

THE CHAIR: Were all the schools you worked in public schools?

Mr Emanuel: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What impact do you think quality of school infrastructure has on parents' decisions as to which school to send their children to?

Mr Emanuel: It is a factor. When you look at the decision by many parents between government and non-government schools, it often comes down to facilities and what is available for their child. In terms of dyed-in-the-wool people like me—those who are for public education all the way—a lot of that kind of decision-making is not like it used to be. When I first started in 1989 in the ACT, parents had the choice to be out of

area, shop around and look at which school they would like their child to go to. In the current climate, parents do not have that choice. Unless you live in the area of Lyneham High School, in the intake area, you will not be offered an enrolment.

THE CHAIR: I have certainly heard from parents who really believe in the public system but are choosing to send their kids to non-government schools because of the facilities. An issue that I am curious about during this inquiry is the impact of underinvesting in facilities, like the gym at Lyneham High. We are seeing that enrolments are flatlining or even decreasing, so it does not make sense to invest in a new gym. But there is an old gym. You get the point I am making—right?

Mr Emanuel: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The question is: moving forward, what do you imagine will be the consequences of just renovating the existing facility rather than building a new one?

Mr Emanuel: Lyneham High School has always had the SEAL program, which is Sporting Excellence At Lyneham, and it has been in one of the worst facilities across any years 7 to 10 public high school in the territory. You can look at the facilities there and you can see the hard work of staff to make it work. I spoke to my executive teacher in PE one day about the fact that the gymnasium was certainly on our agenda: “How do we get this upgraded?” By “upgrade”, I am talking about a new facility. That has been the conversation all the way along. Any of the conversations I had from May, I think, in 2018 when I first became principal, have always been around a new facility being built—a double gymnasium, classrooms, changerooms, storage facilities, and all the bits that you would expect in a facility to support a large population of students. Sorry—could you just remind me of the initial question? I think I rambled a bit there.

THE CHAIR: I think your rambling is more interesting than my question.

Mr Emanuel: When you look at whether people are choosing to come to Lyneham High school based on a gymnasium, there is probably a whole raft of reasons why people choose the school. One is that they live in-area, but a lot of people would move in-area to get in, and that might not have been for sport; it might have been for a range of other programs that the school offered, like the band. But every student has to do PE. Every student would like to be involved in sport. My staff made that facility work. They were doing the risk assessments and the modifications to basic games to work in that facility. You cannot just say, “We’ll put up the posts and the net and we’ll have a game of volleyball, badminton or whatever.” There are balls stuck up in the rafters because it is not high enough. If you run off the side of the basketball court, you do not have much room between yourself, the court line and a brick wall. So it is not safe. Just making the floor surface competition standard is, as I said in my submission, lipstick on a pig.

THE CHAIR: You said it was in all conversations since May 2018, when you started, until 2020?

Mr Emanuel: Yes. I finished in 2021. In 2018, the head of infrastructure and capital works came. I invited him to the school. We had a big conversation. We toured, and it was clear at that point that, from my point of view, we needed a new facility. It was not around somehow changing the one we had. There was a conversation about that, but it

would have meant raising the roof and it would have meant extending in probably two directions on the current site, and, by the time you are doing that, you are building a new building. That conversation went very much down a footprint. We stood in the car park where the footprint of the new gym would be. That was from the very beginning. Every other conversation that I had with anyone who visited and I could take for a tour through the school—whether it was directors-general, deputy directors-general or those from infrastructure and capital works; I cannot remember whether I ever had politicians going through—it was always around, “This is not a fit-for-purpose space for a school our size. There is the building itself and its safety issues.”

It was not until I was about to finish in 2021 that some of the initial conversation happened around the design brief. The design brief was very clear. I saw a set of documents online, I think through freedom of information. That design brief in April 2022, which was after I finished, is really clear about what the community needed. Infrastructure and capital works people have gone through the whole process, up to the point of a whole functional brief, including architectural drawings. It is essentially ready to go. Approve the expenditure and we could put it out for tender and start building. That indicates to me that the department of education is very much on board with the fact that it is desperately needed by the school. It is about the priority decision-making of the Treasury around whether they will fund it. What bothers me is that the amount of money they are talking about to upgrade it—and “upgrade” is not even right; it is about making adjustments to the current building that is completely unsatisfactory—is an extraordinary amount of money.

I do not know whether you have had a chance to go to the Lyneham High School gym and see for yourselves. Do that, and then drive to Shirley Smith High School and look at their gymnasium. That is the current standard. There is no way you can do upgrades to the Lyneham High School gymnasium and get it to that standard. In the bundle of documents was a letter from Minister Berry—and there was also another document, which I could track down, that came from somewhere else—that talks about the upgrade bringing the building up to standard. It will not.

MS BARRY: Thank you so much for your passionate advocacy. It is obvious that you really care about this issue.

Mr Emanuel: I do.

MS BARRY: Also, as a principal, you care so much about children’s education. I want to get clarity on the sequence of events. When you were principal, initial conversations were had with the department and various senior executives from the Education Directorate. When did the conversation change?

Mr Emanuel: As I was leaving at the end of 2021—it was around October—there were emails. In that bundle, there might even be one of my emails. Some of the consultation and discussion was basically going into the design brief that was constructed in April. By that stage, I had left the school and retired, so I cannot speak to conversations that happened. Former colleagues of mine were in infrastructure and capital works, and, because I have an interest in the ongoing saga of trying to get a new gymnasium for the school, I heard bits and pieces of stories. When I look at the infrastructure and capital works, I can see they are around the framework: “What does a gymnasium look like in

a high school?” That set of specifications is for a school of 800 students. I believe the minimum is a full netball sized court with appropriate run-offs. For a school of 1,000 students, quite a few would argue that a double gymnasium would be a no-brainer. If you are going to go to the expense of doing that, why wouldn't you put in a facility that caters to the needs of the staff, the students and the community?

There were industrial issues for staff the whole time I was there, and I am sure that is still a problem, because all of the things you expect in a brand new gymnasium, like having line-of-sight of students, safety, and security of belongings. All of the operational things become so much harder and more stressful for staff every day. And then you look at the changerooms where, through the leadership of the school and utilising our budgets, we did the upgrades that we could to keep the facilities workable. You are just tinkering at the edges and putting band-aids on things.

My concern is that it kind of sounds like we are kicking this to the side. How much longer are we going to wait? Having spoken to the principal before me, the gymnasium has probably been on the agenda for the last two decades. Are we going to wait another two decades before we take some action and actually put a facility in place that respects the staff, respects the students and respects the community? There are community organisations that are crying out for this facility. It is an outrage that we are having this conversation. It really should be a no-brainer.

MS BARRY: Thank you. We heard from the previous witness—going back to the conversation around capacity, and I agree with you—that there are 1,000 children who currently do not have a fit-for-purpose gym. There are significant safety concerns. But we have also heard that it is 40 per cent of the use of a gym. You still have 60 per cent for community use, for example. What community organisations used the gym when you were principal?

Mr Emanuel: Basketball was there. Badminton might have been there for a bit. But, again, it came down to whether you could actually have a game of basketball, badminton or volleyball and not have it interrupted because someone hit the roof. People tried to make it work. As I was finishing, people were saying, “We can't continue with that,” or they would use it for practice at best, but it certainly could not host proper competition games and those types of things, which makes it crazy that we will put a competition floor into a facility that cannot actually host a competition. It seems like complete mismanagement and a waste of money.

MS BARRY: You mentioned significant concerns, band-aids and teacher stress. What supports did you have from the Education Directorate when you raised these issues with them? There are significant and serious concerns about the safety of our children in schools. What have they done?

Mr Emanuel: I think I have said it already. From an Education Directorate point of view, there was certainly engagement with me and conversation around the needs of the school and the needs of our students and the staff, and the reasons the current facility is not fit for purpose. A lot of the stuff that happened was a bit after I left, but it started just before I left. From my contacts and people I have spoken to just to stay abreast of what was generally happening, even though I had retired and left the service, it was very much around a full work-up, a full design brief, a full EDIS infrastructure spec

being done, and architectural drawings. I do not think the Education Directorate stood in the way of it. They understood the need and, as Jose said, good people did a whole lot of work to get it to the point where it was. It then becomes a political decision in the Treasury to allocate the funds for it. From the point of view around whether I was supported, I was heard and conversations happened. It probably did not really kick off until I had retired, but it went a long way, right up to the point where we could put it out to tender and start building.

What is really needed is the political will to say, “This is important, not only for the students and their education but also for the community and all the organisations that would use it.” It would be used every single night of the week, and I would guarantee you that they would be looking for venues on weekends as well. There would be people fighting to get their place at the gym.

MISS NUTTALL: At any point, was there mention of just upgrading the floor to competition standard? Was that ever identified as an issue from your side or the directorate’s side?

Mr Emanuel: Never from me. As I said in my submission, there was never a discussion for anything other than a new building on a footprint. Never was there a discussion saying, “We’ll just upgrade the floor,” because I would have said to them, “Don’t bother.” When I was at Melrose High School, we had a double gym. They were going to put tanks underneath. They were going to put in fabulous aircon systems. It was all done at the last minute. There was not the recovery money from the water stuff. They started cutting back. In my submission, I talk about how projects are cut back for value all the way through. It got to the point where they were going to cut the floor size of the gymnasium by a third, and I said, “Don’t build it then, because it will be a single classroom and it will be a waste of money.”

I am the kind of person who will speak upfront quite clearly if I see that it is not going to be workable, useful and an improvement for the students and the staff of the school. What is needed is a double gym. When I was there, the school was operating at 103 per cent. We had a transportable unit put in to add classrooms so that we could cope with our numbers. It is sitting out the back. That will still be in the capacity numbers, I am sure, but it was only used by PE teachers to have classes, to do theory, health and other classes; it was not used by the remainder of the school in any of the other subject areas in the time that I was there. You could build a gymnasium and you could argue that it needs classrooms as well, but the priority is actually getting a sporting facility that meets the learning needs and the educational needs of the students at the school right now.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested in the timing. The ACT Labor commitment referenced by the ACT government in 2020 was to upgrade the gymnasium at Lyneham High School. Obviously, between then and 2022, there was the Lyneham High School new gymnasium design and master planning project brief, which was shown to key community stakeholders in April 2022. At least for your tenure, was there any mention of a change in scope? What I am interested in drawing out is: would it have been reasonable, from a community and a school principal perspective, to expect that the commitment for an upgrade then became that project brief in 2022?

