



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021-22](#))

**Members:**

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)**

**MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)**

**MR P CAIN**

**PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2021**

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**Acting secretary to the committee:**

**Dr C Regan (Ph: 620 50142)**

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

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

**APPEARANCES**

**Community Services Directorate.....54**  
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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 12.47 pm.**

Appearances:

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

Education Directorate

Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General

Parkinson, Mr Andrew, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Capital Works

Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform

Le, Ms Thao, Chief Financial Officer

McMahon, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery

McAlister, Ms Coralie, Chief Executive Officer, Teacher Quality Institute

Huxley, Mr Mark, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement

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

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the second of five public hearings of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion inquiry into the ACT budget 2021-22. Before we go further, the committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people, and to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and their contribution to the life of the city and the region.

The proceedings today will examine the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate in relation to child and family centres and child development services. Before we start, there are a few housekeeping matters that I wish to draw to everyone's attention. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. The proceedings are being broadcast and webstreamed live. It is helpful for everyone, when taking a question on notice, to please say, "I will take that as a question on notice." For all witnesses, the first time you speak please also confirm that you have read the privilege statement and that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister Berry, we will not do it for everyone because we have got a cast of thousands here. But when people do speak we will just acknowledge the privilege statement. We do not have opening statements, to save some time, so let us just jump into it. Minister, this budget has a lot of investment in Gungahlin schools. I was wondering if you could update the committee on how this budget funds education in Gungahlin.

**Ms Berry:** Thank you for that question. Yes. Gungahlin is one of the fastest growing jurisdictions in the country and we are seeing an ever-increasing number of schools and school expansions happening in that part of the ACT. In previous years, in

government budgets, we used to build only one school every four years but now, because of growth in our city, we are starting to see one new school being built every year. We are definitely seeing that in Gungahlin, with the new school in Throsby and the expansion of Margaret Hendry Primary School, as well as an expansion of the Franklin Early Childhood School to a P to 6 primary school.

I will ask Katy or somebody from the directorate to provide a little more detail on those schools.

**Ms Haire:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. To provide a little more detail, I thought I would ask Mr Parkinson to describe the projects that are being funded in this year's budget for Gungahlin schools and the north side and then I will hand on to Ms Deb Efthymiades to talk about our planning for the future in Gungahlin and the north of Canberra.

**Mr Parkinson:** I confirm that I have read and understood the privilege statement. To the budget announcements this year, in this year's budget the government has announced \$118 million of funding to construct the expansion of Margaret Hendry school and the new Taylor high school on the land immediately adjacent to Margaret Hendry.

The expansion of Margaret Hendry will provide an additional 600 places for P to 6 students and will be located immediately to the west of the existing school, on the same block as the Margaret Hendry school. It will be an expansion of those learning communities, and some additional facilities within the main admin areas of the school. The expansion of Margaret Hendry school is scheduled to open for the start of the 2023 school year, about 15 months from now. It will be a fairly busy period of activity on that site over the next 15 months as we expand that school.

Immediately adjacent to the Margaret Hendry Primary School site is the site for the new high school in Taylor. North Gungahlin High School is its working name at the moment. That site is located, as I said, immediately to the west of Margaret Hendry and directly south of all the Taylor playing fields. There will be a new high school there. That high school will provide 800 permanent spaces, and that is scheduled to open in the 2024 school year. That high school will provide a whole range of facilities for that community in Taylor: a large double gym, specialist learning facilities for high school kids and general learning settings for high school kids.

Both those schools, like all our new schools, will be built as energy efficient, zero-emissions schools to continue the commitment the government has made towards contemporary learning environments and energy efficient, environmentally friendly buildings.

**THE CHAIR:** I am not sure if you said it, but what was the time line on Taylor high school?

**Mr Parkinson:** It is scheduled to open at the start of 2024, and the Margaret Hendry expansion for the start of 2023.

**Ms Haire:** Would you like a little extra information on the projected growth and for

future planning for the north of Canberra?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Ms Haire:** I will hand over to Ms Efthymiades for that.

**Ms Efthymiades:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I do not have quite as many spectacular details as Mr Parkinson, as the work we do goes before he gets to that fun bit of actually nutting out all the specifics. There has been a significant investment by government in this budget of \$9 million into feasibility and planning across the whole of the ACT, including considerable effort in the north.

In the inner north we are anticipating growth in both primary and high schools within this next decade and, therefore, feasibility into exactly how we deliver on that is included in this budget. In addition, there is an explicit inclusion of feasibility work around increased college expansion for the north, inclusive of Gungahlin residents. That is going to be another quite significant piece.

A final piece in that suite is around specialist school offerings on the north side and what is a contemporary offering, going forward. There is also feasibility funding for that. There is an awful lot happening right across the board but particularly in the north.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I get an update on Kenny High School as well?

**Ms Haire:** I will pass to Mr Parkinson for the latest on the Kenny High School.

**Mr Parkinson:** Kenny High School has development approval now for the construction of that school on that site. We are working through the last couple of environmental issues that were called up by that approval and hope to resolve those shortly. The contract has been awarded for the construction of the school and it is scheduled to open in 2023, again about a 15-month build process from when we can get on site to have that school built and operating. We have already awarded that construction contract. We are well placed to make a start to that as we sign off the last of the approval process and get going on that site.

**THE CHAIR:** It was mentioned that there are still ongoing planning works around new north-side college facilities. Can anyone inform the committee when there might be more information available to the community about a decision in that space?

**Ms Haire:** I will ask Deb Efthymiades to expand further on her answer around the north-side college.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The feasibility work is for that deeper planning work and community engagement to get underway. There have already been some informal conversations that have commenced, but until we have had the deeper feasibility study and then we take those considerations back to government for decision we will not have a lot of extra publicly available information. There have been a number of informal conversations going on at both Dickson College and Gungahlin College, who already operate beautifully as a tandem pair, particularly in terms of VET

delivery for the north. There is a lot to build on there and there is a lot of keen interest in working out how we make that work for the residents of Gungahlin but also the north side more broadly.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to ask about teacher shortages. We know that teacher shortage is a national problem. Congratulations, Minister, for establishing the teacher shortage task force to look at that from an ACT perspective. I would not mind getting a bit more information about how much funding, if any, has been allocated specifically to the task force, who will be making up the task force and if there is anything the government has already identified that the task force is working on as a priority.

**Ms Berry:** Thanks for that question. Yes, we were able to get ahead of the rest of the country around making sure we set this task force up, particularly working very closely with the Australian Education Union but also the CPSU because they do provide staffing in ACT public schools.

It is specifically around making sure that we understand where the shortages exist, who the partners and stakeholders that we need to work with are to encourage teachers to come to the ACT. One of those partners is the University of Canberra, who we already have a really strong relationship with, and what it looks like for them, as far as the teaching capacity at university goes, for having diploma-qualified teaching professionals in our schools in the years to come.

We already pay some of the highest rates in the country for our teachers. We know that our public schools are a great place to work. But the task force really gives us the chance to look in more detail at some of the information that the Australian Education Union found in their survey results from their membership, dig a little deeper into that data and understand what teachers are telling us. It is about listening to what they are saying but also understanding a bit more about what we need to do as a community and as a city to encourage more teachers to come and work here. Also, importantly, we want to make sure that they want to stay and have a longer career as a teaching professional or continue to upgrade and professionalise in that space.

Katy, did you have anything else?

**Ms Haire:** The minister asked me to chair the task force; so I chair it. We have been meeting fortnightly since it began. The five areas that the task force is looking at are the attraction and retention processes for the teacher workforce, as the minister has described; teacher and school leader recruitment processes; staff absences; how we best utilise our existing workforce and ensure equity across the system; and also the continuity of education for children, particularly if teachers are not available, if teachers are away.

We are drawing on the information that we are gathering through our workforce strategy which, as the minister said, is working with our partners, including the University of Canberra, looking at the forward enrolment projections as well as the forward projections of the need for teachers, our own workforce profile and identifying what we need for the future. We are working really closely with a range of partners in order to do that broader work around our workforce strategy.

**MR DAVIS:** I appreciate that this is anecdotal, but I have been contacted by a constituent who is an educated teacher and is currently a member of the relief teaching staff and who has put to me that they would like the opportunity for a full-time, ongoing position, working as a relief teacher. I am not sure if something like that could be scoped as part of those works. I just wonder how much the relief teaching workforce will factor into the work being done by this task force and what innovative solutions the government might be prepared to look at for those teachers who are seemingly, at least anecdotally, prepared to work a little more than we might be getting from them at the moment.

**Ms Berry:** You actually nailed it with the word “innovative”, because nothing is off the plate as far as looking at ways that we can encourage more people to stay, work different ways, of course taking into account the Australian Education Union’s really important role in ensuring that the industrial relations rights of the workforce remain true. All the things we are discussing also have an industrial lens to them, because we do not want to undermine or whittle away any of the rights that that workforce has been able to maintain over a number of years. That is why it has been really important to understand where the ANU see this workforce conversation going.

This is a professional workforce and we want to make sure we continue that and not undermine it in any way with the work of the task force. Maybe you have some more to add to that?

**Ms Haire:** Thanks for the question. That idea about how relief or release time for teachers might be dealt with in a more significant way is, in fact, right in the sights of the work that we are doing in the task force. I guess the model that we have at the moment with the casual relief teacher is one that has been around for many decades, and it is probably time to start thinking about some different ways of ensuring both continuity of employment for teachers and also the certainty of having the workforce when and where we need it for relieving other teachers—the idea that you have come up with.

We are looking at multiple other ideas. We are looking around the world for where things have been done differently. We are also listening to what our workforce is telling us, such as your friend, about what might work. It might be different in different schools and in different parts of Canberra. That is one of the things we are looking at as well.

The government is committed, as you know, to, where possible, converting insecure, casual or part-time work into ongoing work. In parallel to the task force, we have also gone through a process of identifying if any of our casual or contract workers are interested in and available for ongoing permanent work. We have had a number of people take up that offer as well.

**MR DAVIS:** I would be happy if you took it on notice, but I would be interested in knowing how many staff you have been able to recruit into full-time, ongoing positions from the casual or part-time workforce.

**Ms Berry:** I think we have that detail. We could probably take it on notice.

**Ms Haire:** And maybe get it for you by the end of this session.

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**MR DAVIS:** That would be great.

**MR HANSON:** Could you give me a sense, from your initial work, of how many vacancies we have? In terms of FTEs, how many more do we need? What is the shortfall? What is the quantum of that? How many current vacancies are you also trying to fill?

**Ms Berry:** We might have to take that on notice because it is a fluid system throughout different school communities. However, some of the shortage might be in the relief for teachers who are unwell or can't come to work for various reasons, because they have appointments or whatever, filling in those reliefs with a casual pool, which was sort of where Mr Davis was going. What does our casual pool look like? Do we have enough to fill in those relief spots? Do we have enough qualified teachers for the specific roles that they might need to fill in for? How is a relief teacher actually sought?

One of the issues that were raised with the Education Directorate by the ANU and by our school principals as well was how the relief system is actually used at the moment and what it requires of school communities in the administrative task of going through the book of relief phone numbers and calling people to try and get them to fill places.

One of the things that we were immediately able to do was to bring that work into the Education Directorate to take that initial pressure off the administrative task of the school communities to start searching for those relief teachers. I think that has already made a difference, just taking off that bit of work, which can sometimes be quite comprehensive, and then embedding it into the Education Directorate. That has only been there for a few months now, but I understand that it has been positively received by schools.

**MR HANSON:** In terms of the new positions in the budget, are any of them actually registered teacher positions?

**Ms Haire:** Yes. There is funding for additional teachers in the budget. I will just try to find that for you.

**Ms Berry:** I might just, while Ms Haire is looking for that, refer to a question that you asked me, Mr Hanson, around the number of FTEs in our schools. The budget papers showed a reduction. That was actually for the Jobs for Canberrans program, which was predominantly cleaning positions, as you might recall. That was sort of a flow-out of those Jobs for Canberrans that had previously been employed during COVID-19. But we have got that detail for you now.

**MR HANSON:** Great. Do we not need cleaners ongoing? As children are coming back to school, why do we not need the cleaners anymore?

**Ms Berry:** That is a good question. We have engaged more cleaners and more

cleaning is happening across our schools. I might get Ms Haire to explain the process for that.

**Ms Haire:** I will go to your first question first, if that is okay. In the budget papers there is an item, equitable enrolment adjustment, that is in fact the additional funding for learning professionals and support staff of 42.4 full-time learning professionals and support staff. In addition, through the base funding, we are funded for the growth across the system, which includes the teachers that we need to fund to support those schools. There is significant funding in the budget for additional teachers.

**MR HANSON:** There are 42.5, and they are support staff, not registered teachers. But in terms of the growth that you are talking about, how many new registered teachers does that employ?

**Ms Haire:** I would have to come back to you with the precise answer, but there are registered teachers in both the equitable enrolment adjustment and in the adjustment to our base funding to account for the growth of that.

**MR HANSON:** When you look at the reduction in the Jobs for Canberrans staff, then you look at the 42 new staff and then you look at your estimated employment level increase, it shows that reduction of 188 jobs. That is from the interim outcome. But from budget 2020-21, earlier this year, the 6,320 goes to 6,365. That seems to only be that increase of 42. I can't see any increase in the budget for actual employment growth beyond that 42.

**Ms Haire:** I might hand over to Thao Le, our Chief Financial Officer, to explain the technical detail that I otherwise may not quite get right. The additional teachers funded through enrolment growth are accounted for in a different part of the budget papers. I can confirm, as the minister said, that through the Jobs for Canberrans program it was not only the employment of the day cleaners; we also had an innovative program of employing additional people in schools to undertake a range of tasks. Because the schools were only open for a small number of children we were able to undertake a range of tasks.

