



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure](#))

**Members:**

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)**

**MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)**

**MS N LAWDER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 7 MARCH 2022**

**Secretary to the committee:**

**Mr J McAdam (Ph: 620 70524)**

**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.

## **WITNESSES**

<b>ATTRIDGE, MS VANESSA</b> , Executive Branch Manager, Enrolments and Planning Branch.....	<b>115</b>
<b>BERRY, MS YVETTE</b> , 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...	<b>115</b>
<b>HAIRE, MS KATY</b> , Director-General, Education Directorate.....	<b>115</b>
<b>MATTHEWS, MR DAVID</b> , Executive Group Manager, Business Services Group .....	<b>115</b>
<b>MCMAHON, MS KATE</b> , Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery.....	<b>115</b>

## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 1.32 pm.**

**BERRY, MS YVETTE**, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

**HAIRE, MS KATY**, Director-General, Education Directorate

**ATTRIDGE, MS VANESSA**, Executive Branch Manager, Enrolments and Planning Branch, Education Directorate

**MATTHEWS, MR DAVID**, Executive Group Manager, Business Services Group

**MCCMAHON, MS KATE**, Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon, and welcome to the education and community inclusion committee's final hearing for its inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure. Today's witnesses comprise Minister Berry and officials. Minister Berry will be appearing in her capacity as Minister for Education and Youth Affairs.

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

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege. When you speak for the first time, please state that you understand the implications of the privilege statement. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if you could state, "I will take that as a question on notice." The proceedings today are being recorded, and will be transcribed and published by Hansard.

Thank you for being here, Minister. We do not have any opening statements, so I will lead off with a question. Could someone talk the committee through how school capacity calculations are made?

**Ms Berry:** Thanks, Mr Pettersson. That is a really good question. I will ask Ms Attridge or Mr Matthews to provide some detail on that because there has been a lot of work done in this space around priority enrolment areas, capacity growth and population growth. I will ask Mr Matthews to go through that for the committee.

**Mr Matthews:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. The assessment of school capacity is an ongoing process that occurs every year. It literally involves—*interruption in sound recording*—in schools, and doing a tour of schools with the principal and taking notes around the availability and use of all—*interruption in sound recording*—in the school.

We have a commitment to do that at least every second year—*interruption in sound recording*. In higher enrolments, we do that annually or at—*interruption in sound recording*. What we do is that, in looking at the community, identifying—*interruption in sound recording*—for teaching and learning. That is a space that could be used—

*interruption in sound recording*. What is excluded from—*interruption in sound recording*—which are used as—

**THE CHAIR:** Can I interrupt you, Mr Matthews? Is anyone else having the same difficulties hearing that I am?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to try—

**Mr Matthews:** Yes, I can try again, Mr Pettersson. Is that a bit better?

**THE CHAIR:** That is perfect. We could hear reasonably well when you were talking about annual school tours to calculate capacity.

**Mr Matthews:** Just to finish that off, and to answer any questions the committee might have, we do visit all of our schools no less frequently than every second year. The objective of those visits is to understand the available spaces and general amenities of each of our schools. Where we can, we identify each classroom space and we assign a multiplier of 25 students to each of those classroom locations. The school capacity, in very broad terms, is determined by the number of classroom spaces times the 25 students.

That is a maximum potential capacity. It excludes some general mixed-use spaces like halls and libraries, for example, and other spaces which are not fit for classrooms or to be used as classrooms, like staff rooms, for example. That gives us a general school capacity. That can vary from year to year, depending on a range of different circumstances. If we have added a relocatable learning unit, for example, it goes up temporarily. If we have taken certain spaces offline to do works, or if they have been repurposed by the school for other purposes, that can come down.

Of course, we do not want schools to necessarily get to 100 per cent of capacity; that is not the objective. Essentially, the calculation provides us with an understanding of what the total capacity of the school could be; we then look at how the school is being used and make sure that it can undertake the full range of teaching and learning responsibilities that it needs to.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee has heard evidence that a multiplier of 25 is not a perfect measure because year groups do not come in neat groupings of 25 students. Does your calculation in any way take into account that uneven nature of student years and the inconsistent numbers across years?

**Mr Matthews:** It is not designed to do that, Mr Pettersson; as I have just described, it is designed to give a total theoretical capacity for the school. To make that point, and to reflect the fact that we understand that issue, with our class size guidelines, not every year group can have 25 students, so it does mean that we understand that, in line with our class size guidelines, 100 per cent school capacity is not always possible. As I said before, it is not necessarily a goal, either, that we are working towards.

We do take into account the different streams that occur. Most schools, depending on

how large they are, have one or more streams of students that come through the school. You could start with, say, three kindergarten groups and three year 1 groups; of course, in all likelihood that will flow through the school and we will be able to understand what the requirements of the school are as they go through those different year groups.

What we do look for in terms of utilisation as well is schools where there are more students starting in kinder or year 1 than those that are leaving in year 6, because then we have an understanding, as those population groups flow through the school, that they will have requirements for more space and teaching and learning. That is how we can look at how we can maximise the use of the space or add additional capacity, if that is what is required.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there any calculation of the capacity of specialised teaching spaces in a school?

**Mr Matthews:** There are two ways of answering that question, Mr Petterson. Schools generally, and particularly primary schools, use general teaching areas as specialist subject areas. That is very appropriate as part of their curriculum offering. It might be a Japanese class, a music class or a dance class. That is one of the offerings that is made by the school. From a primary teacher's point of view, they have a home classroom which they might be based from, and access to specialist facilities for those sorts of curriculum areas. Those areas are generally included in the school capacity assessment, which is, again, why I said that 100 per cent of utilisation is not a specific goal, but they are factored in.

We have some areas as well which are specialist small group settings for additional support and for inclusion. They do have a lower capacity because they tend to be smaller spaces. They generally are fewer than 12, and the calculations reflect the fact that those spaces have a small capacity and, in fact, are designed to do so.

**THE CHAIR:** With something like woodworking groups or specialised music rooms, is there a calculation as to how many of those rooms a school should have?

**Mr Matthews:** It does vary a little bit between the primary and the secondary sectors. In the primary sectors, those spaces would generally be a multiplier of 25. A space that is being used for a language program or a music program would be calculated as 25 students. In practice, of course, most of the students in the school would have access to that specialist offering and, in fact, many more than 25 students would occupy that space. But from a capacity perspective, it is generally counted as 25 students.

In high schools, of course, the faculty-based approach to education, where there are a lot of specialised subject areas, whether it be industrial, arts, mathematics or science labs, are all factored into the overall capacity of the school, and students move through those classes throughout the day, as opposed to primary schools, where they generally have a home classroom.