Mr Emanuel: You can define “upgrade” as a new building and you can define “upgrade” as a floor renovation and maybe a changeroom update, but, in the context of any discussion I had, it was always around a new building on a new footprint, even down to car parking and other things within that space. There was never a conversation that said, “We’ll replace the floor in what’s there.” In any context of what “upgrade” means, in the context of any conversation that I had around a gymnasium for the school, it was around a new one. Someone else can have a different interpretation of what “upgrade” means, but, from my point of view, the upgrade, certainly through my tenure, was very much around a new facility.

MISS NUTTALL: And no-one ever floated other options?

Mr Emanuel: Not like that; no.

MISS NUTTALL: That answers my question. Thank you very much.

Mr Emanuel: You are welcome.

MS TOUGH: That kind of answers my question. I was also going to ask whether, between the commitment to an upgrade and the master plan, other options were put on the table. That is basically what—

Mr Emanuel: There was a delay. I can think back earlier. In October 2021, there was the start of consultation, and the design brief was formulated in April 2022. Prior to that it, I almost felt like I was being put back, in the sense that they said, “We’re doing a master plan of the whole area,” and all those types of things. It went for a while, before I then got back in contact with people and said, “What’s going on?” I think there was a broader plan to look at a new facility and what that would mean to the community, the Inner North—a whole master planning process—but nothing really came back to that. Before I retired, we came back to the conversation about the gymnasium, and it was definitely only ever about a double gymnasium. There are all the things that I mentioned in my statement. They are the things that are reflected in the design brief. In terms of the conversations before I left and what came up in the design brief four months after I had retired, they are very consistent.

THE CHAIR: Was the whole purpose of upgrading the gym to have a bigger gym? Is the primary purpose to have a larger gym or did the other features need to be upgraded?

Mr Emanuel: It was to have a larger gym, definitely. If we were to have a single-court gymnasium built at that site, it would still be a single classroom. Anything short of a double gymnasium for a school that size would be a lost opportunity to put in place something that is actually fit for purpose for who is there right now, but also for the cohorts that will come behind them. All the facilities in the existing gym, like the changerooms, were built 65 years ago. Whilst we can keep things running by putting a lick of paint on and getting rid of the lead paint, as we did when I was there, you are working through all the things to keep the facility inviting enough for the kids to go in and get changed, but it is all old style. If you look at the brand-new specs for gyms around toilets and changerooms, it is a completely different standard to what is at Lyneham High School at the moment. And, as soon as you start building and trying to fix something that old, the things that you will have to rectify as part of the Building

Code and hazardous materials—a whole range of things—will be quite extraordinary. You will eat away a whole chunk of that \$5.7 million, rather than building something from the ground up that is fit for purpose.

It is about the space. On a day like today with rain, you might have five or six classes on a particular line that do PE in a year group. All of a sudden, where do you go? Basically, everybody is in a warm and dry spot, but there is no teaching and learning happening. School programs are not operating. It is about: “How do we get through today with a lesson when we do not have some other spaces to access? If you look at the space that is the Lyneham High School gym and then look at the Shirley Smith High School gym, you will see it is massive. A double-court gym—something like that—for a school the size of Lyneham High School is needed. It really is. On top of that, you have the other facilities that would come with a new build and would be very welcome upgrades to the substandard facilities that are there.

THE CHAIR: We will have to leave it there. We thank you for your attendance today and for your contribution to the inquiry more broadly. Thanks very much.

Mr Emanuel: It was an absolute pleasure.

Short suspension

BOWLES, MS NICOLE, Chief Executive Officer, Basketball ACT

THE CHAIR: We welcome Nicole Bowles, from Basketball ACT. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Do you want to make a brief opening statement covering anything that is not in your submission?

Ms Bowles: Yes, I would. I am not sure if you are aware that basketball is the fastest growing team sport in Australia, and the ACT is not alone in that. Between 2024 and 2025, we have seen 13 per cent growth in our competition participation, by itself. We have had 13 new junior teams from our winter to our summer season and 58 teams in total from our winter to our summer season. The sport locally is absolutely going gangbusters, and booming left, right and centre.

We are currently hamstrung by not just the interest in the sport, but our facilities, our spaces and places for our participants to have a great experience with basketball. Lyneham High School is currently one of those key facilities that the Canberra City Stallions operate out of, and access and utilise the space. Lyneham High School is a key provider for the sport locally. We are keen to see our facilities footprint across the ACT grow. Lyneham definitely plays a key part in that, in looking at the standard of the facility and upgrades in terms of what is being offered there. Yes, we have a vested interest.

THE CHAIR: I understand that basketball is oversubscribed in the ACT. If an additional double gymnasium at Lyneham High was made available for use outside school hours, what would you expect to be the uptake in terms of level of hire across a regular week?

Ms Bowles: Speaking for the club itself, they would definitely increase their hire. Currently, they are at Lyneham, Dickson and Emmaus, and they have actually moved out to Radford College, so that is out of zone for them, because they need more court space available to them. By having a double gym at Lyneham, that would obviously increase their footprint. There are currently 45 teams, and they would like to grow to roughly about 65 teams, to be able to deliver basketball locally. A two-court facility right at their heart would definitely allow them to be able to do that, and have that growth.

Currently, they have stopped advertising. It is purely by word of mouth that the community knows that the Stallions exist within the area. That is because they have no more space. Any growth is just by word of mouth, not by any strategic marketing that happens from the club. They know that they cannot do that because they are hamstrung by where they can train.

THE CHAIR: With having a two-court facility, is that something that would be used every single night, and on weekends? What kind of—

Ms Bowles: Yes, definitely. Currently, with our competition platform, with the new schools that have come online in the Gungahlin region, we have been able to extend our competition footprint out to them. We now utilise them because they are two-court

facilities, and they have great run-off and access for spectators, because that is a really critical thing. I know schools are built for school.

It is about having that external access in terms of how we can get to that, the space around it, and storage, to be able to access schools to do different things, and to run community events. Now that we have that happening up north, we have been able to expand out there. Currently, we do not run any competition level within the inner north.

We used to use Daramalan College for running some overflows. Occasionally, we can get into Daramalan College; they have two courts there, but we have stepped away from that. No competition basketball—it is just all training—happens in the inner north. Having a two-court facility definitely means that we are able to start to run things like more competition basketball as opposed to just training.

THE CHAIR: What are the hire rates? Is it uniform across the schools?

Ms Bowles: Across the schools, it is uniform. With hire rates, the education department have now centralised what an agreement looks like. We still have individual agreements with schools, and that is a frustration point for volunteers and for us, in terms of that. Yes, they have centralised what an agreement looks like, and the court hire rates. That has helped, in terms of that.

THE CHAIR: Do you know what they are, off the top of your head?

Ms Bowles: For a two-court facility, during the week, it is about \$84—\$17 more than a field, and you can fit less people on an indoor court than you can on a football field. At least there is a centralised point. Probably, from an Education Directorate standpoint, it is a cheaper court. From there, externally, community courts cost from \$75, anywhere up to \$120. That is what we currently get charged for one court for one hour by one of the facilities.

THE CHAIR: \$84 an hour for a two-court facility?

Ms Bowles: Yes, for a two-court facility.

THE CHAIR: You might be able to use that for three or four hours in an evening?

Ms Bowles: Yes. Training times, ideally, are 5.15 or 5.30 through to 8.30 or 9 o'clock. That is when most clubs like to train. We would run competitions of a night up to 10.30 or 11 o'clock at night, at some of our community-based facilities. That is when you can play.

THE CHAIR: It is maybe upward of \$1,000 a week—

Ms Bowles: Yes.

THE CHAIR: in potential revenue there?

Ms Bowles: Yes.

MS BARRY: In your submission, you mentioned that the arrangements for using the Lyneham facility were poorly defined and inconsistently enforced. Can you please tell me a bit more about that?

Ms Bowles: In terms of how we utilise schools, where that sits and those different types of things, because of the state of the facility, the club has definitely started to look at other options; hence that is why they have gone out to other facilities. When the original submission was made, in 2020, the club had four or five teams training on one court, and that is just not sustainable for anyone's enjoyment of and participation in the sport, so they have reviewed that.

They now have a maximum of two teams training on the one court. Again, it limits the size of what you are able to do, in participating there. Yes, it is all about transparency and communication, as to how the directorate and the business managers make cases and make access available for a whole bunch of different courts.

MS BARRY: How has this situation affected your relationship with the local community?

Ms Bowles: I think that, by not having a facility that is of a standard within the corridor, it definitely means that the club looks at what other benefits they could give to their members or how they interact. Members are definitely looking at what other options are available for them. In my submission I said there are around 725 participants that reside within the Lyneham postcode. Probably not all of those would register with the Stallions. They would look at other clubs that are available to them around the area as well.

MS BARRY: My daughter plays basketball, so I understand the issues. Is it a broader issue that you are seeing across the ACT that facilities are becoming stretched and there are not fit-for-purpose facilities for the growing population?

Ms Bowles: Yes, definitely. We have two pools of facilities that are around—those that are newly built and looked after, that are providing a lot more access to indoor sport generally; then you have other corridors, like the inner north and the south, that have older, ageing school facilities that are single court, with parquet floors and timber backboards. They are just not up to standard to deliver sport these days. How they are looked after and maintained, in terms of cleaning cycles and those different types of things, make it tricky for community sport coming in.

Schools, on the flip side, probably have challenges with balancing and managing us. But I know a lot of our clubs are willing to work with schools as to how they can go about cleaning regimes or working with things to make life easier. I know a lot of our clubs have also invested in things like basketball nets and work with schools to upgrade facilities so that they have some sort of improvements happening in terms of the basketball infrastructure that is available to them. They may have bought scissor mops themselves, to be able to come in and sweep floors. We have this ever-evolving place where we are able to compete and play, versus not being able to, as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back to capacity, I am mindful that a couple of people have identified it as a bit of a red herring. One of the government's justifications for not

expanding the gym was that the school overall tends to fluctuate between 92 and 96 per cent capacity. As a sporting organisation that uses the facility, how accurate do you find this as a measure that captures the needs of various user groups?

Ms Bowles: If you look at the indoor sports sector as a whole, we are all crying out for more accessibility to different standards of courts. If you build it, we will definitely fill it and have capacity for it. If you look at the inner north in particular, I think there are two facilities that have two courts; that is, Dara and Brindabella. All other facilities are single-court facilities. There is nobody else around who has gone for a double gym.