There were two programs that operated. One was the screwdriver-ready program, which was small contracts for local businesspeople, and the other was the direct employment of people through Jobs for Canberrans. Mr Parkinson might correct me, but we took on around 90 people, in addition to the cleaners, to undertake repairs and maintenance work around the schools in Canberra. The cleaning task has continued. The repairs and maintenance work was a time limited program during—

**MR HANSON:** I see that. From your interim outcome there is a reduction of 188 jobs but then, even when you take it back before Jobs for Canberrans—you take that 188 out—I can only see an extra 45 in the budget. That might account for your support staff.

**Ms Haire:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** But then if there is employment growth in registered teachers, where is that in the budget and where is that reflected in your estimated employment level?

**Ms Haire:** I might pass to Ms Le to take that answer a little further.

**Ms Le:** I have read the privilege statement and acknowledge it. Thank you for the question. Just following on from the director-general's response, in our budget paper we have got, for the equitable enrolment adjustment, an increase in that 42.4 FTEs, which does include learning, professional and support staff. There are teachers in there as well.

With regard to the decrease, you are comparing the interim outcome 2020-21 actual to the budget, that 188 reduction. The bulk of that is obviously through the whole-of-ACT government policy direction in terms of Jobs for Canberrans. As part of that, we had about 185 FTEs, which varies between, as the director-general mentioned, the cleaning support staff and also the building support staff, maintenance work and repair, and a small contingency of some web administrative staffing.

In terms of the FTE increase in the teachers there, the way the FTE has been calculated, it is for the duration of not the whole financial year. That 188 in terms of the FTE as well, when we are looking at that, is obviously not taking into account the whole 12 months. There would be positions that commence part time through the year. We have got initiatives in terms of the increase in FTE for teachers, as you know—I mentioned it before—in the equitable enrolment adjustment, and it also is reflected in our base FTE. I can take that on notice and come back, probably before this session ends, in terms of giving you a number for what that increase looks like.

**MR HANSON:** That would be good, because all I can see is the 188 reduction. I can see the 42.5. It is 42.5 positions that you have identified, but I cannot see anywhere where there is employment growth in teachers. I cannot see it. Maybe I am just missing it. The other thing is: could you break down how many of that 42.5 are actually registered frontline teachers? Who is actually going to be in a classroom teaching, out of those 42.5 positions?

**Ms Le:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, in the previous budget statements F—that is, the 2020-21 version—the last words of foundation 2 of the future of education strategy were “growing the workforce”. In the current version of this document the final words are “teaching excellence”. Very briefly, in the Assembly on 23 June this year you stated:

In this term of government we are committed to hiring more than 400 teachers ...

Relevantly, the biggest AEU teacher survey, published two months ago, provided a rather unfortunate picture of teacher shortage and under-resourcing. On 30 August the government stated that the ACT government have been working with the AEU to tackle some of the issues raised in the report. Given all of the above, can you explain how the very important phrase “growing the workforce”, could have been removed from the second tier of the keystone future of education strategy?

**Ms Haire:** I apologise that I do not have the budget papers from last year with me, but I can confirm that the future of education strategy which was published in 2019 has

not changed and it remains exactly as it was when it was published. I am not sure whether there is a slight difference in what is published in the budget paper that you refer to, but I can absolutely confirm that the future of education strategy has not been amended or changed. We are about to come to the end of phase 1 of the future of education strategy at the end of this year, and the minister is planning to launch phase 2 of the strategy in due course. There has been no change at this stage.

**MR CAIN:** Given that you have said you do not have that particular paper in front of you, would you please confirm at a subsequent moment, either this afternoon or later, whether that word change has actually occurred from last year?

**Ms Haire:** I can certainly confirm that there has not been any change to the published strategy of the future of education. I confirm that now.

**DR PATERSON:** My question is in relation to the accountability indicators. The percentage of year 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students in public schools who proceeded to year 12 at a public senior secondary college was down by four per cent this year. The target was 70 per cent and the outcome was 66 per cent. The target for this year is 85 per cent. That is quite a substantial increase on last year and it also has parity with non-Indigenous students. I was wondering what has been done differently this year to ensure that we meet that increase and that raised rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students proceeding to year 12.

**Ms Haire:** You are correct that the target has changed, because the minister has taken the policy position that we should have exactly the same aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as we do for non-Aboriginal students. While the ACT performs extremely well in relation to the outcomes for Aboriginal students, we want all students to excel and to achieve the same outcomes. That is the reason for the change in the target. The difference of four per cent in the achievement relates, really, to the very small numbers of young people and the difference that one or two young people can make—a one or two percentage point difference.

I would like to hand over to Ms Kate McMahon, who can take you through the range of additional work that we have been doing with Aboriginal students, with our Aboriginal support staff and teachers and also with families in order to achieve that ambitious target, which, if we achieve it, means we will continue to have the highest rate and have an outcome for Aboriginal children that is equal to non-Aboriginal children, which would be an enormous achievement and an appropriate one.

**Ms McMahon:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. Thank you for the question. It is really lovely that we have been able to increase those targets to ensure that we do have parity across all our student cohorts. It comes with work that we have been doing in our schools over the past three years, within what we call our cultural integrity framework. That framework allows all our students to feel safe, totally safe, in their schools, and works with all our school communities, our teachers and our students to ensure that there are culturally safe practices and learning that occur in all our settings.

The cultural integrity framework has been refined over the last 12 months and now has three underpinning positions that allow us to develop those practices in our

schools. They are that we are teaching with cultural integrity; that we engage with our students, our families and our community; and that we create a school culture of respect. It is expected that all our schools will follow the elements of the cultural integrity framework and that we are on a cycle of improvement and development.

To support that, we have increased the number of Indigenous education officers that we have in our schools. That number is 20, both the Indigenous education officers and the cultural integrity coordinators who work across our schools to support those students, our teachers and our community to embed those practices underneath the cultural integrity framework.

We are developing a lot of professional learning for our teachers so that both our leaders in our schools and our teachers have an increased knowledge of both Ngunnawal culture and Indigenous culture, as most of our teachers grew up in a time when that was not really taught as strongly as it is now. It is really important that we have that level of understanding and development in our teachers.

We have also increased the resources that are available for teachers to teach the Australian curriculum with integrity, recognising the language and the culture of Aboriginal people both in the ACT and across Australia. To help our students, we have an aspirations program. We work with our young people, from primary school right through to secondary college, and provide a range of opportunities that allow them to see themselves in professions and having a range of different opportunities that they may not have thought about in the past.

Each year we have a years 5 and 6 leadership day where we take all the Indigenous students from years 5 and 6 and their non-Indigenous friends and we participate in a leadership activity. Our years 9 to 12 aspirations program also deals with taking a group of students to a setting within the ACT to let them explore the different professions that that offering has. We might go to the law courts or to the museum and we expose them to a range of different activities.

We also have a range of scholarships that allow our students to engage and maybe pursue different opportunities. We have a bursary program in primary school and high school, then we have a college program for students and give them scholarships in colleges to ease the way and let them just concentrate on their studies, and then we have a tertiary scholarship program as well. I might just stop there, if that is all that you need.

**DR PATERSON:** Yes. Thank you very much for that. It was very informative.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, you have said in previous statements that you are going to hire 400 new teachers over the term, but in this budget you cannot yet tell me how many are actually registered teachers. Perhaps it is—I don't know—10 or 20. We will find out, hopefully, during the hearing. But why is the money for those teachers not in this budget? Even being generous, you would think that you would put 25 per cent of that funding in each of the four years of government. Where is the money for these 400 teachers?

**Ms Berry:** First of all, the teachers maybe do not exist at the moment. They are still

going through their qualifications. We will employ a number of beginning teachers; we will employ specialist teachers; we have a scholarship program for teacher librarians right now to ensure that they can have their masters so that we can employ teacher librarians across our school communities.

We do not have schools built yet for teachers to actually work in. They are coming online, which Mr Parkinson just talked to, as far as the schools in Gungahlin are concerned, but we are absolutely committed to ensuring that we have a qualified teaching workforce across all our schools once they come online and are available for teachers to work in and deliver a great education across our school communities. In addition to that, we have a number of support staff.

We have already said we will take on notice and provide you with details and we will do that either today or at another time when we can get that detail to you. We have a task force and we are working closely with the Australian Education Union to understand exactly what is going on as far as the teaching workforce crisis across this country is concerned. It is being felt here in the ACT, and we are on to it; we are taking it very seriously. We are having fortnightly meetings with the Education Union and other stakeholders to really understand what is going on within the teaching profession and what we need to do as a community here in Canberra to better support that profession.

I think we are doing everything we can. As far as I am aware, the Australian Education Union, who represent the teaching profession, are satisfied with the process so far. There is a lot of work to do to understand the data and to really nail down and dig a bit deeper into the survey results that the Education Union conducted themselves. We are also doing our own research across our schools to understand what is happening within our school communities and, as I said, we are working very closely with our partner, the University of Canberra, through our Affiliated Schools Program, which is nationally the only kind of partnership in the country which really gives beginning teachers the opportunity to be mentored and prepared for the classroom before they finish their degree.

I think we are going over and above, as a city and as a government, and the respect and value that our community has for the teaching workforce has been shown very clearly, particularly this year—but also last year—as we navigate our way through the COVID-19 pandemic.

I appreciate that you are asking for some details in questions we have taken on notice, and we will provide those details to you, but as far as the situation with regard to the teaching workforce is concerned, I think—in fact, I know—that the ACT government takes this very seriously and we are working very closely with our partners to really understand what is going to bring more people into the profession and keep those that join up to the profession there for the long haul.

**MR HANSON:** You are saying that you are going over and above, but I can quote from the union's survey:

Our members, who are in classrooms every day, overwhelmingly identify under-resourcing that appears systemic.

Ninety-four per cent of school principals said the directorate is not adequately resourced to meet the demands of the public school system and:

... almost all (97%) of classroom teachers feel that students are being disadvantaged ... by split or modified classrooms—

sometimes more than 50 students—

caused by chronic staff shortages.

How can you say you are going over and above? You have been in government for 20 years. How is it going over and above?

**Ms Berry:** I think I have responded to your question. We are going over and above in our response to the issues that have been raised recently by the Australian Education Union on the shortages in class here in the ACT but which are definitely being felt across the country. How the ACT government is responding to that this year, after that work that the Australian Education has done, is over and above what every other state and territory government is doing, in my view. So thank you for that question. I will take the details that you have asked on notice and we will provide that as soon as we can.

**MR HANSON:** You said one of the reasons why you were not putting new money in the budget, or there was not money in the budget, was that you were waiting for schools to be built. But the chronic shortage of teachers is now. Classes are split; people are saying it is under-resourced; they do not have enough teachers now. Why is there not money in the budget to pay for some of those 400 new teachers that you promised? Where is the money?

**Ms Berry:** You are simplifying something that is probably a little more complicated than that. I will ask Ms Haire to provide a little more detail on the questions that you are asking.

**Ms Haire:** Just returning to a question that you asked earlier about the number of current ongoing vacancies in our teacher workforce, we have a current vacancy number of 12 ongoing positions at the moment in the ACT. That is the current number.

In relation to your other question, we can provide a detailed table of where additional registered teachers are included as part of this year's budget, which includes a range of the other initiatives that are in the budget papers, including that we require registered teachers in a range of those other support programs for schools.

**MR HANSON:** Of the 42.5 new positions, how many are registered teachers?

**Ms Haire:** I am sorry, I have not got that back for you yet, but I have the answer to the other question on notice.

**MR HANSON:** How can there be an increase in staff when the budget paper says that staff, in FTE, has only gone up by 45, and there are 42.5 new staff in the budget, and this is just ignoring the 188 that you have cut, which are not primary teachers.

**Ms Berry:** Mr Hanson—

**MR HANSON:** Of the 42.5 positions in the budget, where is the explanation of where these new teachers are that you are talking about?

**Ms Berry:** You are repeating yourself and probably wasting the committee's time. We have taken the question on notice. We will provide you with more detail and a breakdown on the specifics of the questions that you are asking.

**DR PATERSON:** I was just wondering, is there a difference between primary and secondary in terms of where the teacher shortages fall?

**Ms Haire:** Thank you for that question. What the task force is trying to understand is where our teachers are coming from. We have to really start from the very beginning of what is it that makes teaching attractive for the workforce that are here now, and how can we encourage more people to stay in the workforce. We have already started doing a lot of the work of embedding positive behaviours for learning across all our schools to make sure that they are really respectful and safe workplaces, addressing workforce safety through our work safety plans and management plans across all our school communities to ensure that our teachers and our school staff can remain safe.

I think what the task force and what the Education Union survey have shown is that we need to dig a little deeper into the workforce to understand what is actually going on. We are not the only workforce in the country that is facing and experiencing shortages. It is happening across a range of different areas.

As I said in our response to the issue that has been raised with us this year by the Australian Education Union here in the ACT, we are responding appropriately with our partners, who are satisfied with our response to date. We will investigate and listen carefully to our teaching workforce about what it is that is making some of the people in our profession decide that they want to leave and not stay in the profession.

It used to be the case that we had longer term teaching professionals staying here in the ACT, longer than the average for the rest of the country. I think it is around seven years here and five across the country. Somebody can correct me if that is wrong. We know we are doing something right, but we obviously want to be continuing to lead the country in that space.

**THE CHAIR:** ACT Labor took to the most recent ACT election a commitment to introduce a free breakfast and lunch trial in ACT public schools. I was wondering how this budget advances that commitment.