**THE CHAIR:** Just reframing my question, in terms of the total number of woodworking rooms, or the total number of music rooms that a school requires for its

population, is there some calculation?

**Mr Matthews:** Thank you for the clarification. It would really depend on the curriculum offering of that particular school—depending on how many streams of students they have, for example, or what their particular curriculum areas are. There is no specific ratio, except that we want to make sure that, for example, high schools have access to sufficient science labs in order to make sure that it can be a universal offering in each of the schools. It does vary from subject area to subject area and school to school, depending on their curriculum offerings.

**MS LAWDER:** I have some clarifying questions about that capacity. What is the largest number of students that could possibly be in a classroom?

**Mr Matthews:** In terms of the way to answer that, it is a difficult question to answer, Ms Lawder, because—*interruption in sound recording*—where there might be a concert, there might be larger groups of students in a particular learning area. Generally, we abide by our class size guidelines. From memory, 30 students is the maximum, under our class size guidelines.

**MS LAWDER:** If I can use similar thinking to Mr Pettersson, if there are, say, two music rooms in a school which are included in the capacity, I imagine that they are perhaps only used for music classes, which would mean that most other classes actually have more than 25 students in them; is that correct?

**Mr Matthews:** No, Ms Lawder. As I said, we comply with our current guidelines, which set the maximum number of students per individual classroom. We use that to design the classes at the beginning of a school year.

Sometimes we have a situation where there might be one or two students above the class size guidelines, and students can arrive during the year. We accommodate them; we would either provide additional teaching support for that class, to make sure the students can be supported, or we would try to give that class group access to more of the general spaces.

**MS LAWDER:** Could there be cases or instances where, due to demand, the music room gets used as a regular classroom rather than as a music room?

**Mr Matthews:** Yes, that is definitely possible in specific cases, Ms Lawder, and at specific times. If there is a need to use that space for a classroom, it can be. Certainly, that is one of the ongoing conversations that the directorate has with individual schools. Particularly in primary schools, there is a desire to have those specialists available for whole-of-school use. Once we start getting to school capacity, or utilisation that—*interruption in sound recording*—there are times when there is a need to use some of those spaces, that would otherwise be specialist spaces, as classrooms.

**Ms Berry:** I want to provide some clarification for Ms Lawder around class sizes. The enterprise agreement includes the Education Directorate's policy around class sizes. Thirty is the maximum for year 10 students. As Mr Matthews alluded to, the learning support units are at eight, the learning support units for autism are at six. With the

introductory English centres—we have a number of schools that support students who come as refugees, or others to learn English—their class sizes are 15.

For preschool it is 22; K to year 3 is 21; 4, 5 and 6, 30; 7 to 9, 32; year 10, 30; and year 11 and 12, 25. It is putting that into the context of the actual number of students that we are talking about across each age group.

**MR DAVIS:** One of the things I have been struck by, from our school visits, and from looking particularly at some of our newer schools, is that most of the schools, most of the time, are single level. I am struck by that because we seem to be a pretty landlocked territory. I want to gauge from you what appetite the government has to consider two-, three- or four-storey schools, or schools that I would argue would better utilise the finite land that they are on, going forward.

**Ms Berry:** This is something that governments across the country are tackling, around utilising land for schools. I have visited some vertical schools in different states and territories; that is the name by which they are referred to. They have several storeys. Of course, when I was growing up, our high school had three levels.

It is something that we definitely need to consider as land becomes more finite and more difficult to manage, particularly within higher density areas of the ACT. It is probably more suitable in the high school and college space than in the primary and early childhood space, from the feedback that I have been getting from teachers and parents about their experiences in those kinds of schools.

For those younger cohorts, with multilevels, there is the noise, and the inability to move to areas where you can have calming spaces in schools. I do not think it is a policy direction at the moment, but it is definitely something that is on the directorate's radar as our city continues to grow.

**MR DAVIS:** While we are on the subject of managing school land, one of the other things that struck me in all of our school visits was that the schools in more established suburbs, pre self-government, seem to have an awful lot of developable land that is not fully utilised and reaching its full potential. Harking back to my primary point that we seem to not have enough land for all of the different things people in our community want to use land for, how are we recording that across the directorate? I would be interested to know whether, as a directorate, we know how much land Education has that might not be fully utilised, or might not be fully realising its potential at this point.

**Ms Berry:** We might have a little bit of information about that. It would be more school-specific. Also, some of the land that you are referring to, Mr Davis, might be TCCS land, on the boundaries of schools, and not actually Education land. Mr Matthews, do we have anything that we can provide for Mr Davis in that space?

**Mr Matthews:** We do not have a per square metre tally, if you like. As you mentioned, it does vary across the city, in different areas. In terms of the utilisation of land, schools tend to utilise whatever they have available to them. If that includes more than one oval, they will potentially use those different ovals for different purposes.

The other thing, of course, is that the land is available for future school expansions, if required. Depending on which part of the city we are talking about, and the types of land that we have, the school boundaries generally include an oval and some additional land that has some capacity to be used for future expansion. We do have an arrangement with TCCS, as the minister described, as well. I am not aware of a per square metre-type of calculation of unbuilt-on land, if you like.

**MR DAVIS:** To take the minister's point, I know there is a lot of land surrounding some schools that is owned and managed by TCCS, but we certainly visited some schools where there was a surprising amount of land that was not being utilised by the school, and we did understand that it was Education Directorate land. In that instance, is there an Education Directorate policy around how schools can or cannot use that land? Is there some sort of policy around notifying other areas of government that that land is available for use, or could be available for use, if it met community demand?

**Ms Berry:** That is probably in the planning space. All of the various land around the city is for a particular planned use, whether that is for building on, for Education, for TCCS, open space, dry land ovals et cetera. That land is identified for that particular purpose.

In the case of Education land that might appear, on the surface, to be surplus right now, it is not something that might be surplus in, say, 10 years time. We would want to make sure that we held that fairly close for future generations and for changes in demographics in areas, just in case it needs to be utilised, rather than building on it or using it for other purposes. I think where you are going is probably in the planning space more than an Education land space.