That makes running a community event and sport really tricky, because you are then dispersing all of your volunteers, coaches and support network across three or four venues, as opposed to being able to consolidate that in one single location across a two-court facility. That means, too, that basketball is monopolising the use of that space and all the spaces around it. Badminton, volleyball and other community sporting groups do not have access to other facilities because we have to run across all of them, as opposed to consolidating, being in one key area and being able to utilise our time and space more effectively, from that perspective.

Garran is a great example to look at. There was a need in that Woden catchment area, and the government have invested in a two-court facility in Garran Primary School, which will greatly help not just the school but the basketball community there, who have limited facilities around that area as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Within the sporting space, do you find that there is a more accurate measure of either need or capacity? Are there metrics that you use? For you, is it more about the number of teams per area?

Ms Bowles: We look at things and utilise different systems that look at facility capacity and potential use. SportsEye is a great tool that we utilise that measures our participants by postcode, looks at what facilities we have within the area and creates our demand metrics and all those different types of things. Sport and Rec have access to that as well, so they can help Education to look at overlaying some of those data points.

That is where we look at, from a facility strategy perspective, the spaces that we need to look at, where our demand points are and how we then put forward an advocacy campaign across that. It takes into account single courts, but it does not take into account the standard of the court, where that is at and those different types of things. We then need to look at the data and analyse the infrastructure around it.

MISS NUTTALL: That is visual appraisal specifications and things like that.

Ms Bowles: Yes.

MS TOUGH: We were talking before about the Stallions. When did they stop using Lyneham?

Ms Bowles: I mentioned in my report that they were moving away from Lyneham. I triple-checked with the president, and they still do utilise Lyneham. They utilise Lyneham from 5.30 to 8.30 Monday to Thursday. They utilise the court there. They are

still definitely heavily entrenched in that facility.

MS TOUGH: Monday to Thursday?

Ms Bowles: Monday to Thursday, yes, for three hours.

MS TOUGH: Are they looking at moving away?

Ms Bowles: As I said, they have moved out of area, in terms of going to Radford College. They definitely would look at other facilities in terms of where two courts become available and those different types of things. They are growing, but not actually actively promoting. They are relying on word-of-mouth, because they do not have anywhere else to go.

MS TOUGH: Yes, and there cannot be competitions on that site.

Ms Bowles: No, we would not run a competition out of that facility at all.

MS TOUGH: Is that because of the run-off size and the standard of the court?

Ms Bowles: Yes, the standard of the court and the fact that it is one court. We would not put competition basketball in there.

MS TOUGH: Were you part of any consultation on what the future of the gym would look like?

Ms Bowles: Not whilst I have been involved in the sport. I came in in 2021, at the end of that year, so I am not aware that we have been involved in any consultation. I do know that Sport and Rec and the Education Directorate have what our specifications and requirements are, as a minimum, for a facility. We rely heavily on that.

MS TOUGH: Does Basketball ACT get involved in any of the school planning stuff or is it just that Sport and Rec have the information, so they can—

Ms Bowles: Sport and Rec have the information. Obviously, we have an agreement. The government have, where it is a new build and a high school, what our requirements and requests are. We have probably done a lot of advocating to make sure that that happens. Where we are next needing to work with the Education Directorate and Sport and Rec is in looking retrospectively at some of those older, ageing facilities. It is about how we work with the directorate to make sure that we are investing in making sure they are maintained properly and brought up to some sort of standard. That is our next evolution that we are going to have to go through on this indoor sport journey.

MS TOUGH: I am assuming that will be across Canberra.

Ms Bowles: Yes, that will be across Canberra. When the Sport and Rec team asked us for our top 15 facility infrastructure projects, our top five were probably our community-based facilities, and the rest of the 10 looked at schools and how we need to work with everyone to invest in their maintenance and upkeep.

THE CHAIR: Do you know whether anyone from within the basketball community who is not within Basketball ACT has been consulted at any point in the process?

Ms Bowles: Going back that far, Stallions possibly were consulted. There was a *Canberra Times* article talking about this point. I am pretty sure they were advised or asked, but not formally, in terms of anything else that I know of.

THE CHAIR: In terms of the functionality, from a sporting perspective, of the existing gymnasium, are there upgrades to the existing facility without increasing the size of it that increase its usability?

Ms Bowles: Yes, basic stuff like looking at the backboards, the rings and the floor. All those different types of things definitely help improve and bring it up to a different standard. But it would not change how we use it or function with it, because of the size of the venue and the run-off.

THE CHAIR: It would not increase usage?

Ms Bowles: No.

THE CHAIR: Do you know, off the top of your head, how much a single-court facility—I keep asking about these costs; I can probably find them online—would be costing the Stallions?

Ms Bowles: The Stallions? No, not off the top of my head.

THE CHAIR: I will ask the government. We will wrap up there. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today.

BIGNELL, MR SHASTA RANSOM

THE CHAIR: We now welcome Shasta Bignell. For the *Hansard* record, could you please state the capacity in which you are appearing?

Mr Bignell: I am appearing as a former student and school captain of Lyneham High.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Please note that as a witness you are protected by parliamentary privilege and also bound by its obligations, which means you must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Before we ask questions, would you like to start with a brief opening statement?

Mr Bignell: Yes, please. I wanted to quickly point out and talk about an example of ACT Labor's failure to meet their promise. I have noticed that, in a lot of the media statements and even in their inquiry submission, there is a repeated claim that it was always a part of the plan to refurbish the Lyneham High School gym rather than upgrading it directly. I believe that there is evidence in the documentation procured by the FOI requests which directly contradicts this, quoting from the submission made by ACT Labor. This is referencing how they engaged in discussions with the school board about the gym and were considering multiple different avenues for investment. But, ultimately, the government determined that the refurbishment of the existing gym would deliver on its commitment while providing a suitable outcome to the school and the community.

I do not think that this is untrue, but I will reference the fact that, in one of the documents, specifically the Lyneham High School new gymnasium design and master planning project brief, written in 2022, they clearly describe a recognition from the government that a refurbishment would not be a suitable solution for the school, and I quote:

Because of the low functionality of the existing gymnasium, the focus is not on refurbishing the existing space but to construct a new two court gymnasium fit for modern sporting activities on the northeast side of the site.

This, at least personally, has undermined my trust in ACT politics and particularly ACT Labor in general. I do not know the effect that it has had on other people, but I would assume it would be much the same.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement. I want to ask, Mr Bignell, about your experience in now Dickson College?

Mr Bignell: At Dickson College?

THE CHAIR: You are now at Dickson College. You have left the school, but you are still invested in trying to get an outcome here for your community, which is great and, I think, quite inspiring. I was curious about the impact on your education while you were at Lyneham High of the current facilities—overcrowding, days like today, which we have already discussed, and rainy days. What impact did that have on you and your classmates?

Mr Bignell: I think there are a couple of different ways to take this. In terms of the school education, whenever there was rain or poor weather conditions, classrooms would pretty much have to make an appeal to use the gym, because there was enough space to accommodate all students on line. It is about 300 per PE line. So, a lot of the time if we had lessons where it was rainy or if it was particularly cold or hot outside, we just were not able to do PE. We would have to stay inside the classroom.

In terms of actual PE on the curriculum, when we did dance and units like that which need to take place inside, a lot of the time, particularly for line dancing, we would have about the whole year group of students in that PE line. If, say, you are in year 8, all of the year 8 students would be in the gym pretty much shoulder to shoulder practising the line dances, which led to a lot of small incidents where you would bump into someone or accidentally hit someone in the face when you were trying to dance. Obviously that harmed my ability, at least, to procure a good grade in that class and to learn the subject.

In terms of just the gym in general, having to spend a lot of time focusing on this rather than focusing on my studies or hanging out with friends as a student and instead having to push this, when really this should have been something that ACT Labor remained committed to in the first place, has harmed my education as well. I believe that if I had not done this—even though I do not regret it, because this is the responsibility I took on as a school captain moving into this role—I think that I could have achieved a higher standard in my classes and that I would have had a more enjoyable high school experience. There have been times where I have had to compromise on other things to keep pushing this over the last year.

THE CHAIR: How did that come about? How did you get engaged? To what extent were you engaged directly by government officials or teachers? I am just curious about—aside from being frustrated—how this came about.

Mr Bignell: I remember it pretty vividly. It was one of the nights leading up to the ACT election in October. My mum was on the school board and she brought up how, after the meeting—I do not know exactly what the date was—they had been talking about gym and how they were frustrated with it not going ahead and that the refurbishment was coming instead of an upgrade. She asked me if I would be willing to take a bit of a stand on it as a student representative. I spent the night thinking about it and I was like, “Well, I do not really have too much else going on right now; so I think it will be worthwhile to at least take a shot at this and see how it goes.”

I talked to a couple of staff members at the school and I started talking around trying to create a bit of sound about it. I sent a letter to Yvette Berry and I talked to Andrew Barr in person on the election campaign. I also think I talked to you and Rebecca Vassarotti on the campaign as well. That was when I decided to contact the Independents and the Greens on creating a petition for the gym.

THE CHAIR: Well done. Yes, I remember that. It was a day like this. Rainy outside at Dickson shops.

Mr Bignell: Yes, wonderful weather!

THE CHAIR: Yes, and you showed up very wet to tell me about it.

MS BARRY: Thank you, Shasta, for your advocacy. I think you are correct that children should be in schools to learn and not to push the government to do things that they have already promised. Your submissions reference lots of commentary around staff who raised concerns being dismissed, labelled troublemakers and facing the fear of reprisal. How did that present? How did you come to observe that?

Mr Bignell: Concerns from teachers and staff or—

MS BARRY: Yes.

Mr Bignell: A lot of it would come from personal classroom teachers and a couple of admin staff. When I first started sending the letters, I remember we also created the captains video on it at the time to make the school community aware, and after that I had a lot of teachers coming up to me and talking about it. A lot of them were concerned to talk about it in a particularly public setting, because obviously that is something that could cause them to lose their jobs. I do not think any teachers ever referenced specific political parties or anything like that, but a lot of them were expressing frustration over it in the first place.

I know a lot of them were talking about it at the time and were like, “We really want there to be action on this; we want this new gym; and we want to hold the government accountable on this, but we cannot, because we cannot do that in our role and we might lose our jobs.” We were already in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis; so that is a really big threat for any teachers, who are already on a pretty low salary.