**Ms Berry:** Thanks for that. This has been obviously well received by the ACT community to ensure that young people go to school with a full stomach, because we know that if young people go to school when they are hungry it is very difficult for them to study and to engage in the classroom. It is the same case for everybody. It is a bit Captain Obvious really. But there are a lot of kids in our schools that do not get the chance to have a breakfast, that might have lives that are a bit more complicated before they start school, and they need that additional support in our schools.

We are working through trialling that for around 1,500 students, starting next year across about five schools. Because we have different systems of P&C-run and other privately run canteens and breakfast programs already running in some schools, we have just had to navigate a way through all the different programs that are operating in our schools and make sure that we start focusing on the schools that need it most.

We are also making sure that we properly engage with those school communities, that this is not about stigmatising young people into different groups. We actually want to make sure that it is a really inclusive and supportive program so that young people do not feel like they are being pigeonholed or anything like that. This is a really important part of our inclusive school communities work as far as the future of education is concerned, understanding that not everybody starts from the same place. We want to lift them and give them the same equitable chance as others. We can probably provide a little more detail on that.

**Ms Haire:** Just to confirm that the funding for the breakfast and lunch program is on page 163 of the budget outlook, and it is in the Future of Education Equity Fund item. That is where the funding for the breakfast and lunch trial is. You will see the funding comes through there.

I will ask Kate McMahon to provide a bit more detail on how we are working with school communities to develop the model to implement this program in a way that not only delivers the purpose of the breakfast and lunch but also uses it as an opportunity to engage families more in their children's education and create that community around the school that we know is so important to support children's learning.

**Ms McMahon:** As the minister said, it is going to be a really important program to meet the needs of students, as we know that quite a number of our students are coming to school without their nutritional needs being met. So being able to meet those needs in a non-stigmatised manner will be really important.

We are working to identify the schools that will be best placed to be able to offer this trial. It is a trial for five schools over a couple of years, offering food, both breakfast and lunch, three days per week. With the schools that we are looking at, we will be taking into consideration what structures they already have in place, what programs they already offer, and we will be able to identify where those students who most need that service will be located. We are hoping to work, as Ms Haire indicated, with school communities to be able to identify those schools and to work on what are the particular dietary offerings that will help the children because, as you can imagine, there are a lot of different needs in our schools, with different kids with different allergies and different ways of operating within a food environment.

Then we will be looking to work with a number of schools. We have not identified those schools yet, as the budget has just been announced. We need to be able to establish that program and then go out to schools and offer that. But we are really looking forward to the opportunities that this is going to be able to provide to students.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned that you are still in the process of identifying which schools will take part. Do you know the time line for when schools will be identified?

**Ms McMahon:** I would imagine that we will be identifying schools late this year or early next year. We do need to get all our students back into settings after this most recent lockdown. Our focus has been on ensuring the safety, wellbeing and learning of students during this period; then we will be adding this extra opportunity for some students in the coming months.

**THE CHAIR:** This is called a trial. Is this a trial for a semester? Is this a trial for a year?

**Ms McMahon:** This is a trial for two years.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the model and how the food is prepared, are we looking at preparing the food on campus or is the food going to be prepared off site and brought to the schools?

**Ms McMahon:** We will probably be offering a couple of different arrangements, depending on the infrastructure that is available at the school. The funding does not include capital funding to provide for cooking facilities. Also, we want to test a couple of different models to see what is the best methodology that meets the needs of that school community. As this is a trial, we do need to trial a couple of different ways of going about it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Berry:** Mr Petterson, it is good that you have asked those questions. We are working through unpicking a system that has been in place in our schools in the ACT for a number of years now. In countries like Finland we have seen the success of these free school meal programs. That came about during the war, in the 1940s, when poorer people did not have any food at all. The only meal they got in a day was in their school communities. They have been continuing to do that, but it is not just that. It is not just about providing a free meal; it is about making sure that young people get a good and equal start to a good day of education with a full stomach.

Let me unpick the systems we have in place, as Ms McMahon said, to make sure that we find the right model. The model might be different in each school community, just based on the infrastructure and things that are in place within different schools. This trial is about what we can make work in our schools—whether it can be spread out differently, whether it is breakfast and lunch or just lunch, what kinds of meals there are. There is a fair bit of work going into unpicking what this looks like.

The Finnish schools have had a lot more experience and have been doing it for a lot longer than we have. We are getting some good advice and support along the way from people like Pasi Sahlberg from Finland, who works in the Gonski Institute at the University of New South Wales. He has been really useful for us to touch base with on the kinds of things we can do to make our schools much more equitable. Of course, that is what our future of education strategy is all about.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, as you know, I have a particular interest in financial literacy programs in schools and the financial literacy of young people. I want to ask about the

\$346,000 for the Moneysmart teaching partnership. That is the same amount of money dedicated in this budget as there was dedicated in last year's budget. However, as we have discussed, there will be even more students and even more schools involved in that this year. Are you confident that that investment is sufficient to make sure that all public school kids can get access to that program?

**Ms Berry:** I will hand over to Ms Haire in a moment. During our big conversation with the community to develop the future of education strategy a couple of years ago, we heard from young people and students that they wanted to learn how to be adults when they left school. That went to how you do rent, how you do your tax, how you open a bank account, how you get your tax file number and those kinds of things which we call financial literacy.

It was described to us as being about "how to adult". That was the way it was described to us during the conversations we had with young people. We know this is really important—and not just for the grown-ups, the parents and carers of young people; young people told us they wanted to be prepared for life outside school.

I will ask Ms Haire to go into a bit of the detail around this funding.

**MR DAVIS:** If the directorate starts a "how to adult" class, I will be the first to enrol.

**Ms Haire:** As the minister has said, teaching financial literacy is a priority. It has been an element of the ACT public education system for a number of years; it is also part of the Australian curriculum. To support that, we have worked with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to establish the Moneysmart accreditation program that you are asking about.

I am going to hand over to Ms McMahon to provide some more detail, but, basically, the program has two elements; one is a set of curriculum supports and the other is professional learning for our teachers. It is both for students, and directly in the classroom, but also, most importantly, for building the capability of our teachers in this very important curriculum area. I will pass to Ms McMahon to provide some more detail.

**Ms McMahon:** We have a very exciting innovation with our Moneysmart accreditation program. Moneysmart professional learning has been available through ASIC for a number of years. The funding you are talking about is part of our national partnership agreement. We have a sufficient number of people participating in that professional learning to secure that funding.

We are using the funding that we get from the national partnership to employ a coach for our schools to assist teachers in developing their skills to implement financial literacy. We have devised a program to help our schools really focus on financial literacy after that move away from school banking, which really was not about financial literacy at all but was a way of reminding children about saving money.

With the financial literacy accreditation program, the Moneysmart accreditation program, we are partnering with ASIC to do that. There are a couple of elements to it that we ask a school to demonstrate, to secure the notion that they are a Moneysmart

accredited school. We ask them to be involved in advocacy across their school about financial literacy; to engage in a certain amount of professional learning for their staff; and to implement financial literacy explicitly within the curriculum. That can occur in the mathematics curriculum but also across things like humanities.

We ask them to be involved in the community and provide at least one opportunity each year for parents to be involved in some kind of financial literacy, learning or discussion. Also, we ask that they share professional practice with us so that we can share across all ACT schools through what we call our service portal. That is a digital repository of professional learning and professional guidance for schools, and we like to capture best practice in that as well. Part of being an accredited school is that they participate in all those activities. I hope that we work to improve the financial literacy of not only our students but also our teachers and our community.

We kicked off this program just before COVID hit, so we have asked our schools to not push too quickly. We have put them on pause a bit for this new program so that they can focus on anything they need to at the moment. We will be reinitiating this after that time. We have a dedicated officer within one of our teams in the education support office who provides that guidance to schools. It is a really exciting program, and we are looking forward to seeing the outcomes.

**MR DAVIS:** How many of our schools are currently accredited under the Moneysmart program?

**Ms McMahan:** As it has just started, none of them has the tick yet, but we have a number of schools that are interested in it.

**MR DAVIS:** Do we have a goal as a department to get all ACT public schools accredited under the program?

**Ms McMahan:** That is an aspiration. We have exceeded, and have always exceeded, the number of teachers who are participating in the professional learning program. We see this as a great transition in embedding those practices across our schools.

**MR DAVIS:** Would we be entitled to more money under that national partnership as more of our schools become accredited? Is that part of that partnership relationship?

**Ms McMahan:** No. The accreditation is our own; it is an ACT initiative. The national partnership is about the number of teachers who participate in the professional and, through Moneysmart, the ASIC program.

**MR DAVIS:** That is wonderful. While we are talking about financial literacy and school banking, I know, anecdotally, that there has been some innovation. We have spoken about innovation already today, but there are some innovations across some public schools, one in particular in my electorate that I know of, where the P&C have taken it upon themselves to run a school banking program sans the big for-profit banks—run by parents.

I am interested in what work is happening at a directorate level to see whether, where schools are running these really innovative programs, they can feed that up through

the system and we can get those kinds of on-the-ground innovations across as many school campuses as possible so that more kids can be exposed to those kinds of programs.

**Ms Haire:** Mr Davis, I might start the answer to your question. Because we are a small system, we have the opportunity to share best practice, what is working, between schools in a very rapid way. The service portal that Ms McMahon was talking about earlier is one of the tools that we use to share what is working really well between schools, as are the very regular meetings that we have between schools and school leaders that happen on a very regular basis.

Minister Berry may want to speak about one particular example of innovation that she has participated in that shows the kinds of things that are going on at different schools to provide students with that real-life experience and understanding of the world of finance and money.

**Ms Berry:** Black Mountain School, which is one of our specialist schools, partnered with Woolworths to open a shop within the school so that young people could learn how to go to a shop with a budget and purchase food—and also learn how to operate a cash register, to prepare those young people for jobs once they finish school as well. That was around not only financial literacy but also providing some real on-the-job experience.

Woolworths worked with the school and set up a classroom exactly as though it was a shopping centre. They put in Weet-Bix, Domino's pastas and all that sort of stuff. They put in Tim Tams for students to purchase, which were very popular on the day I went along to the school. Students go with a shopping basket, purchase their breakfast, their spaghetti for dinner or whatever, and then go to a cash register operated by one of the other young people at the school. It was not operated with money; it was an experience more than anything. The aim was to get people who had a range of different needs in their lives used to going to a shop and purchasing things—and also, maybe, even getting a job with organisations like Woolworths, who have made commitments to employing people who have different needs.

That is another example of innovation in our schools. They took it upon themselves to say, "What do we want for our young people? What are the experiences they need before they leave school so that they are prepared for life outside after they leave?"

We will go on keeping in touch with our school communities to understand what they are coming up with. Every school community has a different idea or a different need. There are different levels of volunteer parents as well. What works in one school might not work in another, but there might be different ways things can be applied across the board.

We are always up for innovation. The Education Directorate always works very closely with our schools and the P&C council to make sure that we can share information.

**MR DAVIS:** My last follow-up question was going to be on the P&C council. I have heard mention of this school portal. My understanding, though, is that the portal is

used primarily by school leaders and teachers. I would like to get some clarification. Do P&Cs have access to information across that portal? Going to the example I gave you of the school banking program, that has been run by the P&C, so it is a bit detached from classroom teachers, I suppose.

**Ms Berry:** Yes. It is probably not for the P&C council to use that sort of formal process within the Education Directorate. I meet very regularly with the council, and so does the Education Directorate. Whenever these kinds of ideas are raised, they percolate through school councils as well as regular meetings. That is one of the best ways these kinds of ideas are communicated—by word of mouth through P&Cs directly to the people who will be able to implement the programs or consider other things that might work for their schools.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, I have a question about teacher exit interviews. As reported in *Hansard* on 23 June this year, you have stated that public schools conduct exit interviews and surveys to make sure that we collect that information because that feeds into the continuous efforts to make sure that our workplaces are good workplaces. Minister, what does the analysis of the exit data reveal about why teachers are leaving the profession in the ACT?

**Ms Berry:** That work is done on a school-by-school basis to understand why teachers are leaving when they leave. I do not know that we would have comprehensive data. That is the reason we have set up a taskforce with the Australian Education Union to really understand and unpick what is going on within our school teaching profession.

**MR CAIN:** Then how is it that you arrive at a conclusion that the workplaces are good workplaces? What leads you to such conclusions—what data and evidence?

**Ms Berry:** As I referred to earlier, we are the highest paid teaching workforce in the country. We are also, on average, the longest serving teaching profession in the country. They are just two examples I have previously given.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, can you confirm that, when an exit survey is done at the school level, none of those surveys or analyses of the data as to the reasons teachers are leaving are ever sent to the directorate? Are you saying that is just held at the school level?

**Ms Haire:** Mr Hanson, I might take that question. As the minister said, looking at changes to the approach to teachers exiting is one of the focuses of the task force that we talked about earlier—the one that I am the chair of. We have been working recently with the ANU on some different approaches to the exit survey model. We have been working on that for the last couple of months. We are looking at potentially changing the nature of how we survey teachers when they are leaving and looking at how we might use that information.

**MR HANSON:** I just find it extraordinary that for decades, I would assume, or for a long time, teachers have been interviewed on exit as to the reasons they might be leaving the profession, or leaving the ACT public school system, and none of that data analysis has made its way to the directorate. The directorate now finds itself in this position where it has a chronic teacher shortage. It is an extraordinary admission that

none of that data has been used by the directorate and now you are only just starting to look at it because of this crisis that has emerged.

**Ms Haire:** Just to confirm my previous answer, we are now centralising the process. As the minister said, it was previously happening individually in schools. As part of the work we have been doing since the establishment of the taskforce, we are centralising the gathering of that material.