**MR DAVIS:** That makes sense. I have one last follow-up. It might sound like a curve ball, but it stays on theme, so stay with me. The growth and renewal strategy, Minister, that you are leading in the housing space identifies that there are certain properties that we inherited as a government, pre self-government, that are beyond their natural life, and they are proving more expensive to maintain than it would be to build nice new homes. Has any similar appraisal been done of schools that might be around the same age as some of the properties in that space? My question specifically is: have we done any work to determine if there are some schools where it would be more cost-effective in the long term to knock them down and start again, as opposed to continuing to maintain them?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, Mr Davis, there is work in that space. In fact, one of the commitments that the government has made is around the Garran Primary School, next to the hospital. Because that school is kind of landlocked and there is no other opportunity to expand that school for the growth in that area, in the Woden town centre region, the ACT government and the Education Directorate have made the decision that that school will change quite drastically from where it is now. That will be quite a process, to build a new school, move everybody over to the new school and demolish the old space. We are not yet at the point of planning what that would look like. That is definitely a case where the ACT government and the directorate have made that decision.

**MS LAWDER:** I want to talk a little bit about enrolment forecasting. I read that the Education Directorate has a partnership with the ANU School of Demography. What, if anything, is the lag between significant events such as COVID, which has impacted on migration and the movement of people, even around Australia, and updates to that demographic profiling in terms of enrolment projection?

**Ms Berry:** Ms Lawder, that is a good question. Ms Attridge can provide some information about the work we do around demographics and whether there has been growth in births in the ACT as a result of COVID. I think that is where you were going.

**MS LAWDER:** Yes.

**Ms Attridge:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. We have considered whether the pandemic has impacted enrolments in the ACT and it has not really impacted to a significant extent, currently. We worked with ANU on this, particularly last year, to assess whether there might be impacts on filiation shifts due to economic impacts or because of migration remaining at much lower levels. In 2021, we saw around 145 fewer students compared to 2020—a fairly minimal impact, which we saw as being due to international migration. We will continue to monitor that to see whether there will be any future impacts on forecasting in the future.

**MS LAWDER:** For example, could there be a catch-up period where there is a sudden, greater migration or movement, to bring the swings and roundabouts? Do you anticipate that that is what might happen?

**Ms Haire:** Ms Lawder, it might be helpful if Ms Attridge takes you through the way that we work with the ANU and how the model works, because it does take account of a range of different factors which attempt to be sensitive to not just births, and not just migration, but also the patterns of behaviour. It is a really interesting and sensitive model. Ms Attridge can explain how that would pick up potential changes in behaviour and assist us in planning for growth in future years, as you are alluding to.

**Ms Attridge:** I am happy to add on the enrolment forecasting. I note that Professor Raymer appeared before the committee last year. We have developed an enrolment forecasting approach with the ANU School of Demography which supports us to predict what future enrolments will look like in the ACT.

We use a cohort transition approach which takes the number of students that enter the school system at any particular point and predicts where they will then continue on through their public education. Kindergarten, year 7 and year 11 are key transition points where we see people enter, or potentially exit, the public education system and move through.

We can also predict where we think interstate migration will have a bearing on enrolment forecasting, in terms of the number of people coming in to the ACT system. That is where we have seen a small impact, given that last year we had interstate border closures, which meant that we did not have people coming into the ACT for much of the year. That will start to increase again as those border closures have lifted.

We will continue to monitor what those fluctuations might look like through enrolment forecasts into the future, but we are not anticipating significant impacts at the moment that have not already materialised.

International student numbers coming into the ACT are more likely to impact in future years, as we start to see international border closure changes. We will continue to monitor what that looks like coming into and out of the ACT, to determine if there are any significant impacts that might alter the current state of public school enrolments for the ACT, and whether there would be a corresponding planning or demand response needed for that.

**MS LAWDER:** I noticed, with the rate of enrolments, that there are more in public schools than private schools over a decade or so; growth has been higher in public schools. Do you anticipate that continuing or stabilising at some point? How have you factored that into your planning?

**Ms Attridge:** We have considered what the population shift impacts are likely to be. I am aware that the official ACT population forecast is currently being reconsidered and revised, and that is likely to be revised slightly downwards. In terms of public education forecasting and growth, the main source of growth in the future will be births. Public school enrolment will continue to grow at similar rates to recent growth, or probably slightly lower—possibly at a rate of around 1.9 per cent each year in the next few years.

**Ms Berry:** Just to add to that final comment around demographic and movement in the ACT, once the new schools in New South Wales around our region—Bungendore, Murrumbateman and Jerrabomberra—are built, that will impact on the ACT in a more positive way, and perhaps take pressure off some of the schools that have regional students coming into those school communities. We will wait and watch how that goes as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Scattered across the grounds of ACT schools, shipping containers are being used for storage. Are there any policies relating to the usage of shipping containers as storage on school grounds?

**Mr Matthews:** There is support for the use of shipping containers where appropriate, for additional storage, as the committee saw when it went on its school visits, and I accompanied you on those. There are some storage shortages, in particular in our older buildings, and over time some of those older school buildings have had their storage areas repurposed for other reasons. Some of those schools have chosen to use shipping containers.

Depending on what the storage requirements are, whether it is furniture or whether it is learning materials that need to be stored in close proximity but they do not need to be used every day, shipping containers are certainly an appropriate and cost-effective way of increasing the amount of storage in schools.

In our new school builds, we are factoring in some additional storage, and some storage for community use, so that when those community sporting associations et cetera are regular hirers of facilities, they can store some of their equipment on site,

rather than having to pack it up and bring it each time they access the facility.

We acknowledge that the amount of storage does vary, but shipping containers, certainly, are a good option for certain types of storage, and are considered to be cost-effective and safe.

**THE CHAIR:** You have mentioned that shipping containers can be a good option and cost-effective; are there any other alternatives to provide more storage at a school?

**Mr Matthews:** There is the general move to digitise our records and learning materials. A lot of the traditional storage requirements of schools would have involved learning resources—a lot of hard-copy resources and expansive libraries. Obviously, in a modern world, we have a mixture of digital and hard-copy resources. That is certainly one of the things that can be done to help minimise the storage requirements of individual schools.

We can look at how we can repurpose particular places within schools, if storage is a particular priority of an individual school. Of course, that will vary from site to site. I believe that, on our committee visits, we heard a range of different views. Some principals were certainly of the view that regular clean-outs were a good thing for the school and made sure that it retained only the things that were most needed on a year-to-year basis. Others certainly commented that teachers are bower birds and they do like to keep what they have collected over the years. We definitely want to support our teachers to have the available resources that they need, but—*interruption in sound recording*—is a cost and utilise the space that can potentially be used for other purposes.