MS BARRY: On reflection, what could the government and the education department have done better to alleviate these concerns that you witnessed?

Mr Bignell: I think the simplest thing would just be to stick to the commitment they had made in the first place. If you are going to be talking about refurbishing a gym or upgrading it—no matter what you are doing—you have to be clear and concise when you are putting it out to the public, especially as a part of an election campaign, because you do not want to mislead people.

In the planning process, it would have been better if they had consulted more of the school community directly. I think talking to students would have been good. I do not know if there were members of government that came down to the school, but I personally do not remember anyone doing it. If people had come in and taken a closer look at the facilities and had seen the fact that we were not able to hold full school assemblies or if they had seen how packed the gym could be on dance lines and that sort of thing, I think that would have been really beneficial in showing how immediate the problem was.

Beyond that, just listening earlier on when we were sending letters and when we were working and talking to people during the election campaign; taking those concerns on more seriously would have been beneficial. I think that is the best way to put it. I remember the conversation I had with Andrew Barr. It was very much as if he was listening to me but then he started talking about his own experience as the school captain

and I felt like I was not being heard and that my concerns were not being taken into account. I think being more open with that would have gone miles to help improve things.

MS BARRY: Thank you very much.

MISS NUTTALL: You mentioned that October 2024 was when the issue was first brought to your attention. Had you engaged at all with anything to do with expanding the school gym or building a new school gym before that?

Mr Bignell: I do not think I had really heard of anything before that. I remember hearing about it anecdotally from friends and stuff in year 8. But, beyond that, I had not really been involved in any of that infrastructure stuff. It went beyond the capacity as school captain.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, absolutely; hence the recommendation to government to actually consult with students. In that case, I might once again ask about capacity. In your submission you mentioned that capacity actually should not be the issue that determines it. Recently, the ACT government has cited school capacity as between 92 per cent and 96 per cent being a reason not to look at expansion right now. Do you think that applies in the case of the Lyneham High School gym? Do you think that is a fair metric to assess it?

Mr Bignell: I do not think so. I do not think it applies to the gym or the broader school as a whole. I know that there was consistent overcrowding in classrooms. I think the standard is 19 people per classroom. We regularly have 20 and 25. I know that the lead class had over 30. In the gym, obviously I have detailed all of those other problems. I think the fact that those experiences are happening in the first place with the current school capacity really shows that there is an existing problem, even without going over capacity on whatever metric you want to take.

With the hall, I know that in the ACT government's submission they also referenced that there is not a commitment to provide a suitable assembly space for the full school. I have my opinions on whether or not that is something that should be a commitment. But, speaking from experience, I think it really did harm the sense of school unity and the ability to share information with other students. That was something that we were really lacking at Lyneham, especially in year 10 and year 9, those later school years when we were trying to engage more with the school community. It was just something that we could not do.

MISS NUTTALL: That would have been quite frustrating, I would imagine. Whether this is your own personal experience or whether you have heard from friends, you mentioned during line dancing you are packed in and it becomes difficult to avoid injury, did that tend to happen with your more high-impact sports like indoor soccer? Did you ever witness that runoff being an issue, where either you felt that you were holding yourself back or you did actually see people have an accident or an injury?

Mr Bignell: Yes. I was in the DARE program at Lyneham, which is the all-boys one, and we did a lot of physical sports within the gym. It was really lucky that no-one was seriously injured in those sports. I remember multiple times where people would just

run off into the wall and that sort of thing. Personally, I would avoid going too close to the side of the court. There were a couple of times I came pretty close to hitting it. It was something that was a particular problem with that sort of stuff in terms of the run-off space. I also remember balls getting stuck in the top of the gym all the time because the roof was not high enough to hit it up. I forget what they are called, but even the thing that you hit in badminton—

MISS NUTTALL: The shuttlecock.

Mr Bignell: They could actually hit the top of the roof, which is kind of wild, considering that it is pretty difficult to get those to go really high.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes.

Mr Bignell: It was frustrating, and I think it is a real concern to safety because it happened multiple times—and that is just my experience. I do not know how many more times other students have seen that. It was just one class and one year.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: Thanks for coming in and thanks for the effort of writing the petition. It is not easy to get so many signatures. So good on you for that. I think you said to my colleague that you were not really involved in the consultation prior to kind of October last year. How was it presented to you? Do you know what went into creating that master plan? Has anyone spoken to you about the process of how it got to a master plan and then being put on ice, as they say?

Mr Bignell: I heard some stuff from members of staff at the school about being in talks with the government over a period of time. Obviously, it filtered back through year 8 to the students as well. In terms of actually knowing how the project planning process was conducted and what went into it, I am not 100 per cent sure. Most of the information that I had was based on the FOI documents that we submitted under my mum's name.

In terms of hearing about it in the first place, it was really just this thing where it was like, “People are frustrated by this because we feel like we have been promised this and we have been in this process where we have talked to government and we have been planning it”—anecdotally at least— “and it is something that we really want represented but we cannot do this as staff or necessarily even members of the board.”

MS TOUGH: You mentioned the current gym at Lyneham High means that the whole school cannot participate in assemblies. At Dickson College, is there a space for everyone to meet?

Mr Bignell: Yes, I think so. I know that they had trouble fitting in everyone this year. We have a particularly large year. I think it is around 350 people. I know that that was a bit of a struggle to get in for the start-of-year assemblies, but it was not quite bad enough yet to fit the whole school in. The thing at Dickson is that we do not really have full-school assemblies in the same way that you might at Lyneham. At Lyneham, when we would do an assembly, we would have an assembly line every two weeks or sometimes there would be ones organised for other reasons. Those would be either

full-school or a single-year assembly if it is based on a specific thing. At Dickson, the assemblies are run on a certain line on just a random day if there is an event or something. A lot of people, when they have off-lines, are not in class or they are down at the Dickson shops and that sort of thing. There is no obligation to come; so it is normally a much smaller group of people who participate in those assemblies in the first place. But I am not sure whether or not it would be able to fit the full student body, but I know that it was a struggle at the start of the year.

MS TOUGH: Do you have any experience with any of the other high schools in the area, whether they can all fit in school assemblies or not?

Mr Bignell: Not really.

MS TOUGH: Fair enough. I realised that there was a chance you probably would not know, but I thought it was worth asking. I think that is all I had. Was there anything else about your experience last year that you wanted to share?

Mr Bignell: It kind of just goes back to not having that suitable space, always being worried about an accident or something in the gym and the overcrowding, particularly in classrooms. As someone who finds it difficult sometimes to focus on schoolwork, I remember having lots and lots of students in these classrooms. The reason I am referencing this is because a part of the original plan was to potentially change the gym into a drama or a media area so that more spaces could be opened up for classrooms in the school. My experience in having these really packed classrooms was one of finding it more difficult to focus on work and finding it more difficult to conduct myself in a way which is, I guess, respectful—which is also just a friend group thing. It was impacting me—and this is as someone who is neurotypical. I do not know how it would have affected neurodivergent students in particular.

MS TOUGH: Thank you, I appreciate you coming in.

MS BARRY: I have one more question. Did you feel responsible for managing some of those risks that present in, for example, line dancing? As a school captain, did you feel that you had responsibility for managing some of those issues?

Mr Bignell: I feel like I had personal responsibility when doing line dancing or in the courts—so not running off into walls, obviously, and not accidentally knocking someone into there. As a captain, I do not think I felt any personal responsibility for that. It was more of a responsibility to the school community as a whole. For example, if anyone gets injured in there, it might be in part because I had not done enough—

MS BARRY: Yes, that is what I was thinking.

Mr Bignell: But that was broader than just injury and that sort of thing. That was just for the gym as a whole because, as captains, we were the only people who really had the ability to represent it.

MS BARRY: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: In your submission you mentioned going to Majura Primary as well.

When you were there, were classes full? I am curious about your experience through the pipeline with different schools.

Mr Bignell: I think it is important to reference first that I have not been studying in the ACT for my whole life. I lived in the States for a couple years when I was younger. We moved there when I was five and we came back when I was eight. I had a lot of experience in schools both in Sydney, in between that time, and in the States. In terms of the difference between the ACT and schools like Loftus in Sydney, I remember those classrooms and the amount of students in each one were a lot smaller. At Majura we still had fairly large classes. I cannot for the life of me remember exactly how many, because I was like eight years old. But I do remember there being a noticeable difference. But, beyond that, I am not sure because I was pretty young.

Moving into high school and college, I have noticed more and more how this sort of overcrowding or lack of infrastructure has affected school. I know that at Lyneham there was a gas leak or some sort of issue with the gas for the first two years I was there that meant that no-one was able to use the Bunsen burners in some of the classrooms. It was pretty frustrating that took two years to fix—or maybe even more, because that was when we came into the school. At Dickson, I have heard from previous students and teachers that there was a collapsed roof a while ago that had been raised a couple of times but had not been mended until it had already collapsed. I remember a light falling down—actually, a couple of weeks ago, which was pretty funny—in the same section of the school that had been repaired, and in the music classrooms it is caving in.

This lack of infrastructure has been something that has been present over my entire ACT schooling experience. It is just I have become more aware of it the older I get and the more I see of it—and especially the more I talk to private school students and my friends in private schooling where they do not have these sorts of issues, particularly when it comes to having a suitable gym or PE infrastructure or having good classrooms that have air conditioning and heating and the ability to use all the science equipment.

THE CHAIR: Would your assumption be that, at some point at Lyneham High, they will need a new gym? You are saying they need one now, but let's suppose that the government do what they have recently said they would do. You are a smart kid. When do you think they will realise, "Okay; now we actually need a new gym"? Does this seem like a sensible use of public money, when there are limited funds, to do a refurbishment rather than a rebuild? There are infrastructure issues and you have talked about where there is a lack of maintenance and that leads to a larger cost, like the roof having to be replaced. Is that the risk that you see here?

Mr Bignell: Eventually we are going to need more infrastructure at Lyneham. The ACT is growing, even if it is not growing at a rate that was expected beforehand. So my mentality is just, "Why not build it when we are starting to see the problem but it has not become a big problem?" If we are building it when it is a big problem then that is going to make it even worse for the students who are going through the school at that time.