As part of answering your question, Mr Hanson, I wonder if it would be of value to the committee to hear from Ms Coralie McAlister from the Teacher Quality Institute. She can give some data that sits behind the minister's earlier statement about the pretty high level of retention of teachers in the ACT.

As the minister has said, there is an issue around the availability of teachers across the whole of Australia. It is different in different parts of Australia. The ACT is actually in a more privileged position than some of the other jurisdictions. I think Ms McAlister has some data on the retention of teachers.

**Ms McAlister:** I have read and understand the privilege statement. It might help the committee to know that teachers renew their registration annually through the Teacher Quality Institute. We track the data on renewals. We have, year on year, roughly 8,400 teachers who are able to renew their professional registration. Each year, approximately 90 per cent of those teachers do renew. That renewal rate has been consistent over the last five years in the ACT.

Another way of looking at it would be to consider how many teachers do not renew their registration year on year, how many teachers lapse. Have we seen an increase in lapsed registration? In the ACT, we have not. Lapsed registration usually sits at around 600 teachers annually. The reasons are varied. People move interstate, move into another job and so on. We have not seen a trend in the ACT which suggests that a larger number of teachers are leaving. When we look at that lapsed registration, the largest group in that group is teachers who are retiring.

So we do monitor workforce data across the territory. The director-general and the minister are talking about unique employment matters, but I think it is helpful to have a sense of teacher registration across the territory.

**MR HANSON:** If teacher retention has been good and we have a crisis in the number of teachers, does that mean that the government has just failed to recruit and create enough teacher positions or is it recruitment and training and creating enough positions?

**Ms Berry:** No.

**MR HANSON:** What is it then? If it is not retention and it is not training and recruiting, what has caused this problem?

**Ms Berry:** That is exactly why we have set up a task force.

**MR HANSON:** Surely you must have some inkling, Minister. You are saying, "Oh,

we are going to set up a task force.” But this is not new. This has been going on for a while. Surely it does not take this survey report from the unions to tell you that there is a problem.

You are telling me that recruiting and retention are fine and you only have 12 vacancies, yet the union and frontline staff are saying there is a crisis here. There is a real disjuncture in what we are being told about recruitment and retention. You are saying that there are only 12 vacancies and retention is brilliant, but we have been told that there is a real problem in the classroom. It just does not gel.

**Ms Berry:** Okay.

**MR HANSON:** Can I move to a substantive, Chair?

**THE CHAIR:** There are a few supplementary questions. Dr Paterson.

**DR PATERSON:** Sorry, mine is a substantive.

**THE CHAIR:** Any supplementaries? No. Dr Paterson.

**DR PATERSON:** My question is on the budget item around Garran Primary School. I am interested to know what upgrades are going to be conducted there, what are the time frames and how many extra students that school might be able to welcome.

**Ms Berry:** The Garran school community has faced a number of disruptions in normal school life because of the hospital upgrades and the response by the ACT government to COVID, with the centre being right near the school community. Also, it is another area where the ACT government is seeing more densification, with more people moving and more children. And it is an ageing asset. I will ask Mr Parkinson to provide a bit more detail.

**Mr Parkinson:** The Garran school modernisation in this year’s budget has funding of about \$970,000 to begin the master planning process for and design of a modernisation of the school.

At this point, it is possibly a bit early to talk about exactly what facilities are in there, but over the past years we have spoken a number of times to the Garran community, including last night, and the school has passed on to us its aspirations for what the new school at Garran will look like.

They want there to be contemporary learning facilities with modern facilities. The school community noted to us the conflict that occurs with traffic and parking, with the entrance for the school immediately facing onto Gilmore Crescent, opposite the school. That is a factor we have in play in our master planning for what will happen there.

In correspondence to the directorate and to the school infrastructure inquiry, the community has also raised the issue of a shortage of space, with the number of temporary facilities on site. The goal of the modernisation is to replace all those ageing and transportable pieces of infrastructure with new permanent builds in the

future to provide more capacity.

We have nominated a capacity increase of up to 800 spaces for the P-6 school up to final design to provide replacements for temporary infrastructure and give an uplift in capacity. That is noting that Woden as a whole is a growing area of town, and as other growth takes off in the Woden community, through light rail coming to Woden and increasing densification in the area immediately around Garran and Mawson, we will need to provide that extra space at Garran Primary School.

We do not have a set design yet. We have done the master plan. The conversation we had with the school P&C and community last night was setting out some of the steps about how we would engage them, how we would understand the context of the Garran site, how the school community would have a chance to have a say in what was going on there, and how we would test the ideas that we have been working on in master planning to understand whether they address the concerns and aspirations for the school community, going forward, with a modernisation of the school.

At the moment, the budget has a provision for construction, but there is no construction amount nominated within the budget at this point. We do not yet have a firm time line for the construction of this school.

**DR PATERSON:** Could you please provide a bit more detail around what the consultation with the school community and the Garran community will look like?

**Mr Parkinson:** That was part of the conversation from last night. We were testing with the school community how they would like to communicate. Some of the early ideas that we were working through were similar community conversations that we have had with Narrabundah College over past years. It was about talking with the community around opportunities for them to bring forward ideas they have had in the past about the school—what makes the school special, what they see as the features of the existing school, what they see as the concerns of the existing school environment.

Last night's conversation was an early piece of that. We will be looking for opportunities to co-design the consultation process with them so that they have input into the school and we have a chance to make sure that the school design that we work through reflects their input into that process.

**MR HANSON:** I welcome the funding for Garran. I know that they will love it. We have seen a lot of concerns raised by schools about their infrastructure. I have had conversations with the P&C at Majura. Harrison School said that the school has been experiencing capacity and infrastructure issues since its inception. Parents at Macquarie are saying that it is in a dangerous state of repair. We have seen Lyneham High School saying that they are concerned about poor building maintenance. It is Harrison School, Mawson School and so on.

What money is in the budget for those schools? Beyond the money for Garran, what new money is there for all those other schools that are suffering capacity and maintenance problems?

**Ms Berry:** Mr Hanson, I think you are referring to comments or witness statements

made before a committee inquiry that has not yet completed. There are a number of funding commitments made through this budget, and work around maintenance and issues across all of our schools is being addressed. I might ask Mr Parkinson to provide a bit more detail about the funding for the infrastructure program and maintenance upgrades across our schools. It is \$99 million worth.

**Mr Parkinson:** As the minister mentioned, the budget sets up an increased upgrade program, with \$99 million over the four years going forward. That is an increase on the previous upgrade program.

The increased money will allow us to invest more money in improving the amenity, functionality and inclusivity of schools, as well as dealing with some major infrastructure items such as the replacement of end-of-life heating systems; roof replacements; work on thermal comfort; and replacing aged windows in schools that leak heat in and out depending on which season it is. We will do a large amount of work in installing solar systems as well as continuing programs to put batteries in schools where we know solar systems would benefit from having battery storage on the site. Also, within the upgrade program we invest money in school safety and security issues, such as fencing, the improvement of sporting facilities, and aged structures in schools. As well, there is a lot of work on inclusion works within schools, providing equity of access within our school sites as well as reflecting the different needs of students within our system.

**MR HANSON:** Can you give me a breakdown? Does that \$99 million include Garran, or is Garran separate from that?

**Mr Parkinson:** Garran is separate from that, Mr Hanson. Garran has \$970,000 for design funding in this year's budget, as a separate item outside the upgrade program.

**MR HANSON:** But when that Garran upgrade happens, will it come out of that \$99 million?

**Ms Berry:** No.

**Mr Parkinson:** No, Mr Hanson. That will come from a separate provision that is in the budget. It will have construction funding outside that \$99 million worth of upgrade funding.

**MR HANSON:** Of that \$99 million, have you identified where that is going? Or is that a bucket of money yet to be allocated?

**Ms Haire:** Mr Hanson, Mr Parkinson listed a range of different categories for which the funding is used. He might be able to explain that a bit further for the committee's benefit—and also perhaps the process for allocating to those different projects.

**Mr Parkinson:** Within the \$99 million, we set up streams of funding and target different areas. As I mentioned, roofs, solar, thermal comfort, school safety issues and inclusion works all have nominal allocations within the \$99 million. Every year, in addition to that, we ask the schools to nominate what initiatives they would like to see.

The school communities, in consultation with their stakeholders such as the boards, the P&Cs, the staff, industrial representatives and the broader community, nominate what the school sees as the priorities within that. A portion of the \$99 million is set aside for school-identified priorities. We map those against what we see as the infrastructure upgrade priorities and come up with a list of works that are undertaken in any given year.

We will know what this year's works are and we will have plans for what next year's works look like. We will adjust those priorities, communicate those to the schools, and involve the schools really heavily in the design and prioritisation of each of those pieces of upgrade works.

**MR HANSON:** Are you able to provide me—on notice if you have not got it there—with the allocation for each of those streams of that \$99 million? How much is there for thermal? How much is there for roofs? How much is there for inclusion? Then you are saying that, essentially, the exact allocation of what goes to what school is yet to be determined. Is that right? You have not yet decided that there is going to be \$600,000 to Lyneham school and \$200,000 to Ainslie? That is work to be done, and that is done on an annual basis?

**Mr Parkinson:** Yes, done on annual basis, but it is forecasted out a number of years to work out how to fit the program together. I can provide a break-up of each of those streams of funding within the \$99 million, but I do not have them to hand at the moment.

For instance, we know most of the allocations within this year's part of the \$99 million and have communicated many of those priorities to the schools where those upgrades are going to take place, have had those conversations with them and are working through the design processes. Some projects will take longer. We may start design processes a year out and then deliver them in the following financial year, after we have had time to design, consult with the community and gain planning approvals as required.

**MR HANSON:** On notice, please can you provide me with the streams; the breakdown over the four years; the allocation for the next financial year that you said you have; and the forecast over the four years, which you said you have, which was used to design it.

**Ms Berry:** Mr Hanson, we will be able to provide some of that information on notice. Some of it is not known yet. As we said, we work with the schools on an annual basis. Some of the projects have not been identified, so the funding cannot be allocated. But we will do everything we can.

**MR HANSON:** Mr Parkinson said that the forecast had been done for where that is going to be allocated. I just ask for the forecast. I appreciate that it is a forecast; it is not locked in. It would be good if you could provide that forecast, please.

**Ms Berry:** We will provide as much information as we can, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Can someone inform the committee how this budget furthers the good work that is occurring at the Muliyan school?

**Ms Berry:** The Muliyan school has been a really great initiative to make sure that we support some children where the ordinary school environment just does not work for them. They often have a number of complex issues in their lives and need additional wraparound support. Muliyan is about lifting the horizons of some people who do not have the same kinds of choices or opportunities as other kids might have in schools.

It has been a really successful program. As I said, we started a trial with around 10 young people, and we have increased that to 20 and now to 30. When you hear from those young people about their experiences or you meet those young people over the period from the start of when they enrolled at Muliyan to when they graduate, the change in their confidence in themselves and their abilities and their aspirations and the positive outlook that they have on life is quite incredible. It is a touching experience for everybody. The whole school community—all of the school staff and teachers and school principals—have a great connection with these young people in making sure that they get to where they want to be, that they find their passion and what they want to work towards.

I am incredibly passionate about Muliyan and the success that it has provided to these young people. It has really changed the trajectory of their lives. I will ask Ms Haire to provide some more detail.

**Ms Haire:** The Muliyan school is part of our suite of flexible education provision where we try to ensure that children and young people with special needs or additional needs have access to an appropriate and supportive education. Muliyan is for students who are disengaged or disengaging and may have complex personal challenges or circumstances. It is an opportunity to provide them with a tailored and personalised approach to their education.

I might hand to Ms McMahon to talk a bit more about some of the work we have done on how and why that program can make a really huge difference to young people's lives.

**Ms McMahon:** As both the minister and Ms Haire indicated, this is a program for students who are potentially disengaging or have disengaged from their mainstream school. All our high schools have what we call a continuum of educational supports. That is a very targeted program for students who are finding education a bit challenging at the time. When those programs are not successful for a number of children or young people, they can be referred to a panel to seek access to Muliyan.

Thanks to the uplift in funding, Muliyan caters for places for 30 students. Students are provided with a very individualised learning program that caters to their particular interests and their aspirations for the future. It is a way to target their educational as well as their social and emotional needs, to be able to hold their hand and guide them through getting back to their own school, get them back to a sense of worth and wellbeing, and really focus on what is important for them and their education.

By working with a very multidisciplinary group of professionals at Muliyan—teachers, allied health, psychologists, nurses, and youth and social workers—we see that we are able to meet the needs of those young people on a one-to-one basis. Then they are able to take their life trajectory to a very different place.

During the remote learning period, they have all been working successfully in remote learning from home. We had the ECS deliver learning packs to them earlier in the year so that they were able to continue their education and be provided with supports even during the remote period. We found that lots of our students graduated from year 10 and have either progressed to college or transitioned to VET programs or into work. So that is really successful.

Let me speak of one young person who had been very disengaged from their school and had spent significant periods of time not attending. With the guidance that was provided at that setting, we were able to get them back into their own mainstream setting. They are putting their own passion back into the community through working with particular community organisations.

We are really shifting the trajectory of those young people, but through a very targeted program. The extra funding provided and uplifted staffing to be able to cater for more children in that program.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you confirm what that increase in funding was?

**Ms McMahon:** Yes. Let me just turn to it.

**Ms Berry:** I will just talk about some of the other experiences that I have been able to hear about from some of those young people. I have been able to meet students who have had variable engagement and whose parents have been incredibly distressed about where the young person's journey is going, where it is taking them—having really no communication at all with these young people. And the young people are not engaging with their parents or with their school or anyone they meet.