**MR DAVIS:** One of the things I was struck by on our school visits, particularly when we were looking at primary school classrooms, was how differently they can be set up. We saw some older classrooms where the teachers were set up with their desk in the classroom, and that was their permanent workspace with their students. We saw other, particularly newer, schools where it was open plan, the classes would mix and teachers were teaching in a more collaborative manner. How much are school infrastructure and maintenance feeding into the conversations around the teacher shortage task force and how much is the environment that teachers want to teach in potentially impacting our ability to recruit and retain teachers?

**Ms Berry:** It is a good question. Obviously, school and teaching have changed a lot over the decades. That more collaborative team style of teaching method is what we are definitely working towards, despite some of the challenges that might occur in the physical layout of some of our older schools.

However, teachers use their professionalism every day to work out ways to do that team teaching and collaborate with each other, despite those physical barriers. Ms Haire, do you want to add to that?

**Ms Haire:** Mr Davis, infrastructure is not one of the issues that we have discussed with the workforce task force. Certainly, in talking with principals and teachers, and confirming the minister's statement just a moment ago, the nature of modern teaching is that it is a collegial, collaborative undertaking. Our modern education spaces are

designed to support that. However, great teachers, who we have in all of our schools, can work with the full range of infrastructure styles and designs that you saw during your visits.

What we know is that the important thing for teachers is being able to have the time to work together, strong leadership and having high-quality pedagogy support for their professional learning. They are the important things. They are the things that we seek to support them with.

Through the leadership of the school, they work together with the infrastructure that they have. Ms McMahon is here. She has worked in one of our newest schools, Charles Conder; also, previously she worked in one of our very oldest schools, Red Hill. She can probably give you some good examples of how teachers adapt and ensure there is high-quality teaching and learning.

**MR DAVIS:** Just before Ms McMahon does that, because I do want to hear what Ms McMahon has to contribute, I want to pick up on a point that the minister made about an ambition that we have, over the medium to long term, to move to those more open plan style classrooms that create a more collaborative teaching environment.

We heard from some principals who might have more open plan classrooms and thus more collaborative teacher set-ups that, in their own words, that does not suit all teachers and that some teachers were attracted to schools where they were able to have a little bit more autonomy and run their own classroom.

I am worried about how much that is feeding into the teacher shortage task force, because if what you say is true, and from what I understand from some of those principals to be true, I foreshadow a risk that we might lose teachers.

**Ms Berry:** Because of the make-up of the classes in the old schools?

**MR DAVIS:** That is right; or rather the transition to the model of the classrooms that are only in the newer schools. If there are some teachers who are attracted to the teaching environment in the older schools, then that is how they want to teach. We are transitioning away from that sort of model and we are opening up more and doing more collaborative teaching; I wonder whether we are attuned to the risk that that might lead us to losing teachers.

**Ms Berry:** With the teaching profession in the Education Directorate, I think we have described teaching as a continuous learning environment. Generally, I would say that most teachers want to continue to learn and professionally develop their trade. That happens every year with the Teacher Quality Institute.

I would say that there are teachers that have come to the profession having learned a different style of teaching. Schools have flexibility around how that occurs. However, the advice that I hear and the feedback I get from our universities here in the ACT is that that more collaborative team style of teaching is the way and provides the best possible outcomes for every individual student.

I do not think there is any evidence to suggest that people are leaving the profession

because they do not like the way that teaching is changing, with teachers not just being in front of the class anymore; it is a team effort and everybody learns from each other.

**MR DAVIS:** I suppose we would not know that for sure, since we do not do exit interviews with our teachers.

**Ms Berry:** You would certainly be able to figure it out if you saw a massive exit of teachers because of that. I do not think there is evidence to back that in, Mr Davis. We do teacher interviews; they are just not compulsory. You cannot make people who have resigned do an interview or an exit survey, but we do encourage it.

**Mr Matthews:** If I could make a very pragmatic point for Mr Davis, because of the age of our portfolio, we will have a mixture of different building typologies for many years to come. Within our system there will still be those more traditional classroom environments, as well as some of the newer facilities that we are constructing.

There is no doubt that teachers do have different preferences. A key element of future design is around the flexibility of our spaces, so that they can be configured in different ways to create classroom-like environments, but they are not fixed in the same way that they are when they have supporting walls that cannot be moved.

For the foreseeable future, for teachers that have that preference to go into that more traditional classroom, there will certainly be those options within the system. We will certainly be wanting to retain them and encourage them to keep working within our system, as well as providing the professional learning to work in different spaces. Again, that very much is Ms McMahon's territory.

**Ms McMahon:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. Having worked as a leader in a primary school for a long time, and worked in a range of different schools, I can validate that the management and the leadership of the school that allow for the teaching and learning styles that happen in that school have a greater impact than potentially the building design does.

Having worked in a classroom that had an inquiry-based, collaborative philosophy to teaching and learning in a traditional 60-year-old building, we were very easily able to adapt the spaces that we had by moving children around into different classrooms and utilising different spaces. The conversation we were having earlier around the utility of music rooms and the utility of those shared spaces gives teachers opportunities to bring students together in a range of different ways and using a range of different spaces.

When we de-privatise teaching practice by being able to see each other, we draw on each other's strengths, and we build and support the development of teachers in a really authentic way which leads to better engagement and better learning outcomes for our students.

That happens in spaces where we can see each other and can be together. That is done in a range of different ways, whether it is through the architecture of the building or the collaborative bringing together of people.

ACT schools have been designed in ways that have fostered that collaboration for a really long time. I know that when I went to primary school—and I am very old—back in the 70s, we had open plan learning classrooms. And those schools exist today. They change the configurations of them through fixed or mobile structures, but they utilise the spaces to best meet the needs of the kids and to be able to build the staff, develop their skills and utilise their strengths in ways that are very collaborative. We do that in all of our schools.

Teachers will learn, and teachers will learn new tricks, even if they are older and more fixed in their ways. That is done through great collaboration and through leadership in schools. We will have different sizes and shapes of buildings, but what happens within them is probably more important.

**Ms Berry:** I think that the last two years have shown the incredible adaptability of our teaching professionals, to be able to work from within their own home, across the internet. Ms McMahon has made the absolute point that teachers are ready to adapt, and will adapt, regardless of whatever challenges are thrown at them, because they have their students front and centre of their mind.

**THE CHAIR:** The ACT has varied schools, in terms of their age, size, classroom design and teaching model. We have spoken about how teachers can choose which schools suit their needs and teaching style. How do you ensure that students get the education with the right fit for them when we simultaneously have a priority enrolment system and many schools are unable to accept new students due to enrolment pressures?