In terms of being a waste of money, my personal opinion on this, and pretty much everyone I have talked to about this has said, is that, sure, it might be useful to fix the gym—I know that a refurbishment of the PE staff rooms is actually a big win for that

department—but it is a waste of money. It would be much better spent on expanding Majura Primary School and putting into that renovations or fixing the roof at Dickson or any other public school issues. Lyneham does not necessarily need a refurbished floor or new basketball hoops and that sort of thing. It is something that we can do without, generally. What we do need is a new gym and new infrastructure that will be to actually support the student population in the long term and now.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I quickly want to go back to your previous point when you said you were talking to some friends who go to private schools. I am mindful that often for young people it is not completely your choice; usually it is asking your parents if they are willing to send you to a private school. Have you or any of your peers had that conversation of, “If we could, we would go to a private school because of the condition of the gym”?

Mr Bignell: I do not know about the conditions of the gyms specifically. I have a mate who moved to Radford because he does competitive swimming and he is very involved in his studies and that sort of thing. He and his parents felt like they were not going to be able to meet those needs at Lyneham or at Dickson, so he transferred over, which was a bit upsetting because I was pretty close with him and it has been difficult to stay in contact. I personally have not wanted to do that. I have never been a big fan of the private school system—and we do not have the money for that sort of thing. But I know that some of the effects that we have had of overcrowding and not having that much space has affected people’s decisions on whether or not to move to a private school, even if it is not the gym directly.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. That is really helpful to know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You have done incredibly well. Thanks so much for organising this petition and taking the time to make a submission and also appear today. It is very impressive.

Mr Bignell: Awesome, thanks.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much.

Short suspension

BERRY, MS YVETTE, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

ATTRIDGE, MS VANESSA, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure, Education Directorate

CROWTHER, MR MICHAEL, Acting Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform, Education Directorate

NAKKAN, MR JOHN, Executive Branch Manager, Asset Management and Delivery, Education Directorate

WOOD, MS JO, Director-General, Education Directorate

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into the e-petition related to the Lyneham High School gymnasium. We welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and officials.

Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and also bound by its obligations, which means you must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Ms Berry: Yes. Thank you for having me along today. I understand it is as a result of the petition that was circulated by a student, who has also appeared today, from Lyneham High School, calling for the government to install a new gymnasium at Lyneham High School.

There has been a lot of discussion until now about the school, and this student's and others' aspirations for a new gymnasium at the school. We are happy to take questions from you today. I am happy to use up the hour in whatever way you want to. I do not think I have much more to say. Officials are ready and able to answer any questions as well.

There was a bit of a focus on enrolments and capacity at the school, from what I was told, during the sessions involving the previous witnesses. We can also provide information about gymnasiums across the city that might be similar to Lyneham High School's current gymnasium in size. There are a number of them; Lyneham is not the only one. The way that we make decisions around upgrades to schools is based on need within a school. It also has to be backed in somehow, by some level of data, which includes enrolment. We are not going to build a school where there are no children. That would be an unreasonable use of ACT government and taxpayers' funding. There has to be some data behind it, but that is not the only reason that we would fund upgrades across our school community.

I will leave it there, otherwise I will talk for the whole hour.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. My first question is with regard to other school gyms. Has the ACT government recently built new double gymnasiums in other schools across the territory? Are there two or three recent examples?

Ms Berry: New schools?

THE CHAIR: New gyms as part of new schools or in existing schools. It would be interesting to know about perhaps the two or three most recent examples and where they are.

Ms Berry: We have a more recent policy, within the last five or so years, where we now build double gymnasiums at high schools, new high schools, and single gymnasiums at least at primary schools. However, we will be building a double gymnasium at Garran Primary School because of the need within that community for additional indoor sports facilities, given the changes there.

Our schools can make a bit of a difference in that space, given that the schools are empty outside school hours, so making sure that those multimillion-dollar facilities are used by the community is appropriate. Garran is probably a little bit different to the standard, but all our new high schools are built with a double gymnasium.

We often talk with our sports community and our school community about what those particular needs might be in that area. With Evelyn Scott School, for example, its double gymnasium was built with a multi-indoor-sport purpose in mind, particularly focusing on roller derby. Roller derby needs different line marking and wider spaces, to be able to hold their competitions. That school was specifically built to include that purpose.

The new gymnasiums at Shirley Smith and Aunty Agnes Shea schools have sprung floors. I can ask the officials to talk you through what that means. Previously, when schools were being built, they were not built with competition in mind, but we are now building them in that way. Those are a couple of examples of new schools.

THE CHAIR: I am curious about the cost of, say, the Shirley Smith gymnasium and perhaps the double gymnasium at Garran that had to be built. Has that been costed? What are the costs of those two gymnasiums?

Ms Attridge: We do not have information here today about those specific elements because they are factored into the overall costs of the entire project for Garran, Shirley Smith and Aunty Agnes Shea. They are just one component of the entire contract, and they are included in the procurement and contract for the whole project. As I said, we do not have that information here today. Also, it is not quite as simple as separating out just that cost component for the gym, given there are the economies of scale and delivery factors that are taken in the procurement and contract approach to be able to deliver the whole project.

THE CHAIR: I understand the difference between building a whole new school and just building a gym, and doing an expansion and modernisation project of which a gymnasium is part, but I am sure there is still an itemised aspect, such as, “This is what the gym will be; this is what these classrooms will be.” Is that something you could take on notice for those three schools, and come back? I very much accept the caveat.

Ms Attridge: Yes, absolutely; we can take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. When you are making decisions about school facilities—you have touched on it already, Minister—and you consider usage outside school hours for sport organisations and so on, do you include that in the costs? There are hire fees

associated with that. I am thinking about the benefit to the ACT budget of having an additional facility at Lyneham and an additional court that could be used. The facility could be used for competitions and so on. Have you costed what that would generate in terms of hire fees, and is that a normal part of your processes?

Ms Berry: Hire fees only cover minor maintenance and cleaning, so it is not a revenue-making measure when it is hired out to community organisations or sports organisations.

THE CHAIR: I am assuming that currently there is a single gym. With a double gym, you spoke about economies of scale; it will need a bit more cleaning, but not immensely more cleaning.

Ms Berry: The whole gym is still being used. It is still the same cleaner. There will still be the same requirement, and they will still use the whole area. There is no cost saving in the size of the gym, with having a single or a double-size gymnasium. There is no cost saving because it is not utilised for revenue raising; it is utilised for school. Outside school, there is community or sports use. The cost of hiring it is just to pay for the cleaning and minor maintenance.

THE CHAIR: What is the cost of hiring one court compared to a double-court hire?

Ms Attridge: We have standard rates determined for use of school facilities outside school hours. The community use of school facilities policy is designed to facilitate that access for community, outside the times when schools need to be able to use it. Partly in recognition that some of the users that typically hire those spaces can be community groups or not-for-profit groups, the fee structure is based on a cost recovery basis, as the minister outlined. Our fee schedule information is on the Education website, so we can provide that information.

MS BARRY: I have a few questions specifically regarding Lyneham. Minister, we have heard from witnesses today that the current facility is not fit for purpose. Witnesses have raised concerns around specifications of the gym in terms of run-offs and essentially the use of that gym. One witness raised with us that, during line dancing, for example, which is a use for the gym, students were smacking each other in the face because it was just so crowded. How are you addressing those concerns? I note that, in your comments, you said that the school is currently not at capacity and you would not be building a new gym when there is no need. For the children who are currently there, how are you addressing those safety concerns that have been raised with you?

Ms Berry: School capacity and enrolment is one piece of data that is used in the decisions that the directorate makes on where to do upgrades and what kinds of upgrades there are—and, of course, there is the ACT budget. The budget is finite. There are not endless buckets of money, unfortunately, otherwise we would not be here. It does need to be managed, so these decisions are made based on a range of different factors, including capacity.

Lyneham is not the only gymnasium of that age or with that infrastructure. There are a number of gymnasiums in some of our older schools across the city that are of the same age or have the same look as the gymnasium at Lyneham High School. They can still

be used and are still fit for purpose. I understand that it does not have the run-off that some of the newer gymnasiums have. It does not have a sprung floor. I do not think it has sprung nets—basketball rings. It does not have those things because it was built at a different time.

We assess the school's infrastructure, its ability to continue to operate as it is and whether it can be upgraded or not. When the decision was made on Lyneham, the decision was made that that gymnasium could be upgraded for a whole range of different purposes.

Mr Nakkan: I can talk a little bit about what was planned for the upgrade. The first priority of the school in the upgrade, apart from the flooring, was to remove the mezzanine. The school has an old mezzanine on top of a number of equipment storage rooms which butt up against the playing surface. One of the early proposals was to remove the mezzanine and those storage rooms, giving us more floor space—still not enough to have a competition floor, but more floor space for student movement. Those storage rooms will be moved outside the building, into a shed.

The other upgrades are to the change rooms, updating them. They have not been updated for a very long time. Provided the budget can accommodate it, we would also look at the PE staffroom.

MS BARRY: I do appreciate the response, but it does not answer the question of how you are addressing current risk issues in the school. We have heard about significant ones. There is a list of them. How are you addressing the capacity issues right now? I understand that there are planned upgrades, but what are you doing right now?

Ms Attridge: The school, as part of its regular school operations, uses timetabling to manage the flow of students and use of different parts of the school throughout the day, and to be able to schedule that to maximise use of the spaces that they need for different classes and activities. There are a large number of students at Lyneham High School that do a lot of physical education there.

Schools also undertake risk assessments at their schools which they reassess and update regularly. The Education Directorate provides support and guidance to them to be able to assess risks and identify suitable controls and treatments for risks that are identified.

For the gym at Lyneham in particular, and in terms of the risks around the mezzanine and limited run-off area, access to the mezzanine area has been restricted. That risk is completely controlled, in that there is no access available to that area at present, and that has been the case for some time. The school also does specific types of physical education and different types of sports activities within the indoor space that can suitably and safely occur within that space. The school also provides supervision for physical education learning that is happening in the space. Students are supervised when they are in that space. It is about making use of the area and being mindful of it, and planning activities that can safely occur where there is a limited run-off area between line markings and the perimeter of the gym.

MS BARRY: You mentioned risk assessment and risk mitigation. I think I asked this question previously. Is there a risk register? Who has access to that? How do you

monitor or update the risk register? How does that work?

Ms Attridge: Schools are responsible for managing the risk registers at their school. That recognises that they have the most up-to-date and current information about their facility, their student needs and the way that their spaces are being interacted with, and also where risks may change or escalate, and where treatments and risk controls may need to be revisited and adjusted. Principals undertake those and the directorate provides support, assistance and guidance to them where needed.