I met a young man who was so disengaged I was really worried about him. After he graduated, you could not keep him quiet. He was so enthusiastic, so happy. He could not stop talking about his passions, about the friendships he had made, about the experiences he had had at Muliyan. I cannot speak highly enough about the change it is making in these young people's lives.

**Ms McMahon:** It is quite incredible, if you have been out to that centre and had a conversation with those students, to see the change it is making in their lives. \$1.98 million is the uplift for this year to provide for the staffing.

**THE CHAIR:** It is my understanding that the school has expanded its footprint in the complex it is in and now takes up the entire complex. Is there space to expand even further to provide more students with that opportunity in that school setting or would we need to explore different locations if we were to expand even further?

**Ms McMahon:** If we were to expand further, we would need to be sourcing a different location. We do not have an opportunity to expand at that location at the

moment; we would need to look further afield.

**THE CHAIR:** Has anyone investigated providing a service like this on the north side?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, but Muliyan is not supposed to be like a school. It is not a school; it is supposed to be a different environment. It is supposed to operate differently. The physical layout is supposed to be different as well. That is on purpose. That is what we have found has worked with those young people so that we can get more of the support staff and the teaching and learning opportunities in there. Yes, we are definitely looking at other opportunities, but we are still just working on making sure that we nail Muliyan to be the best it possibly can be.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to ask about the \$450,000 investment for review and consultation with students with a disability and their families to try and create more inclusive environments in our schools. I put a question on this funding to Mr Craig Wallace and ACTCOSS during community day last week, and it is safe to say that they were a bit pessimistic, perhaps, and cited a bit of consultation fatigue amongst the disability community and their families. I want to ascertain exactly what the government hopes to get out of this review and what the government might say to some critics who think there are still unanswered questions on recommendations from past reviews.

**Ms Berry:** I understand that that is the feeling of ACTCOSS and, in particular, Mr Wallace, but I have tried to reassure ACTCOSS that this is not a new review where we are doing more research and reviewing for children and families who have disabilities in our school system; this will build on the previous reviews but also, importantly, engage young people in the conversation where they might not have been engaged before, to really work through what inclusion means, whether that is in our mainstream schools or whether that is in a specialist school setting, and what really is meeting the needs of those families.

We have a Disability Education Reference Group, which has the unfortunate acronym of DERG. This group is made up of all the different stakeholders within the disability space in the ACT. ACTCOSS have been invited. They have a longstanding invite to attend that; I am not sure why they have not been coming along to that group. We have been working with that reference group on what this review would look like. It is really about understanding the specialist settings, whether we are meeting the needs, and whether we need to change the way our mainstream schools operate to include more side-by-side, inclusive education with specialist schools.

There are strong feelings from some people about whether we need specialist schools at all. This review is about understanding what parents, families and young people want. Different advocates will have different views and perspectives about things. This is about having a conversation, listening and really hearing from young people and their families about what they want and what is going to meet their needs.

All of this will be worked through. We will be collecting all the information we already know about with regard to the royal commissions et cetera that have occurred

in this space and then really nailing it in the ACT as to what young people want. What is the school experience? What is the physical layout of a school? What do they actually want? We have four specialist schools in the ACT, but are they meeting the needs of our young people? Do we need to think about something different and be a bit innovative? That is what this review is more about. It is not a review into the system; it is about asking what we need to do to do it better.

**Ms Haire:** Going to the next level of detail on exactly what the minister has said, the consultation that is going to take place is going to directly inform plans for the modernisation of specialist schools and also the development of a specific inclusive education strategy. As you have just said, and as the minister has confirmed, we have been very explicit with our partners and stakeholders that we are not starting from scratch here; this is building on all the feedback and the work that has already been done and taking it to a level of execution.

I might ask Ms Deb Efthymiades if she would like to speak a bit more about how we are involving children with a disability in that process. As the minister said, we think that is one of the really important elements in this kind of work.

**Ms Efthymiades:** I guess that is the critical difference. As the minister and Katie have both mentioned, it is about how we get the voices of young people, both current and recent students and people with disability themselves, to enrich our understanding and talk about the contemporary ways we can go forward. Rather than assuming that it is tiny little tweaks, it is asking whether there are bigger step changes. What would make the biggest difference to them? This review is building upon, but amplifying, the voice of young people. The contract we have put out to the content group is that they are working in partnership with organisations to ensure that the mechanisms used will privilege the voice of young people with disability.

**MR DAVIS:** Could I just ask a broader question? It might sound a bit naff, but how does the government currently define “inclusive” in the context of inclusive education? Is that a definition the directorate already has, or is the directorate hoping to develop its definition through this particular body of consultation work? It seems as though educators, parents, young people and the broader community will all tell you something different when you say “inclusive education”.

**Ms Berry:** You are absolutely right. People’s experience of inclusion or ideas about what inclusion is are very different. We have done some work on this in the past. People have different ideas about what that means for them and their families and their circumstances. That is exactly what this conversation is about.

**Ms Haire:** Inclusion can have a very broad meaning, as sometimes understood. The purpose of this project is to deal with inclusion for children and young people with a disability; we are narrowing it down to that specific focus on children and young people with a disability, not that broader understanding of inclusion. Within that, as the minister said, it is focusing on the real experience and aspirations of children and their parents.

There are a range of different definitions. This is not an academic process for choosing between different definitions—not that that is not important. The purpose of

the consultation that has been funded in the budget is very much around the real experience of children and young people and their families, and what their needs and aspirations are for their inclusion in the ACT education system to reach their full potential. It is a very specific and grounded purpose for this work. Deb, would you like to add anything further?

**Ms Efthymiades:** I dug up a little more detail around the organisation that is being partnered with, the Down syndrome mentor program. The consultant will have a young person with disability on the project team. It is taking it to a different level, from hearing from advocates to actually hearing from the people concerned, about their lived experiences and their wishes and aspirations going forward.

**MR CAIN:** I have a question about teacher librarians. As you would be aware, in the 2021-22 financial year there is no allocation for teacher librarians. I reference page 164 of the budget outline. Over the next three years, there is \$4.9 million, approximately, allocated. I refer to an election promise by the government to increase the number of teacher librarians by 25 professionals by the end of this term. Firstly, how do you intend to do that over the subsequent three years, and will these be new hires or retraining of existing teachers?

**Ms Berry:** We can get a bit more detail about the numbers and when they will have graduated, but that is the reason why the funding has flowed through in different years. The teacher librarians do not exist yet; they need to do their fifth-year master's of teacher librarianship before they are qualified to be engaged in those positions. Whilst it will be training existing teachers who want to do teacher librarianship, it is a separate role. We have to wait for them to be trained, because they do not exist at the moment.

**MR CAIN:** Does the fact that there is no allocation for 2021-22 indicate that there is a change of policy in terms of your hiring?

**Ms Berry:** No. It is just that the funding for the scholarships happened last year but they are still doing their scholarships, so they do not exist at the moment. Once they have completed and they have their qualifications, they can be employed.

**MR CAIN:** What category of teacher qualification was required for previously recognised librarians?

**Ms Berry:** That is a good question. Teacher librarianship requires a fifth year of a master's qualification to be engaged as a teacher librarian. Teachers or other staff who work in the libraries are different.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you for clarifying that.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, can you give me a bit of an outline on the return to school plan, the COVID side of it? Obviously, we have seen year 12 go back. When they went back it was not all face to face; there was a curriculum for outdoor activities. When the other years go back progressively over the next few weeks, will it be similar

to the way that year 12 went back, when it was just for outdoor parts of the curriculum, or will it be back to school full time? Can you give me a bit of a rundown on how that is all going to work?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, we can do that, Mr Hanson. We have been providing this information. Schools have been providing this information. Parents and young people have been getting this from their teachers and on their email systems. It is a good opportunity to remind everybody to check their emails so that they are clear on the return to school and what that is going to look like. We will be making sure that those reminders go out. If anybody contacts your office, Mr Hanson, or anyone else on the committee, please direct them to their school in the first instance or to the Education website.

Of course, each school will have a different schedule for their return because each school's physical layout will be different and how the school operates will be different. For example, some schools might have staggered start times, different entrances, staggered break times—two breaks of equal time frames—to make sure that students do not mix with each other and make sure students use different staircases and toilet facilities, as well as staff. That will look different across each individual school. I am speaking generally, but we can provide details on the actual return, the dates and what that will look like for each year group.

**Ms Haire:** I remind the committee that the year 12s commenced back at school at the start of term. That was to enable them to do essential assessments and, in particular, to undertake the AST, which took place last week. As of yesterday, Monday, all year 11s and 12s can now return to on-site learning. From next Monday, 25 October, preschool, kindergarten and years 1, 2, 6, 9 and 10 will also return to on-campus learning. Early childhood education and care programs, including out of school hours care, will recommence as well for children who attend those. Then the week after next, on 1 November, the remaining years, years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8, will return to on-campus learning.

As the minister has said, ACT government schools, in partnership with the Catholic system and independent schools, have been doing a great deal of planning for the safe return of students to campus in accordance with the health guidelines that the Chief Health Officer has provided for all schools in the ACT. I might hand over to Ms Jane Simmons to talk a bit about that process. If the committee would like, Mr Mark Huxley could talk about some of the specific individual examples of the way schools have planned, in some very innovative ways, to keep children safe when they return.

**Ms Simmons:** I acknowledge that I have viewed the privilege statement. I am just building on what Ms Haire has said. We have had year 12 students already back at school and year 11 students. Then we have preschool, kindergarten, years 1, 2, 6, 9 and 10 returning next week on Monday, and then the following Monday we will have years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 returning to on-campus learning. A lot of preparation has gone into that. Each school has a plan to support that. Those plans have been predicated on the advice that we have got from Health. We have a number of safety measures in schools to support that.

For example, we follow the health directions. There is the use of the CBR Check In app. We have a number of measures that we are asking schools to undertake that are

part of the plan. Each school has communicated its plan to its community in the last week; so school communities, parents and students are very aware of that. We have done a lot of work working with principals. Mr Huxley can give you some additional details around supporting schools to be able to develop those plans.

Ms Haire is right: each one of those schools is different. There are different contexts—large schools and small schools. Some examples of what we are doing include cohorting groups of students so that they are not mixing with a larger group of students. To minimise movement around the school, we have split lunch times and recess times. We have staggered starts and finishes. In some cases, where there is a preschool on site, we have the preschool entry in a different part of the school.

A range of different processes has also been undertaken. We have asked schools to think about their timetabling and how they deliver the curriculum. In some instances, schools have made decisions to reduce the curriculum that they deliver to ensure that there is restricted movement around the school. Our priority is to get our students back onto the school site. I might ask Mr Huxley to talk in more detail around some of the specific examples in schools.

**Mr Huxley:** I acknowledge that I have read the privilege statement. Just building on what has already been shared with the committee, schools have taken a very considered approach to implementing the health guidelines. We have worked to share best practice across our schools as they have been in the planning process in recent weeks so that we get consistency in school settings and school sites and stages of schooling, wherever possible. Obviously, every school adapts that to their local context because they have different building layouts, different curriculum offerings and potentially different timetables as well.

Our school principals have been working together in groups. We have organised them by stages of school, supported with one of our directors of school improvement, and we have been running active planning sessions with them. We have been pre-populating a lot of the work where it makes sense to, so where we have common expectations around the health guidelines when it comes to things like mask wearing and health and hygiene practices. We have been consistently working with schools to build those.

Where we see some differentiation is when they start looking at how do they keep cohorts of students together. That has been a really considered approach that schools have taken when looking at the opportunities around staggered lunch times. When you put a school's timetable together, especially in a secondary school, it can be a monumental task to actually change it—changing when lunch breaks occur, changing break times and changing drop-off and pick-up times. To honour the commitment that we need to make to keep cohorts together is no mean feat, especially in our secondary settings.

Our schools have done a lot of work in recent weeks to get ready for that. For example, one of our primary schools has asked parents to print off the name of the youngster in kindergarten and have that on the windscreen of their car so that when they drive in, the staff know which vehicle to direct the student to so that parents do not have to leave the car in those circumstances.

Another school which has got multiple entry points has set up staggered entrances across the school. Students are actually coming in from different areas. There will be specific toilets that schools will be allocating to different cohorts of kids, as well as specific areas of the playground that they will be asking the students to maintain and have access to, coinciding with the split break times we have already talked about.

Schools have done all of that planning in the last two weeks. It has not been a quick thing for them to do. It has been a really intensive piece of work that schools have been doing and very considered. They have taken those public health guidelines very seriously in their adherence of them. The public schools released that out to their communities on Friday last week, so all parents received the information in a consistent and coherent way across our schools.

That was the work from last week. Part of it was the development of the ventilation checklist and assessments that have been developed for each school. As we speak, this week the focus is on developing the indoor air quality, plants and assessments, implementing those effectively and having those up and available for schools by the end of this week. It has been a really staged and supported approach for our schools in the development of that. Obviously, a lot of the directorate expertise has been deployed to assist and support schools in implementing that work and being positioned to return students in weeks four and five.

**MR HANSON:** I just have a couple of questions on that. Can you confirm that, with all the staggered starts and so on, students will be back five days a week; it will not be Monday, Wednesday and Friday for one lot and Tuesday and Thursday for another lot? It is five days a week, is it?

**Mr Huxley:** The adjustments they are talking about are literally five-minute adjustments to the start and end of the day. The information that was sent out on Friday across our P-10 schools was absolutely that the kindies could be dropped off at a certain point in time, then five minutes later they were staggering the actual entrance and exit point for the cohorts at the start and end of the days.

**MR HANSON:** Great. In terms of air quality and ventilation, do we have someone who has the appropriate qualifications, an environmental specialist, going around and doing an audit of those school plans? I imagine that the schools themselves do not have that level of expertise. Is that being assessed and audited?