**Ms Berry:** We can probably provide a little bit more detail on this, but all of our schools are great schools, and every school strives to ensure that there is a personalised approach to every student. I understand that circumstances may be such that, for a variety of reasons, a family wants to make a different choice to the school in their priority enrolment area. I want to provide that assurance that all of our schools are great, and they do strive to do their very best for each individual student.

**Mr Matthews:** Building on that, Minister, as well as including every child in their local school, there are special circumstances that look at enrolment out of area. Obviously, that is more challenging in schools that are already very close to their capacity. We often work with families during an enrolment appeal process and, if their home school is not appropriate for whatever reason, we can look at, normally, a range of different options that might occur for them.

Also, building on Ms McMahon's earlier point, there are lots of different—*interruption in sound recording*—and our government submission to the inquiry talks about the work that we are doing in individual schools around accessibility and inclusion, and particularly the use of sensory spaces. In these spaces, for students that need some quiet time, or some individual targeted learning assistance, they can utilise the full footprint, by going to those specialist locations. Space is very important, but the teaching practices and the wellbeing practices of our schools are the primary approach to making every child feel comfortable in their particular space.

A lot of parental engagement, of course, occurs between schools and families, and there is a lot of one-to-one communication between teachers and families around the needs of individual students. That is where those conversations are appropriately held, to make sure that we understand each child and we can make sure that we are able to accommodate their needs in whatever school they are located in.

**MS LAWDER:** I want to ask about accessibility with respect to disability access. Is there a centralised directorate audit of physical accessibility needs—ramps and lifts, and other sensory—for example, where there are TGSIs and hearing loops? They are a couple of examples; or is it up to each individual school to determine what they need?

**Ms Berry:** I will ask Mr Matthews to expand on this. Of course, many of our schools were built at a time when inclusion of different kinds of abilities was not put into the architectural design of the schools. We now need to retrofit them for a range of different abilities to make sure that students, regardless of their background or how they come to school, get the chance to have a great education. I will ask Mr Matthews to expand on the work around inclusion in our schools regarding disability access and other learning resources.

**Mr Matthews:** In terms of the actual building footprints, obviously, we are very closely engaged with each of our schools. One of the mechanisms that we have is that, within our infrastructure area, we have network officers for each network. They comprise approximately 22 schools each. The role of those individual network officers is to work with each of those schools and to take a whole-of-school approach with those school principals around the particular assets. That includes assembling asset data on things like—*interruption in sound recording*. We have a program of upgrades where we work to make spaces generally accessible, to meet the needs of individual students who we know are going to enrol in that school.

Again, the committee saw some examples on our school visits where that is very much also taken into account by school leaders, when they are looking at how they use their classrooms each year. They want to make sure that the accessibility needs of each of the students and staff are met, and where they—*interruption in sound recording*.

We are committed to try to—*interruption in sound recording*—over time, and we want accessibility to be something which is part of the experience of every student. That means they have as general and normal an experience as every other student. That includes not requiring people to use separate entries and exits. Of course, all of our—*interruption in sound recording*—, but we do have a challenge with retrofitting our older schools, and we do that on a case-by-case needs basis at each individual school.

**MS LAWDER:** I missed some of that; it was cutting out a little.

**THE CHAIR:** You and me both, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** If someone came to the directorate and said, “What percentage of your schools are physically accessible; what percentage of your schools are adequate

for someone with vision impairment and someone with a hearing loss, or deafness?” does the directorate have that centralised data or is it up to each school?

**Mr Matthews:** —*interruption in sound recording*—

**MS LAWDER:** Sorry, I missed that again.

**Mr Matthews:** We would not. That is based on an individual assessment of every school, yes.

**Ms Haire:** Ms Lawder, I can provide a little bit more background on that; that might be helpful. Fifty-four of our, at the time, 88 schools were upgraded to improve accessibility in the 2019-20 year. In the three years up to 2019, there was \$6.5 million worth of projects to implement the work that Mr Matthews spoke about earlier, in terms of sensory gardens, sensory spaces, classroom modifications and withdrawal spaces to support children with those additional sensory needs. \$10.3 million has been spent specifically on accessibility infrastructure up to December 2020. So there is an ongoing program of work to support the needs of children with disabilities in existing schools.

The other point that Mr Matthews spoke to, but it might have been lost in the problems that we are having with transmission, is that all of our new schools—and I know that you visited a couple of the new schools in your school visits—have been designed on the universal design principles so that they are accessible for all, all of the time. Of course, in our new schools, that is a wonderful thing. As the minister and Mr Matthews said, with our older schools, the approach we take is to identify the needs of the children and provide the accessibility updates and infrastructure that are required to ensure that every child is welcomed at their local school.

The other element is that the teaching and learning that go alongside having the accessible infrastructure are equally important. If we had time, I know Ms McMahon would speak to that as well. Accessible infrastructure is necessary but not sufficient; the capability and the culture of our staff, the professionalism of our teachers in modifying teaching and learning programs, and personalising the individual support to the children, is the other part of what makes a school really inclusive. We focus on both the infrastructure and the quality teaching and learning part of that.

**MS LAWDER:** If someone wanted to go to a particular school, is it possible that they cannot attend because of the lack of accessibility? How do you ensure that someone can go to either their local PEA school or, if necessary, a school of choice? How do they know that that school will be accessible for their child?

**Ms Berry:** Generally, those conversations will happen at enrolment, which is around the end of April. Generally, families will inform schools of their child’s specific needs; then the school can make those adjustments for that specific child. That is the case around that inclusive work—making adjustments for a specific child.

For example, I know there are schools that have had, or still have, companion dogs, but not every school has a student that requires a companion dog with them. But there would have to be plans put in place for that to occur within a particular school. The

same goes for other schools that have decided to have lights and digital clocks rather than alarm systems for lunches et cetera, because they want their school to be a more calm environment, particularly for young people who have sensory challenges with loud voices, alarms or bells which make a great amount of noise. That particular school has worked with its community to go through a silent school day; for example, you do not have bells at lunch or at the end of sessions.

Generally, through that first interview at enrolment, families will inform the school of their requirements. Depending on the size of their requirement, and whether it can be quickly adjusted or will take some time to adjust, the school will work with the family and the teachers will work with the student to make sure that they can make those adjustments.

**MS LAWDER:** Would every school have some accessible toilets, for example?

**Mr Matthews:** That would have to be part of the adjustments for each individual enrolment. Depending on the individual needs of the student, as the minister described, it would be identified through the enrolments process. There would also potentially be occupational therapy assessments and other assessments that would be used to identify any of the adjustments or extra support that a student might require. We would certainly make sure that there were accessible toilets available for every student and, indeed, staff member that needed them.