For the gym, I am aware that the directorate has worked with the school and is undertaking further risk assessment with them to ensure that risks at the school are recorded and are up to date, that suitable risk treatment controls are in place, and that updates are made to the risk register to record changes in controls.

For example, one of the risks that the school identified was in relation to the potential for members of the public or the community to be able to access school grounds during the school day. Staff might be exiting or entering the staff car park and perhaps forgetting to close the gate behind them and leaving it open, which could leave that area open for people to enter. In order to strengthen the controls around that, the school did some work with their staff and their leaders around responsibilities and obligations, in order to emphasise that even something as simple as closing the gate is important and is an obligation, because it means that that risk control is being effectively applied.

MISS NUTTALL: A few submissions have drawn our attention to the Lyneham High School new gymnasium design and master planning project brief, the one from April 2022. From what we have read in submissions, the briefings and design seemed to have sufficiently progressed so that a new Lyneham High School double gymnasium was looking quite likely, at least back in 2022. What was the actual point at which this proposal for a double gym, entailed in the brief, was discontinued?

Ms Attridge: The decision around the scope of investment and works at Lyneham High School was made as part of the 2024-25 ACT budget. That was the point in time when the decision to redevelop the school was confirmed.

MISS NUTTALL: Who made that decision?

Ms Attridge: Budget decisions are made by ministers and the cabinet.

MISS NUTTALL: Would that be cabinet or specifically the expenditure review committee?

Ms Berry: Both.

MISS NUTTALL: On what basis and with what information did cabinet and ERC make that decision?

Ms Berry: The reasons I have described earlier.

MISS NUTTALL: Was that provided to you in a brief?

Ms Berry: I believe so.

Ms Attridge: Typically, investment decisions are made based on business case information, with data and evidence put forward to support options that could be presented in a business case. For a school infrastructure project, that would usually include things like enrolment projections, capacity utilisation, current condition—those sorts of things, speaking generally about the process.

MISS NUTTALL: When that brief was first written, within the Lyneham High School community, who was made privy to it at the time?

Ms Berry: It was not a brief. It would have been through a budget submission. That was my word. I mis-spoke.

THE CHAIR: Do you mean the April 2022 project briefing?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, I mean the April 2022 briefing. Sorry, I am going back a little bit.

Ms Attridge: In this case the project brief was shared with staff at the school. There was consultation occurring with the school leadership around school priorities, school needs and options, to inform options development and feasibility work or feasibility studies which are necessary to be able to identify what the options are, what the rationale might be for each, what the challenges, benefits and opportunities could be for each option, to be able to then narrow it down and provide some evidence base behind options that could be presented for consideration or for investment by government.

In this case the school principal provided input around some of those school priorities that John has mentioned, too, around things like amenity, access to the area, storage, improving usability of the gym—those sorts of things.

Ms Wood: The context for that options development at that point in time was off the back of enrolment projections, a period pre 2020 of growth, which has reduced over time. As Ms Attridge said, the options include the rationale, and the rationale in this case was a commitment to refurbish the gym, which was the original commitment, as well as looking at whether additional capacity was needed at the school. That included consideration of one way to deliver additional capacity, which would be to repurpose the gym for that purpose, which would then require a new gym. That is how multiple options were on the table—because, actually, there was more than one objective in that process.

MISS NUTTALL: Was that prior to the finalisation of the April 2022 brief, or was that afterwards?

Ms Attridge: That was happening at the same time and, indeed, throughout the previous term of government. That partly reflects the changes that happen each year naturally, with peaks and troughs that occur in population, and specific circumstances that can change at a school. For example, with Lyneham High School, in the last term of government, we reduced the published overall capacity of the school—the number that we publish that says how many students can be accommodated at the school—to

reflect the requirement for the school to use some of their learning spaces differently, particularly for small group learning, to accommodate needs of students with disability.

As Ms Wood said—and Mr Crowther can add to this—we were coming off a period of really significant, high growth in the public education system and enrolments. That growth did start to slow down through the last term of government, which then has a corresponding impact on capacity utilisation and the assessment of enrolment data. Capacity utilisation occurred, in the last term of government, across the inner north district.

Mr Crowther can talk to that district-level approach and some of those enrolment policy levers that we also use to consider demand management options that would have been considered at the time, as part of that feasibility work.

Mr Crowther: As Ms Attridge has pointed out, at the earlier point in time we saw very strong enrolments at Lyneham High School, and at a number of other schools within the inner north. They maxed out at 1,118 students in 2018. The directorate each year looks at former trends and projects forward to look at how we manage capacity across our schools.

During the period leading up to this work, there was an expectation that the growth in the inner north would continue. There was a view that the surge in enrolments that we were seeing would continue in further years. At the time, advice was presented to government around the options. The projections showed that the high school, after that particular peak, had dropped down a little bit, and the forward projection showed that it would be stable and lowering in further years.

The initial thought around continued growth was not bearing out in the data and the advice we provided to government. Since that decision was made by government, ACT Treasury have put out new population projections, I think in August, and that shows the higher growth. Since the previous time they did that exercise, in 2022, it has dropped again. That expected demand dropped off, and it has dropped off further, based on the latest data from Treasury. We are expecting Lyneham High School largely to stay stable and possibly reduce back in the future.

Ms Berry: During that growth, though, we did install some transportable classrooms down there, for additional teaching and learning spaces in that area.

Mr Crowther: Yes.

Ms Berry: The government responded to that growth at that time. Now it is starting to drop significantly—as a result also of Shirley Smith High School.

Mr Crowther: That is right.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Was an options paper ever produced? I am interested in understanding. There was the design brief and there was concurrent work happening to explore options. Was that work to explore a broader array of options ever shown to anyone within the Lyneham High School community? And what did that work look like? That is what I am getting at.

Ms Attridge: I cannot talk to the specifics of the business case, because that would be subject to cabinet-in-confidence requirements. Typically for a school infrastructure investment project, we would include several options in the advice to government that could produce a variety of results or impacts. That could include a combination of infrastructure investments or infrastructure investment plus enrolment policy changes to make use of capacity at other schools in the region, for example. In terms of whether options were specifically provided to the school, I am not sure that they were in such a definitive way.

Mr Crowther: Not in a formal sense, I would say. The proposal went through conversations with the school. Their needs were at the start of the conversation, which is the same process that we have with most schools throughout the year.

MISS NUTTALL: Noting that the ACT 2020 Labor commitment was to upgrade the gymnasium at Lyneham High School and then the April 2022 brief was presumably shown to key stakeholders, do you think it would be reasonable, from the perspective of those stakeholders within the Lyneham community, to expect that the Labor commitment pertained specifically to what was in that brief, if no other options were presented to them at the time?

Ms Berry: I do not know how people feel, but obviously they have signed a petition saying that their expectation is for a new gymnasium. That is clear. I think we all recognise that is what the petitioners want and that it was perhaps the understanding of some of the people in the school community. That is not the decision that government took. I know that is disappointing to everyone, and that is why we are here. That is the decision that government has made right now. It is not a political decision; it is a decision based on data and evidence, and it is based on need as well, which we have to consider across all our schools to ensure that the budget meets the needs of all our schools, and it has to be done over a number of years.

I understand that Lyneham High School wants a new gymnasium. A number of schools want new gymnasiums. We cannot do them all at the same time. That does not mean that a new gymnasium will never happen at Lyneham; it is just not the project going ahead in this budget. I want to make that clear. I am happy to hear that you are clear that there was no promise made for a new gymnasium in the 2020 election. That has finally been cleared up, because that is important. We have responded to the aspirations of the school—that they want more than we are providing—but that is what we are providing. That is the decision that the government has taken through its budget processes. I know that is disappointing.

MISS NUTTALL: I really appreciate the clarification. My question is specifically about the time period between the 2020 election commitment, which defined upgrading the Lyneham High School gymnasium but did not necessarily go into more detail—

Ms Berry: That is right.

MISS NUTTALL: and the 2022 brief, and whether there was anything contrary to that brief that would have led anyone at Lyneham High to believe that it could have been something other than the double gymnasium that was presented in the 2022 brief.

Ms Berry: I was not at any of those briefings, but that certainly appears to be what witnesses have been telling you today. I am sorry that is how they are feeling. I know they are disappointed. That is clear.

Ms Wood: I would add that the design process and engagement was led by the directorate. We acknowledge that the directorate could have done more to manage expectations and understanding about this process—that it was exploring options; it was not a commitment to a particular option. It is something we have to balance all the time: understanding a school’s needs and engaging people in potential options, and being clear about decisions coming through the government process. As the minister said, the government will always balance a range of priorities across a range of schools and other obligations. The things that we certainly take from the feedback from stakeholders is to look at how we manage those processes and how we manage expectations and be clear about what the conversation is about and the process for a decision.

MS BARRY: Regarding the design brief, when in the process of consultation do you go as far as producing a design brief, if it is an options position? How do you go about producing a design brief that says, “These are the options. We’ve decided to go with this option”? That is my understanding of a design brief: “We are moving ahead with this option, which is why we have a design brief.” How did you get there if it was still about exploring options?

Ms Attridge: At that point, in 2022, no decision had been made on a scope of works and no decision had been made on investment either. The work that occurred, including feasibility and the design brief that you have referred to, is necessary to develop, to a reasonable level of detail and depth, what a concept could include, what the cost implications might be and whether it is, in fact, feasible to deliver such an option at the school. That is necessary because, otherwise, there is a risk that we could get too far down the road and government could even make a commitment to deliver something that turns out could not be delivered at a site, because of constraints like ecological factors or lack of developable land available, and that sort of thing. We needed to engage specialist advice through those services and architects to develop the design concept to that extent, to inform the options development and inform advice to government on those options.

Ms Berry: That is the start of the consultation. What is confounding me a bit is that we get in trouble when we do not consult and, when we do consult, we get into trouble. We have to do some level of consultation, which may lift expectations, and it clearly has in this case. We are not going to put in, for example, a new double gymnasium at Shirley Smith High School. It is not needed. That is the kind of work that needs to happen before the government makes a decision. Somebody will know about it, and, in this case, there were conversations with the school community. They had different expectations, unfortunately, and were disappointed with the outcome of the decision that the government made.

The Education Directorate is having further consultation with the school about the process going forward. There will be fuller consultation with the community about the scope of the works and other things that may or may not fit into the funding bucket, but

we do not make decisions without having those initial conversations with our school communities to understand what the need is and then knowing what is actually possible on the site.