**Mr Parkinson:** Within my branch we are working our way through the schools, looking at the ventilation and looking at that from a twofold direction. There are both mechanical systems within schools and natural ventilations within schools. Natural ventilation is, of course, code for opening windows. We are using technical specialists to look at our mechanical systems. That piece of work is being headed up by an environmental scientist who works with us and normally looks at environmental issues and air quality, solar and sustainability questions. It is well within her technical expertise.

We are taking advice from relevant health experts and looking back at the guide documents that are published by organisations such as the World Health Organisation

and Safe Work Australia, as well as getting technical expertise from our mechanical consultants and contractors that we use and advice throughout our normal business of looking after school HVAC and ventilation throughout the year.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** There is \$400,000 in the budget to upgrade essential ICT systems. Can someone tell me what IT systems you are updating?

**Ms Haire:** There are actually two systems that that item relates to. One is for the Teacher Quality Institute and the other is for the Board of Senior Secondary Studies. I might ask Mr Martin Watson to speak to the element that relates to the Board of Senior Secondary Studies and then Ms McAlister to speak to the element that relates to the Teacher Quality Institute.

**Mr Watson:** I have read the privilege statement and I understand and acknowledge it. The ACSA certification system is the one that holds all of the assessment data for all of the schools and does all the central scaling for the ACT. It was established 13 years ago and has undergone a range of development processes during that time in order to increase the range of things that it can accomplish and also its usability.

This funding is to allow ongoing support of that particular process so that the user interface is improved and so that, as it is a growing system, through a range of other budget initiatives, there is an opportunity to make sure that it is contemporary, works efficiently and meets the needs of schools. That money is specifically there to increase and improve the quality and the range of processes that that system is able to do, led by the BSSS but in support of senior secondary education in the ACT.

**Ms McAlister:** In response to system upgrades for the Teacher Quality Institute, funding has been received to strengthen and broaden the portal—as we call it at TQI—for two areas. One is to accept our pre-service teachers into the teacher registration system. We already register them after changes to the TQI act in 2019. We have about 1,500 pre-service teachers on our register at the moment. It gives them visibility of the teacher standards and introduces them into the teaching profession at that early career stage. The strengthening of the portal will allow them to transition, as appropriate, into provisional and full registration. It will also provide the ACT government with really important workforce data around teachers from this early stage of their career.

The second piece of work is to broaden our regulatory framework to accept all qualified early childhood teachers into the registration system, as opposed to early childhood teachers that work in schools. Under the government's Set up for Success early childhood strategy, there is a stated commitment to register all early childhood teachers in the ACT. We are at the stage of consulting with early childhood teachers, those within schools and also those within the sector, on how broadening our framework might look to suit the needs in the ACT. It is those two elements of the teacher workforce that the funding is addressing.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. The school student databases were updated recently, maybe a year or two ago, to the central database program. Is there any feedback on

how the new database is working?

**Ms Haire:** We have had a number of upgrades to the school administration system as well as two central. That might be another question for Ms McMahon.

**Ms McMahon:** The administration system was established a number of years ago and has been growing ever since. It is able to capture our attendance data, incident data, some timetabling and academic reports. All of those are going really well. The next phase of the student administration system will be a parent portal. We have commenced testing of that parent portal with a number of schools and we will continue to do that for the rest of this year.

The parent portal will be a fantastic innovation for our community. They will be able to send in notes to tell the school about attendance and do all of their notes for excursions and permissions. If any of you are parents, you would know how frustrating it is to have to do that on a number of occasions. We are going to streamline all of that process with the parent portal. It will be a way of using the SAS system to communicate to all of our families with newsletters and notes that we can send out from that repository. It is proving to be a highly successful program.

**THE CHAIR:** My interest in this comes from the inquiry into school bullying and violence. One of the central issues that arose was the database that schools were using. All of the things you have listed sound very helpful. Is this database capturing, potentially, behavioural incidents that are occurring in schools?

**Ms McMahon:** Yes. That is the incident reporting that I mentioned. When there is an incident of bullying or incidents that we do not like in schools, we can record those in the central database system. A school is able to use that data to plan for improvements for individual students or for groups of students. They can look for trends across the school of what is happening and then utilise the positive behaviour for learning program which most of our schools are implementing. It is a data-driven program. You are really looking to see what is happening in the schools to be able to address that behaviour. We are certainly able to capture that data—and it is good data too, positive incidents that are happening with students. That is actually recorded as well. Certainly, it is strengthening, both at a school level and at a system level, the data that we have accessibility to.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Davis.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to ask about three-year-old preschool. The budget says that we are supporting 500 additional three-year-olds to access 15 hours a week of early childhood education. I just want some clarity on whether that is in addition to the 500 places that were provided last year.

**Ms Haire:** An increase from 300 to 500 is allowed for in the budget. There are a range of other elements of the Set up for Success program that are also funded through this year's budget, which is the first phase of the implementation of that strategy. Of course, access to three-year-old preschool is a very important element of it. There are also other elements. We have gone from having 300 places a year to 500 places a year. I will ask Ms Efthymiades to speak about the other aspects that sit

around that provision.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The whole initiative around Set up for Success has two main planks, I guess, and they were both related election commitments. The first was around three-year-old preschool and, as you have just heard, 500 places. That is 500 every year. Obviously, a child is only three for a year. They are in the program and then they move on. Every year we are refreshing that and constantly going through a warm referral process. This budget uplifts that and makes it a much more viable concern for our partner providers because we have increased the daily rate. Young people can be there for a 10-hour day, which is much more in keeping with how services operate, rather than four-year-old preschool being a six-hour day. That has been a big uplift for them.

The other part of the election commitments was about enhancing the capability and professional standing of the workforce, which is a really important part of Set up for Success. There are a number of things within this year's budget that support that. We have an increase in the number of scholarships that are available for people to upgrade their qualifications. That is about professionalising the workforce.

We also have a whole raft of professional learning elements. A key one that has been really fantastic and has had a whole lot of uptake, which has been run on our behalf by the Australian Childhood Foundation, is supporting the workforce to deal with children affected by trauma. That has been really successful, well-received and quite extensive. It has 11 online training modules; 12 webinars on a whole range of topics relating to trauma; five blog articles, which have gained a bit of momentum; and a number of professional support networks. I think that is a really important uplift of the profession, because often little people come with traumas and it is important for our workforce to have direct information available to them.

Another element is that there are some grants for educators to support them in their obligations and rights when working with children. One of the other aspects that this budget funded is for two early years engagement officers to connect with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, to connect them through child and family centres, Koori preschool and school. It is critical that we get that early connection point right for those families as they engage with early learning and then onwards into schooling.

Finally, one of the other things I would like to mention in this budget for Set up for Success is the comprehensive and systematic approach to transitions from three-year-old to four-year-old and on into further schooling. A parcel of money has been put aside so that we can get some expert advice on doing that in a really comprehensive and ACT-relevant way.

**MR DAVIS:** You were right to point out that it was an election commitment. This was a commitment made by both of the governing parties. I suppose the key difference was our time line to get there. My question is about the time line. I just want to confirm that it remains the government's commitment to have universal access to 15 hours of early education by 2024. What road blocks or stumbling bumps do we envisage in getting to that universal access by 2024, and what is being done to mitigate those pressure points?

**Ms Berry:** This has been a piece of work that has been conducted by ACT Labor and me. Having worked with early childhood educators before I came into government, this has been quite a journey for me. I wanted to make sure that this was a commitment that the government could deliver on. One of the things, of course, is the workforce. The workforce does not exist, so attempting to implement universal access to early childhood education any quicker just could not happen; it would be impossible.

Rolling this out and understanding the needs of young people and making sure that it is targeted means that we can identify how the program will work, going forward, and how we can turn this big ship around, when there has been a focus on care instead of early childhood education. It is about really understanding the needs of children aged five to three and how important universal access and good quality early childhood education is. That is why, as Ms Efthymiades said, there are so many prongs and parts to the early childhood strategy. It includes the development of early childhood educators.

Ms McAlister talked about TQI and the registration of early childhood teachers. Of course, we have particular young people and families in our community that do not have the same equal opportunity because early childhood education is unaffordable or because they have a number of complicated things going on in their lives and they need additional support. We have been able to partner up with the Community Services Directorate to do warm referrals, which is about forming relationships with families who might never have had these kinds of experiences or a positive education experience in the past. We need to build those relationships and make sure that they are getting all of the other supports. We need to make sure that, in addition to universal access, we get them to preschool so that their preschoolers get the chance to have a great start to a great early childhood education.

This has been a work in process for a number of years now. However, it has been done carefully, considering some of the challenges that we have in place. I have just identified a few of those. Funding is not so much the issue, although we have asked consistently, ever since I have been here, for a partnership agreement with the federal government to expand the preschool agreement to three-year-olds. We have not been successful in having that call heard, but we ask every year on a regular basis for the federal government to chip in some funds because this is such a crucial time in a child's development and in a child's brain development.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** Just a quick clarification. My office has confirmed that in budget statements F last year there was the phrase, "This includes building capacity and growing the workforce as a budget priority." This year "growing the workforce" has been replaced with "teaching excellence". Minister, this is a very deliberate change. I think that the committee would like to hear the justification for such a change.

**Ms Berry:** I am not quite sure what you are trying to get at here.

**MR CAIN:** There is a clear change in priorities stated from last year to this year,

PROOF

Minister. It is in writing.

**Ms Berry:** I am just not quite sure what it is that you are trying to get to in your question.

**MR CAIN:** Why the words were changed from “growing the workforce” to the much more general and broad “teaching excellence”.

**Ms Haire:** We are happy to take this question on notice.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you. That is all I am asking.

**MR HANSON:** Earlier I was promised a breakdown: of 42.5 positions, how many were going to be registered teacher positions. Is that information available?

**Ms Berry:** We have taken that on notice.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

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

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Deputy Director-General, COVID-19

Pappas, Ms Helen, Executive Group Manager, Children, Youth and Families

Plater, Ms Janet, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Children and Families, Children, Youth and Families

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

**THE CHAIR:** We are looking at CSD 2.1 and CSD 2.2 over the next hour. I will lead off with the first question. Minister, can you tell the committee how the CAYPELS scheme will be supported through this year's budget?

**Ms Berry:** The amount of \$557,000 has been approved to support the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Service. That includes operational costs, as well as a SOGB officer for the 2021-22 financial year, with funding of \$207,000. This is being provided for equipment purchases. This funding is going to support the CAYPELS program to operate for a year while we work on a proposal around the ongoing service model for that hire service and also to make sure that we have funding to purchase new equipment—that we can replace some of the older equipment that is beyond its useful life with more modern, fit-for-purpose equipment, such as standing frames and wheelchairs—as well as having project officers to develop a service model that supports early intervention services in the ACT.

This has been really important funding to make sure that this equipment loan scheme can continue to operate in the ACT. I might ask Ms Pappas to talk a little bit more about the equipment loan scheme and what it provides for young people and their families.

**Ms Pappas:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. Ms Plater can give you the detail, but the CAYPELS program is an assistive technology scheme. It supports children and young people who have developmental delays or disabilities. It is an opportunity for parents to test out equipment for their children, to make sure that it is fit for purpose and it is going to meet the needs of those individual kids. It is to ensure that the equipment that they subsequently purchase is appropriate equipment. It is the only assistive equipment scheme here in the ACT. It works up to the age of, I think, about 12. Janet might correct me if I am wrong.

**Ms Plater:** Sixteen.

**Ms Pappas:** It is up to 16.

**Ms Plater:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. CAYPELS is a really important service. It is the only paediatric loan service that we have in the ACT. It provides

equipment for parents who have children who are diagnosed with disability or developmental needs. It is open both to children who are in the NDIS scheme and children who just have normal developmental delay. It gives families an opportunity to have a short-term loan of about three months so they can see if the equipment will meet their needs if they need to purchase it. You can also imagine that, with babies, children grow quickly, so it is an opportunity to have short-term loans as their children grow.

The funding is really important because it will allow the service to continue. Funding is also provided for important equipment like standing frames and wheelchairs. We have stock, but it is getting a little old and it needs replenishment. Some of that equipment can be quite expensive.

An example of the sorts of things that the CAYPELS service is used for could be a young child with a genetic diagnosis and complex medical issues who has spent most of their life in hospital and, due to their medical and developmental issues, they have got little head control and on discharge from hospital require additional support to be safely positioned to eat. We would lend them something called a tumble form, which allows them to be securely and appropriately positioned when seated for feeding, ensuring that this can be managed safely. It is really vital equipment. This funding will allow us to continue to provide this service and replenish stock.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. Just following up on something that Ms Berry mentioned, this funding is for one year whilst the scheme is, for lack of a better word, re-imagined. Is that correct?

**Ms Berry:** That is what I understand the model will look like, going forward. I am sorry, I said 557; it is 555. Ms Pappas, do you want to talk a bit more about what that funding looks like for now and the work going into what this model looks like?

**Ms Pappas:** It is important for the ACT to keep delivering a service that is going to meet the needs of families. What we have to do fairly regularly is make sure that the service is meeting those needs. The next nine months will be about going out and getting some feedback from some families; talking to them about what works and what does not work about the scheme; looking at what other jurisdictions are doing; and having a better understanding of the users of the service, to make sure that the equipment and the service meet those needs. That is the work of the project officer. It is also about understanding where this program sits within the other supported services across the ACT that deliver services. For families that access the NDIS, it is about making sure that those pathways are clear and are facilitated well. That will be the work of the project officer over the next nine months.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Ms Pappas, did you mention that this program or this scheme is only available for children up to 12 years?

**Ms Pappas:** I think Ms Plater said 12; that is right.

**Ms Plater:** No, Ms Pappas; could I just correct that? It is up to 16 years of age for services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is up to 16 years old. I am just thinking ahead. With young people, they tend to be more than 16 years old. What happens to a child who is 17 or 18 years old who needs to loan equipment but they do not fall under this scheme? What happens to them?

**Ms Plater:** The hospital has a loan equipment service for adults. As children grow into the sort of adult age, I understand that they would access loan equipment through those services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** As a 17-year-old, they are not legally classified as an adult. Are you saying that the hospital will be able to loan them the equipment?

**Ms Plater:** That is my understanding, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Davis.

**MR DAVIS:** I draw your attention to page 8 of budget statements G, where you speak about the child and family centres. I was surprised to see that there has been no predicted increase to the number of occasions of service to the child and family centres over the next five years. Can you explain to me in a bit more detail how that could be so and what your modelling is?

**Ms Wood:** We have been in a disrupted time, obviously, over the last two years for the work of the child and family centres. That has led us to develop some new ways of delivering services. We have more services delivered through online platforms. It really has disrupted the amount and number of services and the reach for the centres. That has meant that we need to do a bit more forward planning. Our forecasts are based largely on where we are now, but we are going to need to reset and look at those projections into the future. Ms Pappas or Ms Plater might want to answer that.

**Ms Pappas:** That is exactly right. We are going to have to do some forward design work. What we have learned over the context of COVID is that more families have been able to access services, particularly because of the online platforms. We have to think about what is going to be the service model, going forward, and how we can continue to make the centres available for those that need to access them, but do it in a way that meets, again, the individual needs of those families. With a lot of the families that access the centres, it is a one-off. With them it is just a touch base, get a bit of information and they are off. There are other families who need much more detailed and longer term support. It is about trying to get a real sense of what that service demand will be into the centres in the forward years.

**MR DAVIS:** What options are available if the demand starts to well outstrip the capacity of the child and family centres, particularly since that modelling is over a five-year period? Anecdotally, there are suggestions that we should be expecting a lot of lockdown babies and perhaps increased demand on those services. I guess I am just raising my anxiety that over a five-year period I am not sure that maintaining those numbers foreshadows some of those increased demands.

**Ms Pappas:** The beauty about the child and family centre model is that it is pretty embedded alongside other deliverers of service, so community-based organisations. In

the child and family centres you have got the child and family centre workers themselves; ACT Health, through the maternal child health nurses; Relationships Australia; and other community-based organisations who also deliver services. The idea of the centres is that somebody can walk into the building or access the service and it is not necessarily only the child and family centres that are able to respond.

The way that the staff work together is that they do warm referrals. So if it is not something that the centres should respond to or can respond to, then there is a warm referral over to another community organisation that works within the centre or beyond the building itself. They have very well-established and exceptional networks into the community service organisations. Families would not be left unserved; it would be about who else within that network could respond to the presenting need.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert.

**MRS KIKKERT:** You mentioned that a lot of families come in for a one-off service and are referred to someone else. Could you run us through exactly what type of service you provide onsite?

**Ms Plater:** The child and family centres are described as a one-stop shop where we can provide a number of services. As Ms Pappas indicated, our partnerships, both with community groups and other government agencies, are really critical. In any centre, and we have three—Gungahlin, west Belconnen and Tuggeranong—we would have a combination normally, in a non-COVID space, of 10 child and family centre staff or equivalent, because we have a number of part-time staff, MACH nurses and other health services. We have a combination of organisations who come and work with us onsite and we also work with them in the community. For example, we partner with the libraries and Communities@Work or the YMCA to do activities such as “tracks to reconciliation”.

All of our workers are health professionals who offer a range of services. What might happen is that a family might come in to get immunisation. Mum might say that they are really concerned about the two-year-old who has behaviour problems and also they are a bit concerned about some family violence issues at home, for example. We will then offer an intake service. That is what our staff do; they talk to that person about what they need. We may offer a health and wellbeing clinic as a follow-up, where they come in and sit with one of our workers and get to talk about their issues and concerns. It can range from parenting issues, challenging behaviours, emotional needs or support. They will also talk about what other services they need. Sometimes they need emergency funding, so we connect them to those sorts of services. Sometimes they need a referral to other health services or to our childhood development service, which is another really important part.

Once that has happened, they will decide what else they need. We can continue to offer complex case management. Our staff will come in and offer individual case management for those clients, but we also offer a whole range of groups that are region-specific, potentially, and sometimes consistent. We have evidence-based parenting groups which we run on a term basis, such as Circles of Security. We also have other groups such as Cool Little Kids. There are other programs for different families. We run a South Sudanese playgroup. We have a multicultural group. We run

a whole range of services within the centre that we can draw on, but we also work with our partners to address the needs that they have.

We monitor the referrals that we get and we change the service offer accordingly. You will find some services that will be different on the south side to the north side and some that will be across all centres. One of our most recent programs that we have been running is Mindful Motherhood, which is a program for babies and their mums. That has been incredibly popular and incredibly successful in helping mums with their newborn baby and so on. We offer a range of complex case management, simple case management, referrals and groups and activities.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you. Considering that a lot of things are happening within the centre and the ACT's population is growing every single year, I am actually surprised that there is no funding for forthcoming years, knowing that this service is quite critical. I would like to go back to Mr Davis's question on why is there not forthcoming funding based on a service that is happening now and being delivered to families when we know that the ACT population will increase in the next couple of years? What happens if more families come to receive those services or referrals provided by the centres, but they are put on a waiting list because you just do not have enough funding, as you are not committed to it at the moment?

**Ms Berry:** At the moment the child and family centres are meeting the needs of our community, but you are right, of course; as the city grows, other different services and needs will be required. But at this stage those child and family centres that we have operating are meeting the needs of our community. They are relatively new, really, these centres across the ACT. Is the oldest one 10 years old? Somebody will have to correct me. They are relatively new services across the ACT. Of course, as the city grows, our services will need to grow with it, but at the moment these services are meeting the needs of the community.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, are you saying that there is no waitlist for members of the public to access services at the centre because every single person that walks into the centre is taken care of?

**Ms Berry:** I would not say that there was not a waitlist, because there might be different services that might be required that, at different times of the year, might have more young people needing to access them. Maybe we can talk through some of those areas. I guess that is the importance of having those important community partnerships, so that you can actually refer people to different community partnerships to meet their specific individual needs that cannot be met, maybe, by the services provided at the child and family centres. I might ask Ms Pappas or Ms Plater to just go through some of those services again and discuss how they are meeting the community's needs and adding additional services or swapping in services in different parts of the region, depending on the needs of those particular communities.

**Ms Plater:** In answer to your question, we have a range of services that are available and we are flexible within that. What may happen is that we start a new program that is a pilot that we run for a term. We might find that there is interest in that term and we may need to have people wait till the next available group. But, largely, we are able to adapt and refer.

The other thing that is important to remember is that, although the centres are in the regions, families can attend any centre that they wish. We do not have a regional restriction to entering and accessing the services. If your grandparent lives in Gungahlin, you may go to the Gungahlin centre even though you live in Tuggeranong. That also allows us to refer families across the centres, if we feel that there are services that are needed, and also connect with the local services in each regional base.

Some of the examples of variation at a local level would be that we have a South Sudanese playgroup at the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre. We have an Atfal playgroup at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre, which is for people with children who are Arabic speaking. At the Tuggeranong centre we have a multicultural playgroup which now attracts a number of members of the Indian community, among others, as well. So we listen to the needs and we work it out.

We also change venues according to need as well. During COVID last year, we were unable to run our groups in our small centre because of COVID distancing. As we brought services back online, we hired the community hall and expanded our services. We also went to the park and asked families to go there so we were socially safe. That allowed us to have more numbers as well. We have other ways of flexibly adapting to the demands that we have.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you have data on how many families are currently on the waiting list for each of the services provided at a family centre and, if you do not, could you take that question on notice?

**Ms Plater:** We have information about who is interested in groups running through. We do not have many waiting lists for services at this moment, but I will take it on notice just to make sure that I can give you a well-rounded response today.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you.

**Ms Pappas:** Can I add, just to clarify, that if a family presents and wants to access, for example, the Circles of Security program and that is full this time around, they go onto our waitlist for the next program, but the child and family centre workers continue to touch base with that family and support them. They are not just left on a waiting list without support and services in the meantime. Ordinarily, it is not just for one issue that families come to the centre; sometimes there are multiple issues. While they are waiting for a parenting program or a response, they are also being supported and are offered other services along the way; so people are not waiting, as you would traditionally expect a waitlist to run. People are continuing to have contact with those families while they are waiting for that next parenting session.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It would be great to also have the data on how many people are waiting for the next round of services being provided, or the family that actually missed out because there was not enough room to cater for them in the upcoming program when they were on time—

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert—

**MRS KIKKERT:** with that particular program.

**Ms Pappas:** We will not have data about families who miss out because we schedule families to come to the programs both in terms of availability, in terms of spaces, and in terms of what meets their needs. We might be running a program this term, but the family are not wanting to access it until next term. So they are on the waitlist for the next one, but still delivering a service. It would not be fair to say that families miss out. The responses are quite flexible and quite individualised. We do not have data per se to say family X missed out, but rather family X is attending Circles of Security next term and, in the meantime, X, Y and Z is happening; case management is happening, a behaviour clinic is happening, or they are attending a playgroup in the meantime. So we would not have data. I just wanted to clarify that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thanks for clarifying that.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, it is my understanding that early childhood services can apply for a temporary waiver from the requirement to have an early childhood teacher if they are unable to find a suitably qualified individual. Could you tell us how many services, and how often, have applied for such waivers, and for how long are these waivers valid?

**Ms Berry:** Apologies, Mr Cain; I do not have officials here to be able to provide that information for early childhood education and care services. This is early childhood development—this part of the estimates inquiry. You have asked the question; I will take it on notice and see what information I can provide for you.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you. I thought it did fit here, but I am mistaken. Could you also answer: what are the conditions that support a grant of the waiver? What is the reasoning behind approving such a request?

**Ms Berry:** Mr Cain, it might be best if you put those questions on notice to the previous part of the committee inquiry; I can get those officials from the Education Directorate to respond.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is about autism assessments. Stakeholders report a very large increase in families seeking autism assessments for teenagers, but the CDS provides assessments only for children up to the age of 12. Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia, in contrast, provide free diagnostic services for young people up to the age of 16, 18 or sometimes even older. Can you explain the government's decision to cap autism assessment at age 12?

**Ms Berry:** Ms Pappas, can you respond to that?

**Ms Pappas:** It is a good question. The Child Development Service delivers autism assessments, and you are right; it is up to the age of 12. There is a private market of psychologists who can do autism assessments beyond that. Families are able to approach those services directly. Unless Ms Plater is able to answer that question, I am not aware of whether there is anybody else in the community that does autism

assessments for young people specifically, other than in the private market or through the NDIS.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is correct. A private autism assessment could cost about \$2,000, so what happens to that particular individual and the family if they cannot afford that?

**Ms Pappas:** I might have to take that on notice, Mrs Kikkert.

**MRS KIKKERT:** There is no help available for those young people?

**Ms Wood:** I failed to acknowledge the privilege statement before. Mrs Kikkert, we have oriented our service system to reach children and families with that kind of support earlier. That is why the Child Development Service is focused on that younger age cohort. We know—and the evidence is clear—that children will do better if they get those assessments and the right kind of support earlier. That is where the bulk of the effort is focused, but we can come back to you on notice with more details about options for older young people.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is understandable, but stakeholders have seen an increased amount of teenagers coming in for an assessment. Does this suggest families are increasingly falling through the cracks?

**Ms Berry:** Mrs Kikkert, we will take that on notice and provide you with some more information.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, do you acknowledge that these kids are falling through the cracks if they are not being diagnosed earlier and now they are teenagers? Stakeholders are saying that there is an increased number of teenagers seeking this assessment, but they cannot, because their family cannot afford it. Do you acknowledge that there are cracks and there is a failure there?

**Ms Berry:** What we have said and what Ms Wood has just referred to is that in the ACT, obviously, we want to try and detect autism or have autism assessments much earlier. That is why we have the early childhood strategy; that is why we have expanded universal access to three-year-olds for 500 students, and increased that.

That is why we have the Future of Education Strategy and we are working closely with CSD on our warm referrals to early childhood education for three-year-olds, so that we can do those assessments earlier. When you have those assessments earlier, at a younger age, and the diagnosis is made, those young people can get supports much earlier, and that is really important.

I understand what you are saying around young people who are older and have not yet received that assessment. Ms Pappas said that we will get some information for you, to respond to that, and we will take the rest of that question on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Could the committee get an update on the work that CSD is doing on the first 1,000 days strategy?

**Ms Berry:** Ms Evans will be able to provide some information on that.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you for the question, Mr Pettersson. I acknowledge the privilege statement. The directorate is working closely on the first 1,000 days with colleagues, both in Health and Education. It is one of our key reform pieces as we start to look at the broader families and communities sector and the way that we respond, as the minister said, to make sure that we are providing essential early intervention.

The first 1,000 days is an approach that goes from antenatal care right through to about two years of age. We then have a period with that early entry and three-year-old preschool; that takes up the next part of our service system, to make sure that children are receiving the services that they best need.

In terms of looking at that best start and the first 1,000 days, initially the work was being led through Health, with an expert reference group. We have now completed that piece of work, which did a whole lot of mapping around our service systems to consider what was available and what was still required for children and young people to get the best possible outcomes.

We are now moving into a phase where we are co-designing with community some of our first 1,000 days responses. Particularly relevant to this portfolio area would be the work that we are doing with Education around the warm referrals that the minister just referred to for three-year-old preschool, which picks up younger siblings as well. We are working closely with families. They might be identified through, for instance, a community sector partner or a child and family centre as being eligible and suitable for the three-year-old preschool program, but we are not stopping at just referring them into that program. We are working with those families to determine what other needs they have and how younger children in that family could benefit from other services.

It is looking at a wraparound approach. The work is being led through Health in terms of consultation with the families and that co-design piece that I just spoke about. It is probably not so much in this portfolio, but that broader approach to the first 1,000 days is certainly something that is very much within the minister's portfolio.

**THE CHAIR:** Is the strategy still being developed or are we talking about how to implement the strategy at this point?

**Ms Evans:** There is an overarching framework, the early years framework, which has been developed. It is a 10-year framework which governments agreed to. The first 1,000 days is one plank, if you like, of a broader strategy. As I said, we then move through the age range. If we are looking holistically at families, we would then be considering not just children in the first thousand days, because children reach the age of two very quickly; it is about what happens next for that family and those children and what needs they have beyond that.

There is more than one strategy. There are a whole range of service responses. For instance, they include children in the health system who, in those early years, need some support around cleft palate or hearing issues. They go right through to the much softer touch work that you might be doing with families, such as around how to

encourage them to read books to their children. It is probably not easy to capture it as a strategy; it is more about the framework for early support and where the first 1,000 days fits in with that. I hope that is helpful.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Ms Evans, what kind of support is given to kids or babies who have been diagnosed with FASD?

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert, that is not a supplementary; that is a new line of questioning.

**MRS KIKKERT:** She was referring to the first 1,000 days; she spoke about the programs and the support for those babies. I would like to know what programs are available for kids with FASD.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert, we will go to Mr Davis for a substantive.

**MR DAVIS:** You will not believe me, Mr Pettersson, but my question relates to FASD screening, so I will let Mrs Kikkert have that one.

**MRS KIKKERT:** There you go, Ms Evans. Do I need to repeat it?

**Ms Evans:** I am fine, Mrs Kikkert, but I was going to say that these responses are probably not in my remit. Ms Plater may have some commentary around how the Child Development Service would support families that bring a child forward with developmental delays that may be FASD-related. I might throw to Ms Plater.

**Ms Plater:** In terms of the health needs of children diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome—is that what you are referring to?

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is correct, yes.

**Ms Plater:** That would be in health services in general, regarding making sure that the family is okay. If the child is presenting with developmental delays and needs, they can come into our Child Development Service. They can have an initial assessment through a drop-in clinic; then they would be referred for speech, occupational therapy or physiotherapy assessment, to identify needs. We can often do some sort of parenting group as well—a short-term parenting group to show ideas for intervention and assistance.

Our Child Development Service works very closely with our colleagues in child and family centres. Sometimes families presenting with children with those sorts of issues may have parenting issues as well, and behaviour issues that they need help with. They will make connections with other services such as child and family centres, so they could put parents into parenting groups as well. Both services always work closely with the ACT Health system, if they feel there are other medical needs that they need to provide, developmental assessment and support.

Another aspect of our Child Development Service is that we have a developing kids program. When we identify particularly vulnerable children—and a child with FASD might fall into that category—we offer a group program with a teacher assistant.

Those families can come in and receive some more intensive support to make sure that they are connected to services and get the developmental needs that have been assessed. Once we have identified their needs and provided them with that information, we will refer them to the appropriate areas for support.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you have data on how many families are accessing this particular service for FASD?

**Ms Plater:** I would have to take that on notice in terms of the specific nature of that diagnosis.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, my question relates to funding for a review of disability education. On page 71 of the budget outlook, it appears that there will be a review of education for students with a disability, with funding of \$450,000 over two years. Firstly, when will this review be submitted?

**Ms Berry:** Again, this was a question for the previous session; we already responded to a question asked by Mr Davis. I am not sure there is more that I can add to the answer that was provided during the last session. Of course, you can put a question on notice following up on Mr Davis's question, if you need some more detail on that. Chair, I might ask for your advice. I do not have Education officials here. We responded to the question that Mr Davis asked around that in the last session.

**MR CAIN:** Whether it was the same question, I cannot recall. Are you saying that you are not able to answer any questions related to this review?

**Ms Berry:** It is just that this is the Community Services Directorate, not the Education Directorate. We answered Education questions during the last session, when Mr Davis specifically asked about the review. We provided some detail about what that review was about, ACTCOSS membership of the disability referral group, and that the review was not starting from the beginning; it was about engaging young people. I do not have a time frame at this stage for when it would be available. If you put a question on notice to the previous group, so that it is asked in the right space—

**MR CAIN:** We will do that, Minister.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like you half-answered the question again. I am sure that we will figure something out.

**Ms Berry:** I am glad everybody is listening to all of our responses, though! You are all very diligently paying attention to all of the work that we are putting into the budget.

**THE CHAIR:** There is just so much in it, Minister; it is hard to keep track.

**Ms Berry:** I know; it all blends into one.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I would like to go back to autism. Minister Berry, you stated in February that the wait for an autism assessment at CDS was eight to 10 months and that the number of people on the list had been reduced from over 100 to around 70.

What are the current figures? Do you acknowledge that a drop from 100 to 70 is good but that it could be better, and how could you make it better?

**Ms Berry:** Mrs Kikkert, we have talked at length about some of the challenges that we have faced around a diagnosis of autism, particularly through the implementation of the NDIS, and that it is leaving some young people behind with regard to their assessments. It is about whether or not it is an NDIS assessment, or some other supports, depending on where on the autism spectrum a young person lies. Ms Pappas or Ms Plater might respond in a little more detail about the NDIS and the gap that that is causing, because it is not focusing on some of the other things we need to do, which Mrs Kikkert is going to, I think.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can I also mention that mild autism is not covered with NDIS, it is about the severity, when a child is diagnosed with autism. I am specifically requesting information on autism that is quite mild but needs attention from the government.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, I understand what you are asking about, Mrs Kikkert.

**Ms Pappas:** Can I check, Mrs Kikkert, that you are asking about waitlists?

**MRS KIKKERT:** The number of people on the list for autism assessment before was over 100, then it dropped down to 70. That was back in February. I would like to know the current figures—whether that number has dropped. Also, what are you doing to make sure that this number continues to go down?

**Ms Pappas:** It is important to note in the first instance that the Child Development Service receives between 12 and 14 new referrals for autism a month. We have had an excellent response since February from our telehealth service, who have been doing autism assessments. That has been received really well by families. We have had, to date, up to 14 October, 177 children referred for autism assessments through the telehealth pathway.

Currently, as at 27 September, there are 119 children waiting for autism assessments. You can see that that list fluctuates; we are accommodating the 12 to 14 new referrals every month. We have flow through the system; we have families who are being seen through the telehealth system, accessing the private market, or accessing the multidisciplinary assessments that are done at the Child Development Service.

Children will be funnelled into the most appropriate pathway. Certainly, families are appreciating being able to access telehealth. They are saying that it is meeting their needs and it is an easy way to engage in that service. But there is a demand for autism assessments. What I am trying to highlight here is that there is flow through the system, but we are getting, as I said, 12 to 14 new referrals a month for autism assessments.

**Ms Evans:** We have 80 assessments booked between July and December in the telehealth area, just to demonstrate that flow-through that is happening and planned in terms of those assessments.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Considering that there is quite a huge demand from families to

have their child assessed for autism, how can it be improved? How can these families on the waiting list have their child assessed rather than having to wait? It is quite difficult to have a child who you may think has autism, but you cannot receive the help that is necessary for them.

We have kids that are waiting until December. I am assuming that there are kids waiting until next year. When you are living with a child that may have autism, one day seems like an eternity; three months, four months or five months is a long time. What can be done to make sure that the number of kids waiting for an autism assessment can be reduced?

**Ms Pappas:** This is quite a specialised area of assessment and the market is pretty thin here in the ACT. There are not really high numbers of psychologists and specialists here in the ACT that are doing autism assessments. For those that are, they do have waiting lists, particularly in the private market. It is an opportunity for the private market to step forward and try to attract psychologists with this specialisation to do this work.

We provide as much support as we can for those families while they are waiting. Again, it is not just about the autism assessment; there may be other needs that can be met while families are waiting for autism assessments.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But as we discussed before, with respect to the private sector, it will cost a family \$2,000 for the assessment, so they have no choice other than to be on the waiting list. You are saying that the resources are an issue here; we are understaffed to assess kids with autism?

**Ms Pappas:** I think it is the market; the specialisation of psychologists doing this work is pretty limited here in the ACT.

**Ms Wood:** There is Medicare support for kids under seven. Obviously, not everyone is diagnosed during that period, but that is where we really push the effort to get early supports. As Ms Pappas said, bringing online the telehealth option has made a big difference to families in the ACT.

The telehealth service itself has been impacted by COVID. The numbers that Ms Plater shared about how many assessments are booked over the next three months shows that we can get more of that flow-through, and more people getting assessed, now that we are moving through the lockdowns across the different states into a slightly more normal environment. I think we are seeing the value of having that option, and it has definitely been meeting the needs of many families.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Sure, they are meeting the needs of many families, but there are many families still on the waiting list. How many specialist psychologists are working within the government to assess kids with autism?

**Ms Plater:** We currently have three psychologists on contract to provide those services. As Ms Pappas indicated, it is a thin market. We regularly try to recruit to our services. There are a lot of competing market forces when we do that. We negotiate with the psychologists that we have on contract on the number of assessments that

they can offer each term. That is currently one of the reasons why we use the telehealth service. We also use the telehealth service because it is a very viable, consistent alternative when we are unable to recruit staff.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Are those three contracted psychologists full time?

**Ms Plater:** No. We negotiate with them to do as many assessments as possible, but it can vary from term to term, based on their availability.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What are their hours per week?

**Ms Plater:** It varies from term to term. We employ some of them on casual contracts and they indicate to us what they can provide each term.

**MRS KIKKERT:** When you refer to a term, Ms Plater, can you pinpoint how long that is?

**Ms Plater:** A school term.

**MRS KIKKERT:** A school term. So you have three psychologists working casually, a term, to diagnose families—over 100 here in the ACT?

**Ms Plater:** We have endeavoured to recruit full-time positions for psychologists, but we have been unsuccessful. These are psychologists that we are able to work with, to provide that service. We continue to try to recruit psychologists to the services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Are these contract psychologists private psychologists? You guys are contracting them to work for the government on a casual basis?

**Ms Plater:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What you are really looking for is a full-time psychologist working for the government so that you have that continual—

**Ms Plater:** Yes, that is correct. We have engaged the telehealth services. We have offered 177 of those services at this time. That is why it is such a valuable service.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, it is a valuable service, Ms Plater. What do you recommend? How many full-time psychologists would it take to cater for the needs of these families who need to have their child assessed for autism?

**Ms Berry:** Mrs Kikkert, I do not think that it is appropriate to ask for an opinion from one of the public service witnesses. What we can say is that psychologists are one of the areas where the country is facing a significant shortage and recruiting them to different parts of the ACT government has been a challenge. The early childhood development service is one of those areas where it has been a challenge. Because of the fluctuating needs of individuals, sometimes it is easier and more efficient to contract to meet the need as it fluctuates, as it changes, rather than having somebody directly employed. However, as a country and a community, we need to address this shortage of psychologists who are willing to stay and do this assessment work for a

longer period of time.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Having said that, Minister, are the psychologists that work in schools, school psychologists, qualified to assess kids with autism?

**Ms Berry:** Some of them are but some of them are doing a range of different work within our school systems—supporting students through individual learning plans and things like that. It is a good point that you make because, as I said earlier, our intention is to diagnose and have these assessments done much earlier in a child’s learning journey. That is why we have committed to the universal access for three-year-olds to preschools and expanded it to 500 students in this budget, so that we can work very closely with the Community Services Directorate, the Education Directorate and the early childhood sector to provide these young people and their families with that support much earlier.

As we said, there is access to Medicare for those under seven as well. We need to unpick the needs of a young person. This goes to the child and family services around those different programs that might be in place, like the Prep for Pre program. Families might not understand or know about what is happening in a young person’s life, but when they are put in front of speech therapists and occupational therapists, they can get that sense of, “Okay, something’s not going right here, and we need to get you some other supports.”

Whilst the assessment is in train, no matter who is providing that assessment—whether it is a private psychologist, whether it is one provided by the early childhood development organisations or whether it is through a school psychologist—we can all acknowledge that we want to do better in this space. That is why we have implemented the early childhood strategy, working closely with CSD, to get that diagnosis much sooner and the supports in place much earlier.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, we certainly want those children to be diagnosed much sooner. You mentioned that there are few psychologists in schools who are qualified to assess kids with autism. Minister, do you have data on how many of those psychologists are qualified to assess those kids with autism? If not, could you please take it on notice, and whether those psychologists are not assessing kids with autism because they have other work that needs to be done.

**Ms Berry:** It is actually quite a specialised area, as Ms Plater said. There might be some school psychologists who are qualified in that space. I will take that question on notice, with the caveat that that is not primarily the role of the school psychologist.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms Berry:** I am not sure how this will work, Chair; I will figure out whoever it needs to go to.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Our time has come to an end today. Minister Berry and officials, thank you for being here today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Berry, the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs and Minister for Early Childhood Development, for being here. The secretary will provide you with a

## PROOF

copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing, when it is available. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today—and there have been a few—could you please get those answers to the committee secretariat within five working days of the receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript of today's hearing. If members wish to lodge questions on notice, please get those to the committee secretariat within five working days of today's hearing. The hearing is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 4.15 pm.**