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary question, Mr Davis.

**MR DAVIS:** I appreciate that this was before Ms Lawder joined the committee, but back in May last year, we heard from Craig Wallace from ACTCOSS on this very question. I will repeat a quote from him, Minister, because it is not really reconciling with some of the evidence we just heard. He was talking about the context of the public schools being used as voting booths by the AEC. The AEC does some work to determine the accessibility of those facilities, and Mr Wallace said:

There were 86 polling places in the ACT at the last election. Sixty-two of these were schools. That is around 72 per cent of that total. None of these were listed as accessible without assistance; they all came back as assisted access.

He went on to say:

If a voter cannot access the public area of a school for half an hour to cast a ballot without assistance in Canberra, how likely is it that a child with a disability will complete years of concurrent education there?

So my question is, how much does the Education Directorate work with the AEC to determine how they have come up with that modelling, to form the view that none of our schools is accessible, even for a person with a disability to cast a vote, let alone conduct, as Mr Wallace says, years of concurrent education?

**Ms Haire:** Thank you, Mr Davis, for that question. I do not know the details of how the AEC draws that conclusion, but what I would say is that ACT schools are required, under legislation, to be accessible and to make reasonable adjustments for all children to attend. That is under both the Disability Discrimination Act and the disability

standards for education. We consult with parents, and we implement reasonable adjustments. In our new schools, as we have discussed with respect to universal design, issues that may affect someone who has a mobility-related disability is built into the design of the entrances and walkways et cetera, in our existing schools. As I think you have all noted, the portfolio is 99 years old, and it ranges from very different eras.

The adjustments are made to ensure that the children who are enrolled in the school are able to access it. I suspect that that gives rise to a different set of criteria to what the AEC is looking at. What we are looking at in our older schools is accessibility and inclusion, most importantly—I know that is very important to you—of the children who are enrolled in that school. I suspect that the AEC is looking at a different set of criteria to that. We take very seriously both legislative but also moral requirements to make the reasonable adjustments so that children can attend their local school.

**MR DAVIS:** Could I just ask, then, as a simple follow up, if you would not mind: given that that evidence from Mr Wallace has been on the record since May last year, and the AEC's determination of the accessibility of our schools has been on the record for even longer, has anyone from the directorate started a dialogue with the AEC to determine how they have formed that view? Have we reached out to them and had a conversation with them?

**Ms Berry:** Mr Davis, I think it is accessibility for the purpose of a child's education that the directorate makes the necessary adjustments. So I think you are talking apples and oranges. I understand Mr Wallace's issues around accessibility for the more general community and for the opportunity to have a vote. For our schools' accessibility work, it is around for the individual child's ability to attend their local school. It is a good question that you have asked, and I understand Mr Wallace's concerns there, but the diagnosis, I guess, that the AEC used is different to the one that we would use for our students.

**MR DAVIS:** Okay. But my question, specifically, was: has anyone from the directorate reached out to the AEC to determine how they form that view?

**Ms Haire:** No, we have not, Mr Davis. However, there is another opportunity coming up, where the AEC will be in touch with us shortly, so happy to—

**Ms Berry:** Yes. Seems to be something happening soon!

**Ms Haire:** We are happy to ask them about that issue at the time when they are seeking to use our premises again.

**MR DAVIS:** Okay, thank you.

**MS LAWDER:** At the very least, the AEC is looking for a clear path from the car park to the school hall, which is usually where the voting takes place. Often there is a small step or a lip to get into the school, which is the very first impediment that will stop people with a mobility issue. So if it is not accessible for an adult with mobility issues, how can it possibly be accessible for a child with mobility issues?

**Mr Matthews:** I can quickly provide some data. I think the question was taken on notice, but the latest data I have in front of me is the August 2020 census, and there were 2,647 students in ACT public schools that were accessing disability education programs at either a mainstream or a specialist public school. So, notwithstanding those important issues that were raised by Mr Wallace, and that we will inquire further into, there was clearly a sizeable proportion—that is, about 5.3 per cent of the ACT public school population—that are children with a disability accessing public schools in August 2020.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry, going slightly off script, time has absolutely flown past; it is now 2.34 pm. We have only had six substantive lines of questioning. With your indulgence—I am not sure of your availability—is there any chance that we could continue this further, for potentially another line of questioning from each of the members?

**Ms Berry:** I will just have to check. I am just going to go off for a moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; all good.

**MR DAVIS:** I must apologise, Chair. As keen as I would be for another line of questioning, I have somewhere to be in five minutes.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder, what about you?

**MS LAWDER:** I am happy to stay.

**THE CHAIR:** We will see who we can get, but if you need to disappear, Mr Davis, that is quite all right.

**MR DAVIS:** Thank you. Let me see what I can do, while the minister is seeing what she can do.

**Ms Berry:** Chair, I have just checked with everybody. I am okay until three, and everyone else is here until three.

**THE CHAIR:** All right; we will see how we go. I appreciate your generosity with your time. I had a question about tree canopy coverage at schools and the general greenery of schools. Are there any measures of how green—in the quite literal sense of the word—our schools are, or are there any policies guiding how much greenery there is in schools?

**Ms Berry:** Questions on trees are for Mr Matthews, I believe.

**Mr Matthews:** Mr Pettersson and Minister, what I can generally say around trees is that they are an important part of the amenity of every school because they provide shade for students and assist with the general microenvironment. They require very careful maintenance as well, because they present some sorts of risk if they are not maintained. That is something that the Education Support Office in the directorate

works with the schools actively on in terms of making sure that there are regular assessments and health checks of trees by arborists, to make sure that they are properly maintained and do not present a safety risk.

In terms of general goals or targets, we do not have a universal approach to that. Obviously, the tree canopy of each school is partly dependent on the neighbourhood in which they are based, and we know that that varies across the city. Obviously, mature trees take many years to establish themselves properly and to provide a net benefit to the community. So, as part of our general approach to the living infrastructure of our schools, we want to support appropriate greenery and trees, and other forms of sustainability of microclimates within schools. We work with schools very actively on that, and that is an important part of what they do.

They are very keen, and some of our strongest sustainability advocates are the students in our schools. We want to provide them with the benefits of that living infrastructure but also with the curriculum opportunities that that presents. So, in summary, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but it is something that we want to strongly encourage. We want to see the environmental benefits, but we also want to carefully manage the safety elements, particularly, of well-established trees. We are not in a drought at the moment but when we do go through periods of drought, we particularly focus on making sure that the trees are healthy and not presenting a safety risk to the community.

**THE CHAIR:** If I was a new principal at a school, I turned up and stepped outside into the courtyard of the school and there was concrete everywhere, grass not to be seen and no shade in sight, how would I go about getting assistance or even funding from the directorate to improve the greenery of the school?

**Mr Matthews:** There are certainly funding opportunities available, Mr Pettersson, through the public schools infrastructure upgrade program but also through the use of the solar feed-in tariff that is associated with the solar panels on our schools. The way that that works is that the solar panels generate a revenue which then is made available back to the schools for particular sustainability initiatives. That can include things like making outdoor areas green and putting in garden beds and additional shades. So it is part of our general upgrades program, but it is also an opportunity that exists under our sustainability programs.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Davis, are you there?

**MR DAVIS:** It turns out that I can hang around; thank you, Chair. Minister, in the same hearing early on in this inquiry that we heard from Mr Wallace, we also heard from Lisa Kelly, the CEO of Carers ACT. I asked her, I thought, a pretty benign question about how Carers ACT have been consulted in the planning and design of new schools. I was surprised to hear that the answer was: never. According to Ms Kelly, Carers ACT have not been consulted in the design or planning for new schools. Can you talk me through, first of all, why that decision was made, but then, more broadly, who exactly is consulted in the broader community when we are designing and planning new schools?

**Ms Haire:** Mr Davis, I have just realised that I have not acknowledged the privilege

statement. I should do that; apologies, Chair. It is probably a little bit late in the piece; I am lucky that you extended. I also have a correction that I have to make to something I said earlier.

I have read and understand the privilege statement. I also need to say that Ms McMahon was the inaugural principal at Charles Weston Primary School, not Charles Condor, so I apologise for using the wrong name of the school earlier.

To go to your question, Mr Davis, there are two levels to this, and Ms Attridge or Mr Matthews can talk in more detail about it. We have what we call the EDIS—the design specifications for all schools—and we have a separate design specification for primary schools, high schools, colleges and specialist schools, which sets out the broader parameters. That is where we bring in those important principles such as universal design, sustainability, inclusion—a range of things that you, as a committee, have been talking about.

I think you have engaged a little bit with what those design specifications are. In the planning of those broader design specifications, we consult with a range of stakeholders and experts. We did not consult with Carers ACT on that; however, we would be very happy to take Carers ACT through those design specifications. I think it is in that in-principle level, from my reading of the submission, that Ms Kelly was interested.

The second part of the question was about the specifics of an individual project. As Ms Attridge can talk a little bit more about, we do our planning first at the next level down. So we go from the universal, the principals, then we do planning at a regional level. Then, when the government has made the decision to modernise or build a new school, there is a different level of community engagement with that specific school community—the families in the school currently, the future members of that school community and, of course, affected residents in that area. Those are the different levels at which we operate. Ms Attridge, would you like to speak a little bit more about the local-level planning and how that works out? We have a couple of examples of that.

**MR DAVIS:** Before Ms Attridge goes, I have a quick follow-up question, but I do want to hear what Ms Attridge has to say. I am happy for you to take this on notice. Can I get a clearer outline of exactly who the directorate consults with at each stage of that process? Is it peak bodies at the beginning and the neighbourhood communities down the end here? Do you have a framework of who gets spoken to and when—at what stage of the design process?

**Ms Haire:** Mr Davis, we can certainly describe to you the consultation that we did over the design specifications, which have now been finalised for the moment, but are updated regularly. That is a more enduring piece, and specific local engagement happens on a project-by-project basis. Again, I am happy to provide you with the information about who we consult with in that. Ms Attridge can speak about that a bit more.

**MR DAVIS:** That would be great, thank you. Thanks, Ms Attridge.

**Ms Attridge:** It will depend, as the Director-General said, on exactly what kind of project it is and where it is up to. Of course, we also need to comply with some of the ACT planning system's community engagement requirements which are specific to particular education projects or for a Territory Plan variation, for example. So you would see a different type of community engagement take place for, say, the modernisation and expansion at Garran Primary School, which has commenced and is underway—that will see some specific engagement with the community who will be affected by the planned and changed works for that school—from the engagement in other regions. So we start with a regional planning approach and that enables us to consider the needs of each school within a region and the existing assets of the region. We can compare and contrast some of the availability across those assets, as well as considering the demand for those different schools.

Where we know that we need a future planning response, which might look like a temporary or a permanent expansion, or perhaps a new school in the region, we can go out and do some testing and consultation with the community and have that closer engagement. Often that begins with the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, and in 2021 we undertook a number of different consultation engagement processes, initially with the Council of Parents and Citizens Associations for the inner north in particular. I think that provides a useful example to consider.

We met with the council and with all inner north primary schools to consider what future additional primary school capacity is required in the inner north. There are a range of different ways that that could be delivered. It could look like new and expanded infrastructure at existing schools, a new school, or a range of different options. After we met with the council, we did a road show through each school to sit down with them and consider the make-up of each school; the infrastructure that they have; the needs of their community and the assets that they have; and the aspirations for their school.

We then did a further, deeper layer of engagement with, in particular, Majura Primary and North Ainslie Primary schools. Both are high-demand schools experiencing capacity pressure from enrolment growth in their priority enrolment areas. From there, we have seen the government commit to working with those two school communities towards permanent expansions at both of those schools. We are now regularly meeting with them to work through the next steps of that work towards permanent expansions and making sure that their voices and the aspirations of those communities are part of our next stages of planning so that we can include those in developing and refining those response options for government to consider further in the future.

**MR DAVIS:** Great, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**MS LAWDER:** My question is about kids getting to school, and specifically about parking and drive-through arrangements, and what changes you may be making to make it easier. I understand that we encourage active travel and those types of things, but I hear over and over again about parking, especially on rainy days. I know we do not necessarily want to provide more parking, but when you are designing a new school these days, what changes do you put in place to enable a better drive-through, or kiss-and-drop arrangements, and that type of thing?

**Ms Berry:** Mr Matthews might be able to describe some of those opportunities.

**Mr Matthews:** Ms Lawder has accurately described one of the challenges, which is that there are peak periods every day, at the beginning and end of a school day, where a lot of parents want to access car parks and pick up their children by car, as well as an increasing preference and desire to have active travel. We try to meet all of those requirements.

Certainly, we want to encourage active travel as much as possible. As well as building things like bike infrastructure, we also provide parents with information about alternative drop-off points, so that they do not necessarily have to come to the front door of the school to drop their kids off. There might be another location nearby which is a short walk down a bike path, or they can access the school from an alternative car park. We want to provide as many of those options as possible to reduce the pressure at those key points of the day.

We work very closely on this with Transport Canberra and City Services, as part of their school travel program. They help us to work with individual schools to come up with a transport plan which does the things that I have described—the alternative drop-off points, active crossing supervisors, and making sure that we can make the environment very pedestrian friendly.

Ms Lawder refers to “kiss and drop”, which is a really important principle. We want parents to be able to drive in to the school, to be able to safely exit their children from the car and say goodbye to them, and to be able to keep moving, without necessarily either parking—*interruption in sound recording*. They are a lot of the design issues that we are looking at in terms of the way that we are building our new car parks and having regard to the flow of traffic through our individual car parks.

Definitely, safety is the most important criterion at that stage. Also, in a COVID environment, things like cohorting, for example, are helping to reduce some of that pressure, because there are different entry and exit points to the school for different cohorts. So there is reduced pressure on those single points of access at the front, normally, or through the car park.

Every school in Australia would certainly talk about some challenges and pressures at bell time, in terms of car parks and getting children safely in and out of school. It is a very key focus of all of our schools, and it requires all of those measures to make sure that we provide choice and reduce as much pressure as we possibly can. Car parking is a standard or a formula that we are aiming to meet. We want to make sure that we have the right amount of car parking to meet the school requirements, while not overinvesting in blank concrete which is only used at those key drop-off and pick-up points. Again, it is a balance in terms of—*interruption in sound recording*.

**MS LAWDER:** It can also be an issue for people trying to come out of surrounding streets at those similar times. If you are trying to turn right, and there is a solid line of traffic coming from the school, it is very frustrating for nearby residents as well. Again, what sort of work is done in planning to try to ameliorate these sorts of issues?

**Mr Matthews:** That is a very good point. Ms Attridge might want to add to my brief

words. When we are thinking about the placement of our schools, when we are building new schools, we absolutely consider traffic, and do traffic management studies to identify what we think will be the traffic impact. Obviously, even things like school traffic zones, 40 zones, are designed to moderate and temper traffic and to signal to people when those peak periods will be.

We absolutely do understand that at those very peak periods there is some impact on local communities. Over time, local communities tend to understand that and avoid those areas if they possibly can. We are talking only, at peak periods, for half an hour to an hour at most, at the beginning and the end of the day, so they are very concentrated periods of time.

**MS LAWDER:** One of the schools that we visited was at Amaroo, and it is located next to a Catholic school. Are there plans to do similar things? Can you use the other school's car park for pick up and drop off if they start and finish at different times? Are those sorts of arrangements possible?

**Mr Matthews:** Neighbouring schools tend to have good communication and relationships to do things like coordinating their bell times so that there is a slight difference in those bell times, and therefore reduce pressure at those peak periods. Those are the sorts of strategies that are used.

Non-government schools are also experiencing some—*interruption in sound recording*—at pick up and drop off, so it really is about sharing where that is possible, and just being as patient as possible where required. I am not sure whether Ms Attridge wants to add to my answer.

**Ms Attridge:** We have taken the opportunity to learn from some of the existing arrangements in established schools and have used those traffic and car parking impacts to inform responses for new school builds or new infrastructure, including car parking. Traffic is a key issue that we plan around. We have developed siting guidelines to inform any new school developments that we have shared with other key agencies that we work with in this space, including EPSDD and Transport Canberra and City Services.

A recent example of the collaboration that we undertake in traffic impact assessments and studies is planning for new schools in the Gungahlin region; and we have recently worked with Transport Canberra and City Services to develop a memorandum of understanding to change and improve car parking arrangements at Dickson College for people using that facility. We are taking a collaborative approach and reflecting on examples so that we can learn from and apply previous learnings to future situations.

**THE CHAIR:** In our final few minutes, could someone talk the committee through the decision-making process and the circumstances that surround the decision to build a permanent structure or install a relocatable classroom?

**Ms Haire:** I will pass over to Ms Attridge to take you through that in a moment. Similar to the way I described the design process, we certainly go through quite a number of stages before providing advice to government about the need to build a new school.

Taking into account the work on enrolment projection, which Ms Attridge talked about earlier, we take a regional or a district view. We look at the capacity, and we look at the PEA requirements. We also look at whether the growth in population that a school might be experiencing is permanent, or whether it is more likely to be impermanent.

By taking into account a range of all of those factors, we would determine whether a new school is required, whether a temporary facility might be required or whether there might be other ways, such as changing the PEA boundaries, which could also ensure that children are able to access their local school.

Ms Attridge can give a much more detailed answer. I wanted to indicate that it is a very significant decision, and a range of considerations and processes are gone through before that decision is taken.

**Ms Attridge:** The first place that we start is looking at enrolment forecasting. I will add a little bit to some of those remarks from the director-general just now around whether enrolment forecasts demonstrate that we are looking at a short-term peak, perhaps due to a larger cohort coming through that is temporary and not likely to be sustained, or a situation where demand is continuing to grow and is likely to increase in the future, in which case that could change our long-term demand response.

Our first demand response is always to consider non-infrastructure demand management responses to enrolment policy. They are our most cost-effective lever to manage demand. They include, potentially, changes to category A and B enrolments; to limit out-of-area enrolments; and New South Wales pathway schools, so that we can send residents from New South Wales to an enrolment pathway of a school that has capacity to accept them, and can guarantee them continuity of enrolment into the future.

We also look at priority enrolment areas, but we recognise that priority enrolment area changes can be unsettling for the community. Priority enrolment area changes are applied only where they are the most reasonable response to address a demand issue. A good example of that is where a new school is coming online, and a PEA change will help to support catchment for a new school and balance demand across a range of schools in the region.

Where growth is forecast to be short term and not sustained in the future, transportable infrastructure is a sensible demand response. Of course, transportables can be temporary, but a lot of schools choose to retain them past an enrolment peak, or past a temporary point in time, because they provide additional learning spaces for schools. Importantly, they also provide us with time to plan for longer term responses where we know that demand is forecast to continue. That is where we would be looking at a permanent infrastructure expansion where that growth is going to be sustained; or, in new suburbs, or established suburbs, that are experiencing permanent or long-term school-age residential population growth, new schools that could sustain an ongoing population would be considered for the longer term.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Minister Berry,

and all of your officials for being here today, especially for your very gracious extension of time. The secretary will provide your office and officials with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available, to check for accuracy. I hope you enjoy doing that, Mr Matthews; you are going to have a good time! Could your office please liaise with the committee secretary to provide answers to questions you have taken on notice. Once again, thank you, everyone, for being here today.

**The committee adjourned at 3.01 pm.**