THE CHAIR: I am not sure that we got an answer to the earlier question. It was described as options. You have described it the same way, Minister Berry. Our sense, from what we have heard today, is that the brief in 2022 was one option: a new gym. You could probably understand the community expectation that it was the option being considered; it was not one among multiple options. Is that an accurate analysis of the situation?

Ms Attridge: That brief was not intended to be shared by the directorate more broadly with the community. Rather, it was for consultation with the principal and school leadership in order to have conversations about school need and to test it, and to ensure that, in our brief, we have reflected what those needs and priorities are. At the time—some of our records demonstrate this—those conversations were had with that important framing around managing expectation. At the time, the government had not made a specific investment decision to allocate a particular amount of funding or scope for redevelopment of the gym, other than the election commitment to redevelop the gym. We would have made that clear, and some of our records show that we did make that clear in those conversations—that it was indicative and subject to further decisions.

I would reiterate the minister's comments and Ms Wood's comments. We have reflected and recognised that there was an opportunity to strengthen those important caveats and be really clear about what was indicative concept development and subject to future decision-making. We have done some work with our teams to apply that learning and experience with Lyneham to some of our other projects. We will continue to do that in the further engagement that we will have with the community and the school in the next stages of this project.

THE CHAIR: At that time, was there another option brief, for a refurbished gym, presented to staff in March or May 2022, or was it not until the 2024-25 budget that a decision was made to rescope the project?

Ms Attridge: Through the 2024-25 budget, the government made decisions about the extent of redevelopment of the gym and committed \$5.7 million. No decision had been made prior to that. I do not believe that the directorate had articulated to the school which specific options it was considering, other than having conversations around an option that included increased capacity in the existing gym, which would require replacement of the gym—delivery of a new gym.

THE CHAIR: In that intervening period, April 2022 to June 2024, was an alternate option prepared as a full brief and presented to staff?

Ms Attridge: The directorate developed a range of options. I do not believe that it presented information to staff that articulated the specifics of those options, other than the project brief that was shared with the principal.

MISS NUTTALL: Previous committees have found that the current school capacity formula is not fit for purpose. It does not quite take into account the needs of a school

community. Beyond that, it has been put to us, through multiple witnesses today, that an overall measure of capacity for the school is not necessarily going to work for the gym itself, given that, if it is for PE on a rainy day, you will have a full year group using it—that is a quarter of the school crammed into the one place—or will have to go elsewhere. I appreciate that you have cited capacity issues more broadly, but did you specifically consider capacity issues within the gymnasium as part of that discussion? And what did that look like?

Ms Attridge: Capacity assessment looks at all of the school's facilities. Overall capacity figures of a school that we publish are around how many students can be accommodated at a school. They do not reflect how many students can be accommodated within a facility like the school's gym at any particular time. It is more about learning spaces and ensuring that there are sufficient learning spaces available for all students who would be eligible to enrol at a school, for them to be accommodated.

MISS NUTTALL: That goes to why you might preclude them, but, in the consideration of a new gym, the issues we have heard from witnesses specifically go to capacity issues within the gym itself. Do you have a narrower measure that would essentially tell you whether a current gym is fit for purpose for the number of students that would use it at the same time?

Ms Wood: That goes back to something that Ms Attridge said earlier in this discussion, which is that all of our schools, including Lyneham High, manage all their spaces and manage their timetabling. It is complex to ensure that they can maximise use of spaces and do not have any conflicts. That is what Lyneham is doing to manage PE and other uses of that space.

Ms Berry: I understand that after COVID, when they had to put in safety measures and there could not be whole school assemblies, schools did year group assemblies or junior, primary and senior high assemblies. They found that it was better to have a split and not have the whole school crammed into a place. There would not be too many schools—even some of our newer schools—if they were at full capacity, where every student and every teacher could fit into a gymnasium. It would be unusual these days. Our schools are much bigger than they used to be. Gymnasiums are generally not used for whole school events, as they used to be. What Ms Attridge is telling you is that a gymnasium is not designed for a full school assembly.

MISS NUTTALL: I understand that. There are other uses of a school gymnasium, for PE and things like that, especially on rainy days. We have heard evidence that, in practice, if it is raining, not many classes can use the gym. Some classes have to go elsewhere and that interrupts their learning.

Ms Berry: That is the same argument you could use for a library, though. Schools manage their school spaces to fit students when it is required. I understand what you are saying. We do not have any contrary advice, that it is happening at the school.

MISS NUTTALL: Could I confirm, then, that there was no narrower measure, other than overall school capacity, used in determining the use of the gym?

Ms Berry: Need, the state of the gym, and what it could be used for.

Ms Attridge: There are all those sorts of factors, and then there are the operational decisions that schools make about how they use their spaces—uses at different times—and timetabling. The staff at Lyneham do a fantastic job of planning that scheduling to an incredible amount of detail to make sure that they are making best use of space across the campus.

MS BARRY: I have a question on capacity. Someone mentioned—I think it was you, Minister—that, due to projections of reduced enrolments, the decision was made to not build a new gym. Is any consideration going into the fact that the lack of investment in facilities that are currently needed is perhaps resulting in lower public school enrolment? Are you doing any work on that analysis?

Ms Berry: There is no evidence to suggest that that is the case.

Mr Crowther: That is true.

MS BARRY: That public school enrolments are declining and private school enrolments are going up?

Ms Berry: You are talking specifically about Lyneham?

MS BARRY: Yes. You mentioned that the decision not to invest in the new facility was because enrolments were going down.

Ms Berry: At Lyneham?

MS BARRY: At Lyneham. My question is: are you currently doing any work to assess whether the declining rate of enrolments at public schools, and the inclining rate of enrolments at private schools, is because of the lack of facilities?

Ms Attridge: I can start and then Mr Crowther can explain the methodology. Broadly, as Mr Crowther has already indicated, the change in projections for Lyneham High School specifically—but we also see this across other schools—is primarily demographic. It is primarily about population projections. It is about what has happened to the birth rate in the ACT and what is happening in the population and demographics of the Inner North. Mr Crowther can speak to what that shows us.

Mr Crowther: Yes. The biggest impact on our projections and enrolments is demographics. What we have seen in our primary schools over years is a drop in the birth rate. You are starting to see that come through in lower preschool and kindergarten enrolments, and that will travel through to high school and college years. Within the Inner North schools, the lower rate of growth is reflected in the changes in population projections that the ACT Treasury have produced. That is that lower numbers of school aged children are predicted going forward than there were under previous estimates.

Ms Berry: People have not had babies, so we do not have the junior kids in our schools at the rate that we had in Gungahlin, which was extraordinary. It was the highest population growth in the country. It is now dipped off and stabilised—thank goodness,

because now we can concentrate on doing the upgrades and modernising some of our older schools and not continually providing additional spaces in Gungahlin in particular or building new schools where they are not required. It is certainly providing some breathing space for the Education Directorate to look at their budget and work with older schools on these kinds of upgrades.

THE CHAIR: Is that reflected in non-government school enrolments?

MS BARRY: Non-government school enrolments are going up.

Mr Crowther: We have seen that trend shifting nationally. Each state and territory is seeing a slowly increasing proportion of enrolments at non-government schools. Largely, there is greater availability of non-government schools and parental choice. Nothing that I am aware of would indicate that the quality of the public schools that we have is a reason for those decisions. There is nothing unique about the ACT that we do not see in other jurisdictions.

THE CHAIR: Going to Ms Barry's question earlier, does that mean that you are looking at that and saying, "No. This isn't a factor," or are you looking at the population projections and saying that this is the sole reason, and then not investigating whether facilities and the like are having an impact on the decision of parents?

Ms Wood: We are not saying that the demographic change—

THE CHAIR: I accept it is harder to look at than just population data, but we are asking whether you are looking at it and deciding it is not a factor.

Ms Wood: We look at a range of data. For enrolment projections, population is the biggest driver. As Mr Crowther has said, nationally there is a trend. The proportional share of public and non-government education has shifted significantly—

THE CHAIR: I am keen to get to Ms Tough, but first I would like an answer: are you specifically looking at the impact of school facilities and families' decisions?

Ms Wood: We look broadly at satisfaction with schools. We have the School Satisfaction and Climate Survey. We look at a range of factors about how families, carers, staff and students are responding to public education. There is a range of data that we look at to assess—

Ms Berry: And there would be a range of reasons. For example, there are people who leave our private school system to go to our public school system. Brindabella Christian College is a perfect example of people leaving, not because of the facilities, because they had a brand-new gymnasium built there, but because of other things that were going on at that school. They were making decisions to shift and go elsewhere—not all to public schools but to some other schools. We are seeing an increase in the number of students going to flexible education or homeschool education. That is also a trend across the country. It is not unusual here. We think that is happening for a range of reasons, but nailing exactly what that is would require a significant amount of work and the goodwill of parents and families to provide that information, because it would have to be voluntary. We could not force them to tell us the exact reasons.

MS BARRY: I am really sorry, but the question is: as part of school satisfaction, are you looking at infrastructure?

Mr Crowther: We have some questions around satisfaction with learning. I believe infrastructure is part of it. I will have to check.

MS BARRY: Okay. So you are taking that on notice?

Ms Berry: I remember doing those surveys. I think they do include infrastructure.

MS TOUGH: I also want to stay on the population projections. Minister, earlier you mentioned Shirley Smith High School. It is kind of edge of Gungahlin, top of the inner north area. With its priority enrolment area, is it influencing the decisions of parents?

Mr Crowther: For Shirley Smith, there are a number of suburbs where families can choose to go to Shirley Smith. Families in Downer are guaranteed a place at Lyneham High School as their priority enrolment area but, if they choose to, they can enrol at Shirley Smith. But they are guaranteed a place at Lyneham High School. For families in Watson, students are guaranteed a place at either Lyneham High School or Campbell High School, under one of our shared zone management arrangements. Those families can also choose to apply at Shirley Smith but are guaranteed between Lyneham and Campbell.

But the question was around how many families have enrolled at Shirley Smith. I do not have that with me; sorry.

MS TOUGH: That is all right. I am just curious whether, with the population changes and the demographic changes and also a new school being there, that is also possibly leading to Lyneham not being as—

Ms Berry: One of the things that the directorate does when it is looking at population growth across the city and enrolments in schools is that it can—but very rarely does—change priority enrolment areas and shared enrolment areas and make small adjustments in those circumstances. When they do make those adjustments, it then frees up more space in the school for the students in that local area.

We have provided—it was before COVID—priority enrolment areas for New South Wales students to come to Melba Copland and on the other side of town. I cannot remember which schools. It meant that it took the pressure off Melrose High School, for example, which was getting a lot of students from out of area, so that local students could have a space at their local school, which is the priority for the directorate.

MS TOUGH: Are there any factors in the enrolment projections that we have not covered—like why Lyneham might be changing?

Mr Crowther: Our projections model was initially developed in collaboration with the ANU's School of Demography. After a procurement process, we are now working with the Centre for International Economics. They are demographic external experts. We do have expertise within the directorate, but there is that sort of more nuanced specialist

expertise. Each year we run a new set of projections. On occasion, we will do that more than once. For example, for this year, when ACT Treasury released its updated population projections, we had just finished the first update and then went back and did a second update, so that we provide government with the most recent advice. The projections predict a range and, obviously, the further you go into the future it does get a bit more wobbly. So we provide that advice. But it is the best estimates that we can provide government to help with its decisions.

THE CHAIR: In relation to Ms Barry's question, can you provide on notice a list of the factors that are used to—

Mr Crowther: I can.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned you were going to have to check on notice about infrastructure as part of the school surveys.

Mr Crowther: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I think it would be helpful, as one of your items in your methodology is probably going to say school surveys or something to that effect, to have—

Mr Crowther: Sorry; not for population projections.

THE CHAIR: No, sorry; for enrolment projections.

Mr Crowther: The question was around understanding of satisfaction with infrastructure through our surveys, which I have taken on notice. That is not factoring in projections of enrolments—

THE CHAIR: Okay; they do not inform enrolment projections.

Mr Crowther: What I was talking about is the role of projections around largely the number of four-year-old preschool students that will go into education, and a transition approach of how they will flow through to primary, high and college. So it is a hard numbers, maybe a census, Treasury population projections—

THE CHAIR: Okay; so family satisfaction with their school does not inform enrolment projections?

Mr Crowther: Within the enrolment projections, we take account of affiliations. Some families are more—

THE CHAIR: Sorry; do the surveys we were talking about just before inform enrolment projections?

Ms Wood: The surveys—

Ms Berry: They are people that have left, aren't they?

Ms Wood: Yes; that is right. What I was saying about the surveys is that this is how

we understand how people are feeling about public education—across staff, students, parents and carers. It is a way that we kind of work out how to respond to those school communities. So that can inform a range of decisions. What Mr Crowther was talking about in the enrolment projections is a very technical exercise.

THE CHAIR: Okay; so that is a no.

MS BARRY: That is a no.

THE CHAIR: I want to quickly jump back to the full project brief, April 2022. At that time, was it the directorate's position that a full new gym was the way to go—that a refurbished gym would not need school community needs at that time?

Ms Attridge: Our records indicate that, at that time, there was a range of information that showed a number of options could be considered. One of them was expansion and replacement of the existing gym with a new gym. At that particular point in time, there was also a stronger driver in support of expanding capacity and providing a new gym, based on the enrolment projections and the growth at the time, which then reduced each year since then. That demand driver for that expansion and brand new gym dropped away since then.

THE CHAIR: So, at that time, it was the view that we needed a new gym and factors changed and the position changed at the time—

Ms Wood: I think the underlying position is actually just—

THE CHAIR: I get that there are options. I understand that, but I have options and I have a preferred option. And that can change, because now I am not in the position I was at lunch time. Do you know what I mean?

Ms Wood: I think the underlying that Ms Attridge has pointed to is that the new gym came out of expanding capacity through using the existing space at the gym. So it was not a—

Ms Berry: A separate decision on its own.

Ms Wood: That is right.

THE CHAIR: So, for us to understand the timeline: there was the election commitment in 2020—“We are going to do something about the gym; we are going to upgrade the gym”; then the directorate goes off, as you do, when you start to work out how to implement these election commitments; and then we get to April 2022 where, at that point, the view is that the way to fulfil this commitment is with a new gym.

Ms Berry: No.

THE CHAIR: Or the most likely way to fulfil this commitment, the preferred way—

Ms Attridge: One of several options.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but it was the only one that had a full brief in relation to it with architectural drawings with costs.

Ms Berry: But the gym was not on its own.

THE CHAIR: I am not suggesting that it was. But, if we were here in April 2022 asking, “How are you going to fulfil that commitment?”, you would probably say, “It is looking likely that this is the pathway forward.” I accept that it has changed since then.

Ms Berry: I do not know what they said, because I was not there—and you were not there.

Ms Attridge: I do not think we could say that it was looking likely that that was the way forward. It was a really strong option that provided a whole lot of benefits, because it was bigger, and it would have come at a much higher cost than other options as well. It was a very attractive option at the time, and it had that more compelling driver behind it around growth at the time. But no decision had been made. The directorate was aware that it was subject to future decisions that would be made by government, which is why we always have multiple options on the table.

THE CHAIR: When presenting those options, when we get to 2024, through the budget process, did the directorate recommend a new gym or a refurbished gym, or just lay out equal options?

Ms Wood: That is subject to the business case, which is cabinet-in-confidence issue.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but I think now that the decision has been made the deliberations cannot be impacted, because they have already happened.

Ms Berry: I will take it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify the question that has been taken on notice, it is: the options that were presented and any preference for a given option—any recommendation for a given option to be taken?

Ms Berry: What options were provided to the government?

THE CHAIR: Yes, and which were recommended by the directorate?

Ms Berry: Sure. I will take on notice on whether that information exists in a business case that is outside of the cabinet processes or whether I can provide that information. So I will take it on notice and get that advice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. There was \$5.75 million or thereabouts allocated in last year’s budget. But earlier we heard that you are now starting to consult on what the refurbished gym could look like. We also heard from the P&C that they have not heard anything since last June. So where did that figure come from?

Ms Attridge: The \$5.7 million?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Attridge: The business case that was provided to government would have included costings information and informed that decision and that investment.

THE CHAIR: Okay; but we still do not know what it looks like. I am curious about where that figure has come from. Do you know what I mean? What does that figure—

Ms Attridge: Okay; I see where you are going. The intention is to redevelop the existing gym using the existing footprint—so within the exterior perimeter walls of the space—and to provide as much as impact as we can with those funds across the facility. It is expected to include things like upgrading the change rooms, making changes to the floor and upgrading the floor. It will include some aesthetic updates as well to modernise. The investment and the works will also address and meet current code and standard requirements as well. That is the sort of scope of work that informed the advice to government around the cost to redevelop.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So there has essentially been a budget provided, in the same way that, if I get a quote to get some landscaping done, and they say, “What can you spend?”, I might say \$10,000, and they do not come back to me with options that cost \$30,000; they say, “This is what you can do with \$10,000.” Is that kind of like where we have landed?

Ms Attridge: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Obviously you are providing more information than I have, but I do the same thing with the landscaper: “I want new turf or whatever”—

Ms Attridge: Yes. Yes, that is right—

THE CHAIR: “And you have got to stick within budget now and deliver what you can”?

Ms Attridge: Yes. That is why we needed to do some of that feasibility, scoping and design work during the last term of government to be able to provide as accurate advice as we could at that point in time about the indicative costs—noting that costs and market are subject to change and fluctuations, and the more accurate we can make that advice at the time, the more likely it is to align with current market costs, so that we can spread those funds as far as we can across the gym.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us what the cost was going to be for a new gym?

Ms Attridge: I believe that—

Ms Berry: I will take that on notice, too.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

MS BARRY: I just have a few follow-on questions, if that is all right?

THE CHAIR: If you could be really quick.

MS BARRY: Really quick, yes. The \$5.7 million was decided based on, in Mr Emerson's own words, a quote you were provided—or whatever the process is. At what point were the needs of the school considered? Had the conversation happened with the parents about what is needed in this school and whether that meets the need?

Ms Wood: As we talked about earlier, there were extensive discussions in the first term of government around that range of options which were canvassed. We are obviously getting ready to go and have more direct conversations with the school. But it is always that balance between gathering information about the need to prepare options and then how much can be shared. We have already canvassed in this session the expectation management being an important part of that. I think we have done quite a bit to understand the needs of the school and the more specific understanding will come through—

MS BARRY: What support has been provided to the parents? We all agree that there was an assumption on one hand and another assumption based on the parents' expectations. What supports have you provided to the parents currently?

Ms Attridge: High-level information about the commitments are being provided to the school and communicated publicly as part of the budget process. The most recent update that was provided to the school to share with the school community through their newsletter occurred around week 1 of term 4. It was either week 1 or week 2, an update was shared with the school to share with them. The directorate is able to meet with representatives of the school P&C or the school board along with the school principal. That can be arranged.

MISS NUTTALL: What was the rationale for a competition standard floor given that the building itself could not be made competition standard?

Ms Berry: Because that is our policy now.

Mr Nakkan: Just for comfort and ease of use. It is similar to the courts that they will play on when they are in competition and it can be used for training. So it is replicating that surface as much as possible.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Berry: I know you are very interested in Lyneham High School in particular. But, as I said at the start, we have to make decisions across nearly 93 public schools about funding for upgrades. I think I can quote the ACT parents—who have not been invited to come along today—who said in their media release:

We cannot allow politics to decide which schools receive funding. Every student deserves a safe, modern learning environment—

yes, they do—

and right now there is inequity across the system that must be addressed.

I think what I am trying to get to today is that, yes, this school community have been vocal and they have aspirations for their school, as every school does, but that cannot be the reason why decisions are made that are not made at other schools, based on need, who may not have a vocal parent group or representatives in the parliament. It must be made with data to back it in and based on what is actually really needed at the school.

Yes, this school absolutely wants a new gym—and it would be delightful. I would love to build a new double gym at that school that was competition standard. But, at this point in time, the budget does not allow for that, and we can address some of the need by doing the work that the education directorate has come to working with the school community. As I said last week, I am happy to meet with the school about their aspirations going forward. But, right now, this is the work that we are wanting to get on with. So that will occur. But I am happy, as is the education directorate, to continue to talk with the school about their other needs and future aspirations in that space, as I do with every other school across the city.

THE CHAIR: Fair enough. I think what we are learning about is the disparity between community expectations and government understanding of what was and is being done, which was the strong impetus behind us starting to inquire into the position. I do not want to speak on behalf of the committee or disclose confidences, but that was certainly the case for me—trying to understand.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If you have taken questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all our witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard and the secretariat for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today.

The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm