

Chair; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Yaz Mubarakai; Mr Geoff Baker;
Ms Meredith Hammat

Division 24: Education —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Education.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General.

Mr J. Peckitt, Deputy Director General, Education Services.

Mr R. Thomson, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Ms M. Sands, Deputy Director General, Schools.

Ms P. Beamish Burton, Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Mr R. Miles, Director, Teacher Registration.

Mr S. Percival, Assistant Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Ms J. Healy, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards.

Ms M. Heberle, Acting Deputy Director General, Student Achievement.

Mr S. Ward, Chief of Staff, Minister for Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If I could read out a statement. Quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting outcomes in early years development, school readiness and successes later in life. The first five years of a child's life set the foundation for their future life outcomes, including their learning, health and wellbeing. The creation of a dedicated early childhood education portfolio and its first-ever minister, Hon Sabine Winton, demonstrates the state Labor government's commitment to ensuring that all children in Western Australia, no matter their background, postcode or family circumstances, have the best possible start in life.

Early childhood education funding is accounted for within division 24, Department of Education. My office has had a discussion with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and it has been agreed that I will answer all questions relating to education, including early childhood education, during the session. I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for that. This is largely to ensure that any overlapping questions regarding the education portfolio can be answered and that the opposition will not miss an opportunity when the Minister for Early Childhood Education has her estimates session later in the week.

The Minister for International Education, who will be appearing this evening, will answer all questions relating to international education, which is accounted for under division 14, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, as well as division 24.

I hope that is as clear as mud! Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 353 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item "Temporary Regional Incentives for Teachers 2024" under the heading "New Initiatives". There is an increase from \$3.8 million in 2023–24 to \$11.6 million in 2024–25. I am wondering why there are no further budget items for regional incentives for teachers in the out years.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As it states, \$15.5 million was allocated to the regional attraction and retention incentive package in 2024 to assist schools with staffing in regional and remote schools. That has been incredibly successful in attracting and retaining teachers. The number of schools increased from 48 last year to 66 this year. In respect of why it is not included in the out years, that is because it is part of the bargaining process. As the member knows, the executive of the State School Teachers' Union of WA has agreed in principle to the offer made by the government.

That will now go to its members and be voted on. It was not possible to put that in the budget because we have to wait until that process is completed.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How will it be handled then? Will be like a midyear review scenario once that is completed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The union has indicated that it hopes to put the offer to a vote sooner rather than later, so without knowing exactly the process or when, I would imagine that we will know around August, if they agree to the offer that is put to them. That includes issues with regard to what the member is talking about.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister said it has been incredibly successful. Can the minister give us some figures for the numbers that have been retained in both regional and remote schools due to the incentive program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I cannot give the member the actual numbers, because there is always a combination of reasons why people are attracted to the regions and why they stay. When I speak to teachers in the regions, it is often put to me that it is an attraction for them to stay, but we have met our targets in respect of attraction and retention as a result of that package.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable that the requirements for full staffing of basically all the remote and regional schools are now in place? Would that be the minister's comment?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, it is a constant challenge. I think it would be misleading for any Minister for Education in Western Australia to say that it is not always a challenge to staff all our schools. We have probably the largest geographical education jurisdiction in the world, and there are some incredibly remote communities. As the member knows, there are some remote schools in the electorate that he represents, but that is all relative in comparison with some even more remote areas, so it is difficult. It is always a challenge, but there is no doubt that the regional attraction and retention incentive, which has been geared particularly to the schools that have the most difficulty with attraction and retention, has been successful. But I would not lie to the member and say that it does not remain a constant challenge.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the scenario with staffing of remote schools related to attendance levels or is it, for argument's sake, calculated on the census in February or March?

[2.10 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Funding is based on the census that is done, but I will allow the director general to maybe add to that.

Ms L. Rodgers: The number of FTEs required by a school is based on the census; however, fundamentally, the principal is at liberty to staff their school as they see fit. They have a one-line budget, and they use that budget to meet the needs of their school and their local context.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I asked a question about regional incentives. I am now referring to the item two lines above that, "Improving Access to Swimming and Water Safety Programs". Obviously, I am in agreeance with that; it is a good thing. Can the minister advise how this will assist regional students to access vacation swimming, given that there has been a reduction in the number of courses available across a number of locations over the past three years? Of course, the member for Central Wheatbelt and I have experienced that in several locations in our electorate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I recognise the member's interest in this; we have had conversations about the member's area, and when I paid a visit to Hopetoun, that was definitely relayed to me. That was one of the incentives behind establishing the school of swimming and water safety, for which there is \$3.3 million over the forward estimates for three FTE. I want to correct a misapprehension that was communicated to me in Ravensthorpe. I think people are concerned that this is going to be a physical school and that we will centralise more courses in certain central areas. That is not the case. This is about treating very seriously the teaching of swimming and water safety by having a dedicated principal so that it becomes a school. It will not be a physical school with bricks and mortar; it will nonetheless be a school that will have a principal and a couple of other full-time staff members whose whole objective will be to ensure that we can coordinate swimming and water safety better into the health and fitness and physical education part of the curriculum. It will ensure that we have an employment of permanent staff particularly for vacation swimming, as the member mentioned. One of the issues for swimming teachers is that teaching swimming cannot really be a career. By setting up this school, we can have a permanent swimming teaching class. That will help to alleviate staffing concerns.

As the member knows, staffing is one issue. In some areas that the member and I have discussed, the other issues are remoteness and safety. We have worked with local government on those issues. We believe that this school of swimming and water safety will go towards alleviating some of the concerns that the member and others have expressed.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thought that some slightly over-the-top scenarios were put in place for swimming classes last year, especially in some of the beach locations, that almost prevented those classes taking place. I give full

credit to those communities, such as Starvation Bay, that worked pretty hard to try to maintain those classes. Does the minister foresee that all those beachside locations will continue to be used as part of this overall package?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As long as the conditions that were put in place as a result of reconsideration of those decisions are complied with. That is why it has been important to work with the local community and local government authorities. The member acknowledged the work done by local communities. I acknowledge the work done by the director general and the Department of Education to ensure that those locations remain open for vacation swimming.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Did the minister consult Royal Life Saving Western Australia to develop this initiative?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Very much so.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Why has the government opted to develop this in house instead of partnering with Royal Life Saving WA?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that we will always talk with and utilise the expertise of Royal Life Saving, but we consider this to be very serious. It will be a school of swimming and water safety. The Department of Education will be responsible for that school, as it is for any of its other schools. We do not partner or co-partner with a third operator for any of our other schools.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is it optional for schools to participate in swimming lessons or do all schools have to participate in the swimming program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are two issues. The member is now referring to in-term swimming, not vacation swimming.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that, in the end, schools have flexibility in determining whether they will engage in in-term swimming. It is strongly encouraged, though.

Dr D.J. HONEY: A view has been put to me that schools that choose not to participate are often in socio-economic areas with a large migrant population and many of the children's parents cannot swim; as a consequence, they are not confident to go to the beach, and the children do not learn to swim. Was there any thinking around encouraging high participation, particularly from students in areas where there is a large migrant population?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is very important. That is a good question, member. Yes, and that is why we are establishing the school of swimming and water safety. We want to integrate swimming into the curriculum; it sits apart at the moment. We believe that if we better integrate swimming lessons into the curriculum, there is more chance that schools will take up the program.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the table at the bottom of page 353 headed "Spending Changes". That allocation drops off in the out years. Is that just a lack of budgeting or is that establishment costs that are required at the start and then drop away to a sustaining cost at the end? It is about halfway down the table, "Improving Access to Swimming and Water Safety Programs".

Dr A.D. BUTI: Initially, the government has committed \$3.6 million over two years to basically address existing costs and demand pressures. Obviously, we will look at it after that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With additional funding for in-term and vacation swimming, I presume that we will be supporting that across the board. Will that funding guarantee that every school will have two weeks of in-term swimming, particularly in regional locations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is that with regard to in-term swimming?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes. For context, I have one school that has had its in-term swimming lessons cut back to one week for the last three years.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is no guarantee. It is very complex, because we have to find a venue. Sometimes, aquatic centres are being renovated or closed down. That puts increasing demand on trying to find a venue. There have been issues with staffing; we think we are addressing that. There is no guarantee at the moment, but one of the goals of establishing a school of swimming and water safety is that the principal and full-time staff of that school will help with the timetabling of swimming lessons during terms. At the moment, the schools have to do it, and they have other demands on their time. The whole idea is that the school of swimming and water safety will help schools to timetable swimming. I cannot tell the member that I can guarantee that for every single school, but one would hope that with this school of swimming and water safety, there will be greater success in ensuring that there is coordination.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will there be prioritisation for those harder-to-staff areas? If an area has fallen to having only one week of swimming lessons for the last three years, will there be prioritisation so that those areas can be considered a priority for this year? Otherwise, some cohorts will have had four years without appropriate access to swimming.

[2.20 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: They will be prioritised under the new school of swimming and water safety. Schools that have had troubles with having their full complement of in-term swimming will be prioritised.

Dr D.J. HONEY: On that same page, page 353, under “Spending Changes”, is the item “Higher Education Team for the University Sector Priorities and Reforms”. I think the minister knows that I am very, very keen to encourage him to have a focus on the tertiary sector. Although I know it does not fall directly under the purveyance of the state government, we have a responsibility there. Can the minister outline what is planned for that and his thoughts?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member has a strong interest in this area. Obviously, with a PhD, he is going to, is he not! As he knows, we instigated a review of our higher education—our four public universities. At the same time, Minister Clare has engaged in his own inquiry at the federal level. The accord came out a few months ago, and certain funding measures were announced in the federal budget two weeks ago. The reason we set up this higher education team for university sector priorities is to look at how we, as a state government, can maybe become more involved in higher education and engage in strategic stakeholder engagement at the Western Australian level. We need to digest the accord a bit more and what the federal government is looking at regarding higher education, but the whole idea of this funding in the budget is to have the team set up in the Department of Education to look at strategy, policy and stakeholder engagement, help to improve the relationship and level of collaboration within and between sectors, promote a more cohesive and strategic approach across government, and increase collaboration across different levels of government and state universities.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are the vice-chancellors actively cooperating with the minister on that program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a work in progress. Look; they are all very keen. We have regular meetings to discuss issues of mutual interest and benefit for them and for the state. We have regular meetings under the Western Australian Higher Education Council at which we discuss those matters. I am going to the University of Western Australia tomorrow for a number of hours of discussion.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is one of the matters being considered the potential to rationalise, perhaps, the number of universities in the state or is it too early for the minister to comment?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are a lot of things that we are thinking and talking about. One of the things that the federal government announced, which I think is outstanding, is the payment of stipends for student teachers, nurses, social workers and early childhood educators; I think they were the four. We are keen to see how that will work and maybe how the state government can help coordinate placements of these students into the various practicums.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In the table on page 354 under “Other” is a line item for RiskCover. It is the third item from the bottom of the table at the top of page 354. RiskCover fund insurance premiums are \$32.79 million, and then zero dollars are allocated in the out years. Can the minister explain that to me? Last year’s budget had a revision to RiskCover insurance premiums of \$7.86 million and then zero dollars in the out years. Could the minister outline to me how that plays out?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the director general to answer the member’s question.

Ms L. Rodgers: They are just allocated year by year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry?

Ms L. Rodgers: They allocate the funding year by year. It is not allocated ordinarily in the out years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I notice on page 368 that paragraph 1.2 at the top of the page states —

increase in RiskCover Fund insurance premiums ...

As a further question, can the minister outline the percentage by which the RiskCover fund premiums have risen in the last financial year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Mr Peckitt to answer this question.

Mr J. Peckitt: I do not have the percentage increase with me, but I can give a high-level overview of the amounts. Roughly, we pay \$104 million a year for RiskCover insurance premiums, and that will increase to \$128 million in the 2024–25 financial year. The \$104 million is the budget, increasing to \$128 million for the premium.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister supply the number of claims and the amount in this financial year compared with last year?

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Dr A.D. BUTI: We can. I will ask the DG to do that.

Ms L. Rodgers: This year, we have had 1 124 claims lodged. In 2022–23, we had 2 113; in 2021–22, we had 1 831; and for 2020–21, we had 2 031 lodged.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; what was the figure for this year just gone?

Ms L. Rodgers: It was 1 124.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is for 2023–24.

Ms L. Rodgers: That is 2023–24.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What dollar figure do they represent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the DG. We have the total fund premiums.

Ms L. Rodgers: In 2022–23, it was \$104 039 459. In 2023–24, it was \$109 653 100. In 2024–25, it is \$128 753 673.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am on page 361 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. I do not have my *Budget statements* open, but there is a line under “Other Works in Progress”. I asked a question last year about the Western Australian College of Agriculture in Cunderdin, in particular about its student accommodation. My question is whether any of the funding referred to in paragraph 39 is for improvements to Cunderdin’s accommodation. I can see elsewhere in the budget that there is funding for Cunderdin agricultural college, I think, to do with its piggery. I wonder whether an allocation for upgrades to its accommodation is in the global amount for residential colleges.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thanks, member. As I am sure the member will agree, Cunderdin agricultural college is an outstanding college that has achieved incredible results. It is also the college that Justin Longmuir from the Fremantle Dockers graduated from, so it has got to be good! For the money in the budget papers for Cunderdin, at paragraphs 40 and 41 on page 361, we have the money for the piggery. On the member’s specific thing about residential colleges, \$3.5 million is allocated globally for residential colleges. The department, in conjunction with the various residential colleges, will look at where that money could be allocated, but I recognise the needs of Cunderdin in that respect.

[2.30 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When will the global allocation of \$3.5 million be prioritised and determined?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have been told that it is done on a yearly basis at the request of the colleges. It is an active consideration throughout the year.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My understanding is that this request has been made previously. Do the colleges need to keep making that request that will get considered in a yearly context?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Education is incredibly aware of the requests and demands for residential upgrades at the Western Australian College of Agriculture at Cunderdin. I will ask Mr Thomson whether the college needs to put in a new request, but I think the department is well aware of its request.

Mr R. Thomson: That is a line item for maintenance. We have gathered all the building condition assessment information and we will work with those schools accordingly to prioritise that investment over the coming financial year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School on page 365 and the amounts of \$60 million and \$40 million respectively. As the minister knows, I am very pleased with the initial planning money for Esperance Senior High School, but there is obviously no funding in the forward estimates for those other schools. As the minister explained the other day, that definition is required for the forward estimates. Why is it, then, that in April 2023, Premier Mark McGowan announced in the Legislative Assembly the provision of \$100 million for Safety Bay and Rockingham Senior High Schools, yet there was no planning or definition money in last year’s 2023–24 budget?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It would be best for the member to ask that question of Mark McGowan because I do not know why he did it exactly that way. Rockingham Senior High School was opened in 1971; it is not a new school and not a lot of work has previously been done at that school. The announcement was made in last year’s budget and there is no doubt that it is work that is needed. The funding announcement was for not just Rockingham Senior High School, but also the Rockingham Senior High School Education Support Centre. I can arrange a visit for the member if he wants to go to Safety Bay Senior High School. I think he would be hard pressed to say that that school does not need the money.

Last week I was in Esperance and I had a tour of Esperance Senior High School. Through our discussions, I understood the need for a major renovation uplift at Esperance Senior High School and the Esperance Education

Support Centre. The money that has been allocated in this budget is a very positive step. We do not do project definition plans without serious thought, and over \$600 000 has been allocated to that. That is a very positive step.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree that Safety Bay and Rockingham Senior High Schools are well and truly in need, as is Como Secondary College I gather. I guess the question really is whether that was a political comment or a political promise on the way out. For all these other schools, it is about the planning definition et cetera that takes place, whereas for those two schools, it was just announced and now they are adapting to the scenario, if you like. That would be the comment or the question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is that a question or a comment?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is a question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is it? I do not know that that is a question. I think it is a comment, so I will leave it at that.

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: I refer to “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on pages 354 and 355 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Paragraph 6.10 outlines that \$2.8 million has been allocated to progress the project definition plan for the inner-city primary school. Can the minister outline how he plans to address the enrolment issues and growth at Highgate Primary School and the current status of acquiring the inner-city site for the school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In some ways, this answer is related to the question just asked by the member about Esperance and Rockingham Senior High Schools. We have over 830 schools in the public education system, so one is always trying to prioritise and see what is needed by those existing schools. We also have to look at where we need to build schools because of enrolment pressures and so forth. The member referred to page 355 of budget paper No 2 and the \$2.8 million that has been allocated to progress the project definition plan for the inner-city primary school. That school is needed to relieve the long-term pressure on Highgate Primary School, and we are also allocating suitable money for Highgate Primary School.

To give the member a bit of background, in May 2023 the state government announced that the Queens Gardens car park on Nelson Crescent in East Perth would be the preferred site for the new inner-city primary school. On behalf of the state and of the taxpayers of Western Australia, we made a very generous offer to the City of Perth to finally construct a new primary school—the largest ever investment in a primary school—and that the state would repeal the Chevron-Hilton Hotel Agreement Act 1960, which limits the land use of the Queens Gardens site to a car park. At the moment, it is legislated that that site can be used only as a car park. The city will benefit from being able to develop about one-third of the land, which is valued by the state at \$27.25 million, and, in return, the state has requested that the city provide the land for the primary school at no cost. Interestingly, this new primary school has been identified by the city over a number of years as a high priority. The city, in its recent announcements, has said that it wants to make inner-city Perth a liveable city and to increase population growth in the city. If it wants to do that, it needs to have the services available, and having a primary school is paramount to that.

The city has often stated to us that it wants to be in partnership with us. I keep asking the question: what is the city bringing to the partnership? We are, as a state, using taxpayers’ money to unlock the land there and provide one of the three lots back to the city, with a development potential worth \$27.25 million. We will build a state-of-the-art primary school, providing the largest investment in a primary school in Western Australia, which the community will also be able to use outside of school hours. We think that is a very generous offer, but the city continues to say that it wants additional money. I will say a couple of things about that. The city has set a precedent in providing land at no cost. It was prepared to do that at Elizabeth Quay. Why would it not do it for a primary school that is so important? If we were to pay over \$40 million or so to the city for those two pieces of land, that is \$40 million that I may not be able to use down the track on Esperance Senior High School, for instance. We keep asking the City of Perth to accept our very generous offer. I have to say, we have been in constant discussion at either my office or the Department of Education. I met with the Lord Mayor on 18 April 2023 to discuss the state’s intention to build a new primary school at Queens Gardens. I think the next day we had a press conference. The Lord Mayor was there, as was the Minister for Housing, who is the local member, and the Deputy Premier—but she was not the Deputy Premier then; she was the Minister for Planning at the time. She was also there. We have had constant meetings and correspondence since, and recently the department had further discussions, and I believe it is having a meeting shortly with the city. We remain committed to this. It is incredibly important for the future development of the City of Perth. We are not building a country club or a private residence; we are building a school for the benefit of the children and their families who will live in the City of Perth. We need to protect taxpayers’ money, and that is always a balancing act. The member for Roe rightly talked about other schools such as Esperance, Rockingham, Safety Bay and others. The member for Central Wheatbelt talked about Cunderdin. They all have meritorious claims, and if we were then to spend even more money in East Perth, there would be less money for other areas of the state. I think our offer is very generous, and we still hope that the city will come to the party.

[2.40 pm]

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Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister think that the City of Perth was clouded by his initial letter that offered the \$40-odd million? Does the minister think that is now in the background of the city's thinking—that it cannot let it go?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I do not know whether we will get much benefit if we keep discussing this issue. No. The Lord Mayor rang me up straight after he received that letter to seek clarification.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: To accept it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I provided clarification over the phone. We had a meeting in my office a couple of days later. It was made quite clear. He has even gone on radio and admitted that it was an error. Therefore, no; I do not think the city's thinking has been clouded.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This question is also in the context of Highgate. What does the minister project will happen if his negotiations stall for a certain length of time? Is he prepared to look at, say, a land swap or something, which I gather the mayor has been calling for, to help alleviate the Highgate situation sooner rather than later?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have not heard the mayor mention anything about Highgate. Anyway, even if he has, we have funded \$12 million for an innovative modular solution to Highgate Primary School, plus other measures, such as the use of recreation facilities in an agreement with the local government authority. As a responsible government and a responsible Department of Education, we will consider what we need to do to ensure that every child in Western Australia who wants to go to a public school receives a quality education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I note the figure in the budget for Highgate. Obviously, the student numbers are getting up around the 900 to 1 000 figure. If the numbers start going over that, despite the minister bringing in the demountable scenario, what other plans does the minister have for Highgate? What is the nearest other school or place that the minister can send the excess students to in the inner-city area?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I want to more fully explain what we are doing in Highgate at the moment. We have the \$12 million modular block. We also have the shared-use facility at Birdwood Square. We have also provided extra parking for staff. We have done turf, reticulation and bore replacement. We have refreshed two toilet blocks. Two transportable toilet blocks have been installed at the school for student use. A new solar system has been installed and is operational. We have also provided a grant for playground equipment. We are also looking at replacing low-end fencing with garrison-style fencing and appropriate height chain-link fencing along Bulwer Avenue and Bulwer Street. We are also doing other things in the immediate period.

With regard to the member's question, we will need to look at what we need to do. As I keep repeating, the government wants to create a world-class inner-city primary school. We are ready to go. We are providing a very generous offer to the city. The Lord Mayor stood with us and celebrated the announcement. He has constantly, in his own campaigning for Lord Mayor, mentioned that he was working in partnership with the government. I ask again: what is the City of Perth bringing to that partnership?

We are unlocking land to the tune of \$27.25 million, which the city can use. At the moment it cannot use it. We will be building a state-of-the-art primary school that can also be used by the community. I do not understand how anyone cannot see that that is a fair offer. At the same time, the state government must be responsible for taxpayers' money so that we can use it for other schools in the regions and the city.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am following up on the asset investment program on page 359. In relation to asset investment, the minister would know that Shenton College now has over 3 000 kids in it. Bob Hawke College, as I understand it, is fully booked for students, even with the rebuild. City Beach Residential College campus is still in the government's hands. City Beach is obviously an option, but are there any other considerations for expanding an existing high school or building a new high school in the western suburbs? I might say, and this is my view, in that context it strikes me that once we have over 3 000 kids in a school, it is probably big enough from a practical point of view; therefore, is there a prospect of a new school in the western suburbs to cope with a continually growing student population?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is interesting, is it not, member? When one makes decisions, one does not know of the unintended consequences. I am just thinking—the member is about my vintage, so he will remember—Scarborough closed, City Beach closed —

Dr D.J. HONEY: Swanbourne.

Dr A.D. BUTI: — and Swanbourne closed. There was one other, I think. Hollywood closed at the time because there were no population demographics to support it, and that seemed to be the appropriate decision, but now, of course, the strain is being put on Bob Hawke College and Shenton College. They are both outstanding schools. We have a \$15 million double-storey, modular building for 300 students ready to go at Shenton College, and we are at stage 2 of the Bob Hawke College build, which was opened in 2022–23 and cost \$53.9 million. There is also construction of a \$15 million teaching block at Mt Lawley for 500 students. However, yes, the member is right.

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We need to look at that. We have a strategy, and the department is looking at developing a business case to consider site options and the feasibility of a new secondary school in the inner city or western suburbs area.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I do not think it is surprising that my electorate has 16 schools but not one government senior high school. Does the minister have any thoughts on a timetable for that? I am not trying to tie the minister down to a date, but I am trying to get a sense of the timeline for that process.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, I do not have a timeline for when we will be in a position to announce a preferred site, but I assure the member that the department is currently working on a strategy to look at preferred sites.

[2.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the delivery of services on page 353 of budget paper No 2 and the net amount appropriated to deliver services. WA public schools have been mandated to install at least one defibrillator by 30 June 2024 at a significant cost to their budgets. I am aware that this was a directive from the department, or the director general. I am also aware that both the member for Central Wheatbelt and I have been contacted by community groups such as Lions clubs or Rotary International clubs asking why the primary school in their towns have asked them to fund a defibrillator when the directive was made by the education department. If it is a directive of the education department, why does the Department of Education not pay for it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will answer that question and the director general may want to add to my answer. It was a directive because we considered it incredibly important that a school has a defibrillator. As the member knows, it was previously instigated by his government under Hon Peter Collier. It is funded under public schools in a one-line budget, within which a school has the capacity to fund a number of different things. In most cases, it will have the funds for a defibrillator. When the DG made that directive—she may want to clarify anything that I might say—it was made quite clear that if there were any financial hardship, the relevant school would be able to come back to the education department to seek assistance. The information I have is that the Department of Education received only one formal application for financial assistance, which has been supported by the school budget review committee. Only one school has contacted the education department. The director general made it quite clear that if schools were in financial hardship, they would be able to come to the department for assistance.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I find it ironic that school principals, or whoever, have gone out to the community and asked for help to fund a defibrillator. Was it made very clear to them that they could apply for that assistance, because it has happened in more than one community?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was made very clear to them. It was on the department's internal website.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With regard to this line of questioning, a defibrillator is not likely to be used on students at schools, so it is predominantly a staff welfare issue, which I would have thought is a department and government responsibility. I also put to the minister that not all defibrillators are made equal, and a range of defibrillators of different standards would have been installed. Whether they are being monitored or are useful is now a problem in ensuring that they do what they are designed to do. Would it not have been a better outcome to order en masse and make a bulk purchase, given the buying power of the state government, and distribute the defibrillators rather than leaving it to individual schools so that varying types of defibrillators are installed, potentially not being monitored and managed, and coming out of a single-line budget, which, as the minister knows, is already stretched for many schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will make a couple of comments and then pass to the DG. Firstly, schools often complain that they do not have the ability to buy what they want and they have to go through various amounts of red tape. Secondly, although defibrillators are generally used on staff, I can assure the member that students may require a defibrillator at some stage. Thirdly—I am not commenting on any particular school, and schools in the regions may be different—many schools have considerable reserve funds in their bank accounts, some up to \$200 000 or \$300 000. I am not talking about any particular school but many schools —

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister can exclude schools in the Central Wheatbelt from that cohort.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I did not mention any particular schools, but many schools have considerable funds. With respect to the way it was done, I will hand over to the DG to explain further.

Ms L. Rodgers: We wanted to ensure that schools had access to defibs fast. We would expect that a defib would be in a school's standard first-aid kit. It was clear that not all schools had access to a defib. Moreover, they may have had access to a defib, but not everyone in the school knew where that defib was located. There were circumstances in which schools needed to use that piece of equipment and there was uncertainty about how to access it. The direction was given to ensure that schools could purchase one quickly without having to go through an extended process centrally. We also asked schools to put the defib in a particular place in their school. They are probably used more regularly than we would anticipate. We did say to schools that if there were any financial issues, they could come to the financial review committee and we would look at the cost of a defib.

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Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to the member for Central Wheatbelt’s question, was there a directive about what type of defibrillator they all needed—a similar variety or the same brand—for when there are maintenance issues down the track or whatever?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Public schools were not requested to purchase a particular type, but they had to ensure that it met Australian and New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 3200.2.4:2006 Medical electrical equipment—particular requirements for safety—Cardiac defibrillators. They had to meet a certain standard.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item “Camp Operations and Maintenance” under “Other School Facilities”, about 80 per cent of the way down page 365 of budget paper No 2. I notice that after 2025–26—it is scaling down from 2024–25—there does not appear to be any funding in the out years for camp operations and maintenance. Will school camps continue in their current form or has there been some sort of structural change or numbers of camps?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can assure the member that school camps will remain. As the member knows, camp schools are located in Bridgetown, Broome, Dampier, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton and Point Peron. We are obviously looking at the arrangements that we have with Camp Fairbridge, which basically manages these camps with us. We intend to ensure that camps are available for students to attend because they have always been a very important part of Western Australian public education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister mentioned the administration arrangement, if you like, with Camp Fairbridge. I gather that it has not been that successful in certain places. Can the minister give an outline of ongoing contracts and how long that arrangement will be in place?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can tell the member that although we are looking at that arrangement—I cannot go into the details at the moment—we have allocated \$5 million to upgrade those camp facilities because there was an issue with them being at a certain level. Those funds will be used to upgrade camp facilities, increase maintenance works and support operations to ensure that public school students can attend camps that are in the condition they should be. Regarding negotiations and legal arrangements with Fairbridge, we currently have a deed of variation with a new two-year option, and a partial surrender of lease has been signed with Fairbridge in relation to the Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Pemberton camps.

[3.00 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: On page 354 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, paragraph 4 of the significant issues refers to “successful programs” such as the Kimberley schools project. Could the minister outline the details of that project and the success or otherwise of that program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member talking about the quality teaching strategy?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, the Kimberley region presents many challenges, and the education department has sought to respond to those challenges. The Kimberley schools project started as a \$25 million five-year royalties for regions regional reform fund investment. It has been extended for three years from 2023–24 with a further \$11.7 million in funding as part of our package for the Kimberley region. Through the project, we have sought to create an education system that will better cater for Aboriginal students in the Kimberley public and non-government school system. The projects are designed around the four key pillars of targeted teaching, early years learning and care, attendance and student–community engagement. The project uses skilled leaders, teachers and school support staff, including Aboriginal and Islander education officers and Aboriginal school-based attendance officers, to engage in evidence-based professional learning to build their knowledge of best practices. There has been a collaboration between the Department of Education, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Catholic Education WA and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. It is a project that has been tailored specifically for the region, and it has been hugely successful. We have seen an increase in NAPLAN year 3 results. That is really promising.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister mentioned attendance at school in his response. It has been a little while since I have been to Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra, but when I was last there, school attendance was appalling, as was apparent during the school day. When I was last in Broome, fewer kids were out on the street during a school day than previously. Does the minister have any details on attendance at those schools? While the minister is at it, one of the confounding factors with attendance is that sometimes a child turns up at school on the first day, and, apparently, that is indicated as attendance at school, but then the kid just does not turn up for the rest of the time. Could the minister comment on attendance at those schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It sounds like the member is explaining one of my law classes at university in which everyone turned up for the first day and then the penultimate lecture before the exam!

School attendance is a challenge. It is a challenge not only in the Kimberley, but also in many areas of the state and around Australia. In respect of that challenge, the project supports a 0.4 FTE attendance coordinator based at East Kimberley College to follow up students living out of their community. I will not stand here and say that we have been able to ensure that every student who should be at school is at school, but it is an issue that we continue to try to address. With the Halls Creek District High School attendance strategy, many strategies are being put in place to try to ensure that students attend school, but it is not easy. As the former Minister for Education mentioned, schools are a reflection of their community. We need to address many issues outside school, as well to ensure that kids come to school and that we then engage them while they are at school. It remains a challenge, but through the Kimberley schools project and, in particular, strategies regarding attendance, I think we are on the right track.

Dr D.J. HONEY: If we focus on Halls Creek, as the minister may recall, there was a bit of controversy some time ago around a truancy officer—I guess that is the proper word—but I will not go down that path. More particularly, it came out that something like eight per cent of the kids were attending high school on a regular basis. What are those attendance levels now subject to those new programs?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might be able to help the member there. Attendance at Halls Creek is not good, particularly in secondary school. It is below 50 per cent. That is not acceptable. We keep trying to see what we can do to improve that situation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Taking into consideration the minister’s statement at the beginning of the session, the minister might tell me to go to another department, but I will try anyway. Page 357 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, has services and key efficiency indicators under the very broad heading of “Public Primary Education”. With reference to the state’s commitment to the Closing the Gap program, I note that 22 child and parent centres operate around the state. I presume that the funding comes from that global allocation within primary education. I cannot find it in the budget. Where does that child and parent funding come from? I have said where I think it might be, but I am looking for some detail on that so I can ask further questions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not considered to be primary or secondary education. It is in the budget papers on page 358 under the heading “Regulation and Non-Government Sector Assistance”. It is not detailed. We do not have the funding specifically regarding child and parent centres, but that is where it would come out of.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: But that is where it would be funded from—okay.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Just wait a minute. I am seeking clarification. Yes. That is where it is in the budget papers.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. Could the minister advise how much funding is going towards the 22 child and parent centres?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In 2022–23, there were eight, which was under \$9 million. In budget year 2024–25, it was \$9 000 962. In the out years, it was \$10.3 million, and then it was just under \$10.7 million for 2026–27. The year 2027–28 is to be advised.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry; what was that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is to be advised. The year 2026–27 is just under \$10.7 million and 2027–28 is to be advised.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there any view of government to expand funding to increase the number of those child and parent centres across the forward estimates?

[3.10 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the moment, we are dealing with what is in the budget. As the member knows, a report into child development services by a standing committee of the upper house made some comments on that. At the moment, we are dealing with what we have, and there is no announcement that I can make on the expansion of those centres.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has the department done any work to look at reviewing the locations of the Child Development Service centres or creating some criteria for the expansion of that network? I am very supportive of them and think there is an opportunity alongside the Closing the Gap initiative and also an opportunity in our regional communities. I wonder whether we could be doing more to assist the communities to assist the government.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department is doing an evaluation of those CPC programs at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When will that evaluation be completed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will be completed around midyear.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the heading “Miscellaneous” and the line item “Compliance Programs—Asbestos Containing Materials Removal and/or Replacement” on page 366. It is about three-quarters of the way down the page. I do not see a figure for that in the out years after 2023–24 following the allocation of \$1 113 000. Does that mean there is no asbestos remaining in our public school system?

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Dr A.D. BUTI: Was that a joke? This is a very serious matter. I will ask Mr Peckitt to answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: There is a separate allocation of money for asbestos, which is about \$3 million per annum. It is not in that specific line item, but it rolls up to our total budget. There is ongoing money throughout the out years for asbestos removal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall asking some questions about a year or two ago about a K–12 school in Merredin and a primary school in East Fremantle. What is the breakdown of how many schools are left in the state under this program? Are they mainly in regional or metropolitan areas?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure whether we have that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Also, where is that line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not a separate line item and we do not have that information broken down into regions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We just had a reference to the funding. Whereabouts is that located in the budget?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to answer that.

Mr J. Peckitt: The capital projects are identified separately in the budget, but this item relates more to maintenance, so it rolls up to our total cost of services. That is not separately identified, but it would be a cost that rolls up to our total appropriation and total cost of services.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Why has that changed? Obviously, there was a line item specifically outlining the remediation works that were being done around asbestos. Why has a decision been made to roll that in so that we cannot see what is being spent?

Mr J. Peckitt: There are two separate programs. The department has an ongoing budget allocation as part of its maintenance and other funds for asbestos of \$3 million per annum. The other item in the budget papers was a distinct one-off allocation for asbestos removal. That is why it was deemed to be capital. Often this goes back to whether the item, from an accounting perspective, is deemed a capital or recurrent item. The amount I referred to of \$3 million is more of a recurrent item from an accounting perspective, so it is not listed separately in the capital investment program.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that \$3 million per annum in recurrent expenditure across the forward estimates?

Mr J. Peckitt: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you.

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to the quality schools funding on page 373. How is this government ensuring that it is getting the best from the commonwealth for our public school students in Western Australia?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, member. As the member knows, at the very start of the school year, on 31 January, Jason Clare, the federal Minister for Education, came to Western Australia and we signed a statement of intent expressing our government's joint commitment to Western Australia's public school system being fully funded to 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard by the end of 2026. That standard is known as the Gonski index. That is basically what is considered to be the funding required to ensure that students are properly educated. We were the first jurisdiction to sign that statement of intent. We have now been joined by the Northern Territory. Basically, by signing that statement of intent, we were able to negotiate with the commonwealth to reach that full 100 per cent level sooner than initially intended.

Of the 100 per cent schooling resource standard per public student, the commonwealth government funds 20 per cent and the state has to fund the rest. For non-government students, the commonwealth government funds 80 per cent and the state 20 per cent. Every student in Australia, including Western Australia, who goes to a non-government school in Australia is funded to 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard. The issue, though, is that, apart from the ACT, nowhere in Australia are public school students funded to 100 per cent. To his credit, when Jason Clare became the minister, he said that has to change. Although there was an agreement at that stage that every state would be funded to the level of 75 per cent, it varied, and ours was a bit higher. He said he would increase the commonwealth funding by 2.5 per cent to go to 22.5 per cent and the states would have to increase theirs to 77.5 per cent. Both the state and the commonwealth would have to increase their funding by 2.5 per cent to hit the target of a five per cent increase. The commonwealth government was offering an increase of 0.5 per cent each year to 2029, so we would not have received full funding of our public educated students until 2029. However, because we have such a good financial situation due to the way we have managed the budget and finances over a number of years since coming to government in 2017, we were in a position to agree with Mr Clare that we were prepared to increase our contribution to 77.5 per cent over two years if the federal government was prepared to increase its funding over two years. Rather than having our public school students funded to 100 per cent of the index in 2029, all our students in the public education system will be fully funded according to the SRS by the end of 2026, which is absolutely

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fantastic. As a result, we ended up with a \$250 million bonus because we will get to the full funding by the end of 2026. In total, that means \$1.6 billion extra into our public education system. It is an outstanding achievement. We are negotiating with the federal government in our bilateral negotiations on what reforms will go with that funding.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 356 of budget paper No 2. I am looking at the public school students achieving strong, or exceeding, proficiency levels in reading and numeracy through all the years. That figure is sitting somewhere around 60 to 70 per cent. Typically, it is in the low 60 per cent range. I would have thought that was a pretty disturbing outcome. I suspect this is not a new phenomenon, but it is disturbing that it would appear that one in three kids attending school, pretty well in all years from years 3 to 9, and, I would assume, around it, are not achieving above the proficiency level in reading. That indicates they are struggling. Could the minister comment on that and on what programs are in place to improve that performance?

[3.20 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the director general to answer the member's question, but I will let the member know that we are under a new NAPLAN system.

Ms L. Rodgers: Thank you, minister; thank you, chair. There were new standards put in in regard to the NAPLAN scale. Ahead of those new standards being put in, Western Australia took the step to get ahead and brought in national proficiency measures. All other states previously reported on the national minimum standard. We put in place national proficiency measures and then ministers took the decision to essentially put in a new scale, which differentiated students' proficiency between developing, needs improvement, strong and exceeding. It is a new time series and this is the proportion of students who sit in the strong and exceeding category. It is the first year that we have had this data. However, if we look at results region by region—we previously spoke about the Kimberley schools project—we can see some of our most vulnerable students making incredible gains. In the midwest and the Kimberley, we are getting a five percentage point shift in reading and writing in some instances. We are scaling that up across Western Australia. Those are the percentages of students at the current proficiency levels, and we fully support harder standards to make sure that our students are equipped with the foundation skills that they need in order to succeed at school and in later life.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to service 3, “Regulation and Non-Government Sector Assistance” in the “Service Summary” table on page 356. I want to ask about attendance rates and the recent *Four Corners* program in which it was reported that the attendance rate for students in years 1 to 10 dropped from 92 per cent to 88 per cent. In WA, we have seen a reasonable increase in homeschooling numbers, yet the associated FTE number does not seem to have increased. Would the minister please give his comments, or the department's comments, on reconciling the number of increased enrolments in homeschooling with the lack of increase in FTE associated with it? I can give the minister numbers from 2023–24.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; the member does not need to. What is the actual question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For argument's sake, in 2023, 5 825 students were homeschooled with an FTE of 41.26. In 2024, there are 6 215 students being homeschooled and the FTE has dropped to 40.43. There are 400 more students with one fewer FTE.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to compare the home education moderator, in 2017 it was 19.31 FTE and in 2024 it was 34.40. That is a significant increase over that period of time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is fine, but since COVID, we have seen a massive increase in the number of students being homeschooled; COVID no doubt caused the large increase that we mentioned. However, between 2023 and 2024, we have 400 more students being homeschooled, and we have one fewer FTE allocated to them.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not know where the member is looking. I see something different.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: They are the figures I got from answers to questions on notice.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will have to seek clarification on that. The information I have before me shows there has been an increase in 2023–24. It was 33.58 in 2023, and it is 34.40 in 2024. That is what I have in front of me, but if the member holds on for a moment, I will seek some clarification.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am happy if the minister wants to supply some supplementary information.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put the question on notice, I will provide it.

The CHAIR: The question will be on notice, member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have already asked the questions on notice and got those answers. I am now asking for supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Minister, are you willing to provide supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, I will provide it if the member wants to put it on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to “Retention in public schooling (proportion of Year 7 public school cohort studying in Year 12)” on page 356. It seems to have dropped. The 2023–24 budget figure was 81 per cent, and the estimated actual was 74.4 per cent. Is that caused by net interstate and overseas migration or are there other factors leading into those figures?

[3.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, member. I am glad the member asked that question. I think it is a timely question. As the member knows, last week the government released the consultation draft of the post-secondary pathways. There were three main imperatives behind that review by an expert panel. One was the reduction in the participation rate of students doing ATAR. The second was whether our vocational education and training courses were properly aligning with or preparing our students for industry and workforce participation. The third was a drop-off in students from year 11 to year 12. There is an issue and that is why I instigated this review when I became Minister for Education. It was chaired by Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon. It was led by the Department of Education, along with Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. I gave the member a copy of the report last week.

The expert panel has six imperatives in mind. One is reframing the purposes of secondary education. As the member knows, our current system had its origins 20 or 30 years ago, maybe a bit more, when 35 per cent of students went to years 11 and 12. We now have roughly 87 per cent who go to year 11. We need to change the system. Other imperatives include looking at a system built from learning goals, more fully recognising student diversity and achievement, increasing student retention and engagement, recognising the value of all students and their achievements, and incorporating changing models of assessment. The panel came up with 35 recommendations. They are draft recommendations. They are not my recommendations; they are the recommendations of the expert panel and have been put out for consultation for three months. I invite members of Parliament and anyone to make a submission. While that has been going on, we have had the School Curriculum and Standards Authority undertaking a Western Australian Certificate of Education refreshment. Out of those 35 recommendations, some of the key recommendations include whether we could include VET subjects as part of the ATAR score.

I think it was reported in one media outlet that the panel was advocating for non-examinable subjects to be part of the Australian tertiary admission rank. I do not see that in the report; I do not know where that came from. If a vocational education and training course is going to be part of ATAR, it will be rigorously assessed. We are not flying solo on this; New South Wales has announced that it is going to have 12 VET courses as part of its ATAR score. To me, a VET course can be as rigorous as the normal, traditional ATAR units. I am really excited by the possibilities of that recommendation.

Another recommendation of the panel was to look at how we can create a system that caters for the diversity of our student population, whether they are of a multicultural background or students with special needs. There was a recommendation that the numeracy and literacy requirements that were established under the previous government should remain, but that we should look at increasing the way they can be assessed. I can remember sitting where the member is sitting now, when we were in opposition, quizzing the Minister for Education. A member on the opposition side, Nathan Morton, the former member for Forrestfield, had formerly been a school principal and he raised an issue that has always stuck with me. There were year 9 twins in his electorate who were highly intelligent but, because of certain perception difficulties they had, they could never pass the online literacy and numeracy assessment as it was then; they just could not pass it. It was a computerised system and at that stage there were very few exemptions allowed, so they were unable to gain a Western Australian Certificate of Education. That is something that we have to look at.

As part of the report, we are also looking at how regional students are affected. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority has come up with a number of suggestions that I am also excited about. One is to allow students with special needs to obtain a WACE. Many students with special needs can never obtain a WACE because they cannot pass the various requirements. SCSA is looking at the possibility of a WACE that will allow students with special needs to graduate. SCSA is also looking at one of the disincentives for many students choosing to undertake traditional ATAR subjects: they are concerned that they may not get C or above. They have to get 14 or more Cs out of 20 to graduate with a WACE. The easy option is to go for a less rigorous course, like a general course, rather than doing the harder traditional ATAR subjects. SCSA has suggested that maybe a D in a traditional ATAR subject is the equivalent of a C in a generalised course. I think that idea has a lot of merit.

We need to create a system for years 11 and 12 that incentivises and motivates all our students, whether they are at the top end of intellectual capacity, whether they have certain challenges, and regardless of whatever culturally diverse backgrounds they come from. We need a system that will motivate them to seek to achieve their maximum potential, and I think the current system has certain disincentives in place. Also, it is not a system that fully recognises

the various interests and challenges that students in years 11 and 12 face. Yes, I want that figure to increase, and I think the review process that we have commenced and is now out for three months of consultation, plus the SCSA refreshment of WACE, will go some way towards achieving that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that the minister has introduced the subject, I guess one of his platforms when he first became Minister for Education was the aspiration to increase the number of students who do ATAR which, as the minister knows, has dropped to somewhere between 30 and 32 per cent. Obviously, this is only an interim report, but does the minister think that it could potentially compromise that level to an even lower level? As I said, the minister's aspiration as the new Minister for Education was to get those ATAR levels back up. I am wondering how he feels about that side of it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is a good question, member; it is actually interesting. Obviously, the ATAR participation rate is too low, but in public schools it has actually increased slightly, whereas in non-government schools it has not. Public schools have actually shown an improvement in the numbers of students doing ATAR.

With regard to the member's question, no, I actually think it is the other way round. We are going to create a better suite of ATAR subjects. Whether we continue to call it "ATAR" is another issue. ATAR is just a ranking system that was set up to give universities a way to select students; that is all it is. We may actually change the name, and SCSA is looking at that. The crucial issue is that students do courses that fully challenge them and prepare them for what they want to do, whether it is tertiary education, vocational training or going into the employment workforce. In saying that we will look at VET subjects possibly becoming part of ATAR, if the subjects are rigorous enough, that would be a good thing, because students may do that. If a student is considering studying electrical engineering at university, why should they not go and do a VET course that has an electrical engineering component? I think this will actually increase their possibilities. Also, the SCSA suggestion of the ATAR D counting as a C would help that.

I will add that another report that came out after the post-secondary pathways consultation draft was released quoted—without actually identifying the individuals involved—some universities as having said that the report had possibly dumbed down our senior secondary education pathways. I mean, the hypocrisy and irony of that is unbelievable. It is the practices of the universities over a number of years that have led to some students not doing ATAR, because they have been able to get into university via many different ways, and sometimes those ways are justified.

During COVID universities were making unconditional offers—with some justification, because obviously students were staying home and there was the whole upheaval of COVID and so forth, although it has to be said that our students received a very good education during those years. But there was some justification for that. Universities tell us that there are no unconditional offers now, only conditional offers. That may be true, but I receive correspondence that shows that in the case of at least one university, the conditions it placed on entry did not incentivise students working to their maximum potential. So, if that report was true—that universities were saying that we were dumbing things down—that is far from the case. We are all—the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority, Catholic Education, the independent schools and me, as Minister for Education—trying to look at how we can ensure that years 11 and 12 create an educational environment in which every student will want to maximise their full potential, and that includes ATAR participation. Having said that, ATAR in itself is not for everyone. I want to ensure that there is an alternative pathway that is rigorous and that will challenge the students who undertake it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Before I ask my question, I will just say to the minister that that is a noble goal. When I was at my old school, Hampton Senior High School, there were probably about 30 kids doing higher maths, physics and chemistry. I am told that there is probably none doing that now. They are just as bright, but they have been discouraged in various ways from doing that, which is a tragedy for those kids.

My question is around school safety. For the record, I refer to page 353 of budget paper No 2, under the heading "Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets". There has been a lot of publicity and concerns about school safety—children bringing weapons to schools and the like—and I am wondering whether there are any initiatives to look at the issues of school safety, given the heightened public concern about safety at schools? I could not see anything in the budget.

[3.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will answer the question, but does the member have a budget line?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I do. I am referring to the general appropriations, expenses and cash assets table and the total expenditure in there. Is any expenditure allocated to school safety?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is very creative, but I will answer the question in any case. I think I mentioned not so long ago that schools are a reflection of their communities, but that does not mean that we as an education system do not need to look at the issue of violence. When she was the Minister for Education and Training, the previous

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minister announced a number of measures to tackle violence in schools. Last year, I enhanced that statement by producing the *Standing together against violence* plan and a number of other measures. One measure I announced was to unequivocally state to principals and staff that we have their backs if they need to take measures to exclude students. Obviously, to some extent we should not be celebrating that; we do not want students to be excluded, but, as we know, we live in a world where that may be possible. I announced 10 actions in that enhanced *Standing together against violence* document. It is a 10-point action plan that provides strong legislative and policy tools for principals to govern their schools in a way that seeks to reduce antisocial behaviour. Unfortunately, some of that antisocial behaviour comes from parents. That is totally unacceptable, as is violence from students. As I said, we have announced policy measures and there are legislative provisions now in place that allow for students to be excluded. Having said that, in trying to tackle this issue, more than 1 000 students in 2023 were provided with specialist programs in either alternative learning settings or other parts of our education system to combat aggressive behaviour. We have the policy and legislative framework to allow principals to do what they need to do, and we have provided alternative learning settings for students who engage in aggressive, violent behaviour. We have other specialist school programs, as well.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a couple of levels of concern. One is that we are getting a hint of copycat behaviour from the egregious behaviour that happens in the United States. Also, more generally, it seems that there is a proliferation of knives in the community. As the minister said, schools reflect communities. That is a concern. Is there any particular focus in that program on the prevention of weapons coming into schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If a student comes onto a site with a prohibited weapon, they will be suspended.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to the total cost of services and total appropriations. I note that the total cost of services is \$6.8 billion in this budget. Congratulations—I think that is a significant demonstration of the government’s commitment to public education. Can the minister outline what if any additional funding has been allocated to students with complex needs, particularly students with autism, in that total budget allocation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member. As the member knows, as she is also my parliamentary secretary, the issue of students with special needs is increasing in society and of course in our education system, and autism has been the predominant increasing diagnosis. I was gladdened when we were able to secure additional funding to the tune of \$224.3 million to be invested in individual disability allocation. Obviously, most of that will be going to students with autism because that is the fastest growing category of the disability categories that are funded under the individual disability allocation. We have also announced a review of the School Education Act to look at the barriers kids face when receiving support and access to quality education. We are looking at other measures we can put in place to assist students with disabilities. Under our student-centred funding model there are two ways that students can be funded. One is the disability allocation allowance for students who are diagnosed in one of eight categories, including autism. Payments of that allowance are made each year. That is where that \$224.3 million additional investment will be going. We then have education adjustment allocation funding for additional support for students who have been diagnosed with other challenges such as dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. There is also interim funding available for students who are waiting to be diagnosed, because we know that sometimes there can be a waiting list. Last year, we allocated \$8.9 million for students with undiagnosed disability through the education adjustments. When schools receive their funding, that money is factored into kids who have extra needs.

To support schools and students with disabilities, we also have a School of Special Education Needs: Disability, which provides direct services to schools to meet the learning support needs of students with both diagnosed and imputed disabilities. We have a school psychology service, which offers a range of services in schools, including assessment and intervention planning for individual students, consultation for learning and behaviour support, early intervention and whole-school planning. We also have an autism specialist learning program, which provides specialist and intensive support for students who can access age-appropriate curriculum but are disengaged as a result of social, emotional and behavioural issues and challenges directly attributed to the impact of autism spectrum disorder. The number of programs is expanding from 16 in 2020 to 24 programs in 2025. This includes 12 primary schools and 12 secondary schools that link to provide a kindergarten to year 12 program. Approximately 350 students are currently enrolled in the SLP, and this number will grow as the new programs come on board and reach full capacity. Further—I have not finished here—late last year, I also announced a \$2.26 million trial for complex behaviour support coordinators to help school leaders address the needs of students with complex behaviours. I also add that one of the reforms that Hon Jason Clare is linking to the additional money under the National School Reform Agreement is small-group tutoring, so students who are having difficulties in class, particularly in numeracy and literacy, will have catch-up tutoring, being taken out of class to receive specialist tuition.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is probably on a similar theme, in some ways. I refer to page 354, significant issues impacting the agency, and paragraph 2 —

The Department recognises the importance of mental health and wellbeing as a precondition for learning.

How will the department ensure that staff receive the correct advice, support and resources to ensure that students have what they need in relation to their mental health? This paragraph refers to mental health and wellbeing as a pre-condition for learning. Is there any training for staff to make sure they are giving the right advice to those students in relation to their mental health?

[3.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: For a start, we have increased the number of school psychologists in school situations. I will give a bit of a run-down here.

As we know, mental health and wellbeing has become a great focus. That will also be part of the possible reforms; part of the increased money from the federal government will be used to look at the issue of student mental health and wellbeing. Ultimately, if we can create an environment at school that fully engages the students, that will help, but it will not always be the only thing.

If we look at wellbeing, all schools have access to the Department of Education’s evidence-based programs and supports to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, including school psychologists, who obviously provide specialist mental health support. They also include consultation and preventive measures; school chaplains or student wellbeing officers, who support the social and emotional wellbeing of students; youth mental health first aid, which teaches school staff how to provide initial support to young persons who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis until professional help is received or the crisis is resolved; teen mental health first aid, which teaches students how to provide initial peer-to-peer support to a friend or classmate who may be experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis until professional help is received; gatekeeper suicide prevention training for professionals and paraprofessionals whose roles bring them into regular contact with people at risk of suicide; the Be You programs directory, which supports schools with choosing an evidence-based social and emotional learning program that best suits their school context; and the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health, which provides educational continuity for students whose medical or mental health prevents them from participating in enrolled school programs. In August 2022, the state government announced all public secondary school students—no; I will not need to worry about that, I think.

We have the greatest number ever working in the school psychology service system. The current workforce headcount is 631 in the Department of Education, which is phenomenal. It is an issue that is incredibly challenging. I mean, we have got to look at preventive measures to ensure that students’ wellbeing is not affected. As the member knows, discussions are taking place now with our Premier. The issue about social media, students and so forth was reported in today’s paper or maybe yesterday’s paper. I am no psychologist, but there seems to be no doubt that social media has had some influence on the wellbeing of our students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would not disagree with that, minister. As the minister knows, I rate our education assistants very highly for their value to the system and especially for the role they play, especially with our special needs students. Flowing on from this, my understanding is that we have 60-odd education assistant positions vacant at the moment. How does the minister or the director general intend to ensure that schools that do not have sufficient resources or sufficient education assistants in place will cope?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member for the question. Of course, this question would not need to have been answered under the Liberal–National government because when it first came in, it substantially cut EAs. We made a commitment to increase EAs. Providing the number we need is a challenge in our economy, obviously, in most areas of our workforce, not just in education, but we have made a commitment. I just need to confer.

In 2019, mainstream education assistant numbers were 2 580. In 2022–23, there were 2 594 mainstream EAs. In 2022–23, there were 6 459 special needs EAs. In 2024–25, numbers have gone to 2 674 mainstream and 7 219 special needs EAs. When we have that number of positions available, there will always be some vacancies. The easiest way to not have vacancies is to not have the positions available. We are committed to EAs, unlike the previous government, which just slashed EAs. I have to say that it was done for ideological reasons because it associated EAs with a certain union that it did not like. As a result of that, it thought it could reduce union membership by slashing EAs. It was not the member, and it definitely was not his side of the coalition partnership. It was the blue side of the coalition partnership. He is not blue; no, he is green and yellow. Anyway, the point is that we have committed to it and, of course, now the challenge is to ensure that we fill them. Sorry, we are giving grants of \$5 000 for student teachers in their final years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On the same page, page 354, is paragraph 5 about the national workforce shortages and how the department initiated a range of strategies, including the international recruitment campaign. I know that the police minister went over there and sort of hung around Westminster and Downing Street and said, “Come and join the police force in Western Australia!” I am not sure whether the minister and the director general followed that same line or tack, but the question is: how many international teachers were recruited and at what cost?

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Dr A.D. BUTI: It was a very, very successful campaign. I remember going early this year to welcome a number of teachers. I will give numbers. Since the program commenced, on day one of 2023, 117 international teachers have been appointed to 48 different public schools, and most of them, which I am sure the member is pleased with, are in the regions. We now have 139 international recruits who have gone to 58 different WA public schools. In the international teaching pool are 80 suitable teachers who will be considered for future appointments. An additional 86 teachers are currently being assessed and, if found suitable, will be considered for future appointments. Now, the member might want to put the question about cost on notice. I am not sure whether the member did economics at school, but I did, and my favourite area of economics was the economics of migration. Here we have overseas countries that paid for these teachers to become teachers, so we are actually getting these teachers at a cheap rate or amount of money because it would have cost a lot more if we had educated them. We do not have that cost. We could give the member the cost of the recruitment program. When they come here, they get paid normally. If the member puts that on notice, I will get it. Actually, he will find that if he looks at how much it costs to train a student to become a teacher, vis-a-vis recruiting internationally, there is a net benefit to the taxpayer of Australia and Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister spoke about 117 international teachers in 48 schools. Are all those who came across still in our school system? I am assuming they started in February.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the DG to answer this one. I can disclose right now that it costs about \$60 000 to \$80 000 to relocate them to their location and support the overseas teachers who come to Western Australia. I will ask the DG to answer the member's specific question.

[4.00 pm]

Ms L. Rodgers: I have been advised, unless something has changed in the last couple of days, that we have lost one of those teachers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a contractual obligation that they must stay for two years or whatever it might be?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a contractual obligation. I will see whether I can find that, but I think it is four years. I think we are about to have a break, so we can check that during the break and then I can provide that information, but there is a contractual obligation. Sorry, it is four years for them to get permanent residency and they have to stay in the position that they are appointed to. They cannot go to a region for a term and then come back. The director general has just updated her advice to three teachers that she knows of who have been lost.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What about housing for those teachers? Do they all receive Government Regional Officers' Housing or is it a combination of accommodation et cetera?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They get GROH.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Did all 117 receive that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are entitled to GROH, but they may not be able to access GROH because of the demand placed on it. If they do not get GROH, they get rent assistance.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess we will go to the break, but the minister said that just about all those teachers went to the regions. If the minister has any figures to hand on whether the majority were provided with accommodation through that system, that would be appreciated.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will see what I can do during the break.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is fine.

The CHAIR: The committee will now take a short break and recommence at 4.15 pm.

Meeting suspended from 4.02 to 4.15 pm

[Mrs M.R. Marshall took the chair.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will try to provide an answer to the question raised by the member for Roe, so I will pass that question to the director general.

Ms L. Rodgers: When the international teachers come over, if they are going to one of our regional areas where any other teacher would be entitled to Government Regional Officers' Housing, they are entitled to GROH. We are trying to get the numbers now of those international teachers who are at their schools but are in temporary accommodation. We will provide the number as soon as it comes through. If they are in temporary accommodation, we pay their rent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to go to page 374 of the *Budget statements* and the minister's favourite subject—that is, the WA student assistance payment. Can the minister give us the current percentage of students or families who

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have taken up the payment? Does the minister have a breakdown of what has been taken up by the ServiceWA app versus using the more manual lines?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I would not say this is my favourite subject—all education is my favourite subject! In regard to the member’s question, this information is correct as of yesterday, 20 May. Under the ServiceWA app, 145 556 primary school students and 110 074 secondary school students have been paid. Under the web format, 24 480 K–6 students and 15 672 secondary school students have been paid. Under paper form, 1 004 K–6 students and 1 020 secondary school students have been paid. Therefore, under the three forms, the total for K–6 is 171 040 payments and the total for years 7 to 12 is 126 766. The totality is 297 806. I do not have the percentage, though.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister not have the percentage of the total and what that represents?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can give the member a rough estimation. It is roughly 60 per cent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I noticed the other day that one or two schools’ Facebook pages were advertising for people to visit their administration team and they would help them out. Did the minister plan for his administration and school leaders and the like to spend their time working to help people get their money? Does the minister think it would have been more appropriate for this money to have been paid direct to the school, as is done in the likes of Victoria, where it is paid to the school for each student and the money finds its way through in that format?

Dr A.D. BUTI: How much work for the school was involved in that situation?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Would that not have involved a lot of work for the school as well?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No. It is a single allocation. Is it not?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to ask a question, ask a question.

This is the system that we have. It is roughly 60 per cent. I have not heard of anyone who has received a payment complaining. If the school wants to put something on its website, which I am sure does not take too long, to encourage people who have not applied to apply, that is great.

[4.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable that this is the most efficient way to do it when only 60 per cent of people have received the payment rather than allocating it to schools so that the money finds its way to every student?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is finding its way to everyone who applies. There are still a number of weeks left before the end of term. Parents will receive the money and they will spend it according to their needs. It is a cost-of-living relief. People have not come to me complaining about receiving the payment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a cut-off point?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the end of term 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What happens if someone misses the boat or they cannot work their way through the ServiceWA app or whatever? Is there some form they can fill out to apply for a special payment or for the payment that they are entitled to but they were running late?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They have the whole term to apply. To ensure that people do not miss out, some principals may spend two minutes putting something on Facebook to encourage people to apply. People cannot just apply through the ServiceWA app, though that is the quickest and most efficient way that people receive the money; there is a claim form on the web and people can apply on a paper form.

With regards to the member’s question about the money going to schools, schools do not hold details of parents’ bank accounts, so the parents would not have received the money. By using the system that we have, the money goes straight into parents’ pockets. Parents have been asking for cost-of-living measures to relieve cost-of-living pressures. The money goes into their bank account, which we think is the most appropriate way. Although the member said that only 60 per cent of people have received the money, that is still a lot of people—a lot of families.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that there have been scenarios in which parents are separated, estranged or the like and it is basically a case of first in, best dressed. Has the minister had any issues or received any complaints about one parent being the first to grab the payment and the other one saying, “Hold on a minute, perhaps it should have gone to me instead”?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a dispute mechanism to solve any such issues.

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Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have there been any recorded cases of that happening?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure there have been, but under any system, there probably would have been disputes between parents. I do not think it is a large number. I do not have the numbers. If the member wants to put it on notice, we may be able to provide the information. I do not know whether we can provide it but if we can, we will. Sixty per cent of families that are eligible have received cost-of-living pressure relief, which is very beneficial. I will not allow the member or anyone else to try to tarnish something that has been highly successful and well received.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the minister be able to provide that information as supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I do not know whether we have it. As I said, if the member would like that, we will provide it if he puts it on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister intend to look at rolling this out again in the first term of 2025 prior to the election?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is a good try. This system was deemed necessary at this stage and that is what we have done.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to service 4 relating to the support to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority. The table on page 358 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 shows the significant rise in the number of FTE. In 2022–23, the actual was 199 and the 2024–25 budget target is 235, which is an increase of 36 FTE in that area. Can the minister outline the requirement for such a significant increase—it is around 20 per cent—in staff?

Dr A.D. BUTI: SCSA does incredibly important work. That is related specifically to the adoption of the Australian Curriculum, number 9. I will pass on to Ms Healy, the Executive Director of SCSA, to elaborate.

Ms J. Healy: As the minister said, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is responsible for adopting and adapting the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority recently reviewed the Australian Curriculum. Ministers signed off on it. We use that curriculum to adopt and adapt and customise it for our own students in our WA context. We have a longstanding history. We are probably the first jurisdiction to do that. We have adopted and adapted English, health and physical education. That work was completed last year and is up for familiarisation for our teachers this year to implement next year. This year we provide them with different forms of professional learning to assist them to familiarise themselves with new curriculum. Then we move through the other learning areas, so it is a phased approach, particularly to support our primary school teachers who have to deliver all eight of the learning areas. It gives them time to become familiar before they have to formally implement it in the classroom.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Would we expect that once that process is through and we have adjusted to that new curriculum, we will see those FTEs reduce?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that is a question that the executive director cannot really answer at this stage. Who is to know what other work SCSA may need to do. It is going through a refreshment process now. I can assure the member that the bodies in the SCSA building work very hard and I do not see any wastage. I am just being honest; I do not know what will happen in the future.

Before we move on to the next question, I want to provide some information to the member for Roe about GROH and the international unit. Out of those recruitments, 84 were eligible for GROH, 81 are in GROH, and three are in temporary accommodation. With regards to others, they were not eligible because they are in the city or they are not in a region where they are eligible.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item “Students at Risk” under “Expenses” on page 374 of budget paper No 2. I notice that the figure basically stays the same over the out years. Given the obvious sad and tragic incident involving the Rossmoyne student with extreme ideology, what is in place to counter future scenarios and what provision is made for deradicalisation programs in WA public schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That line item is not related to public schools; it is related to non-government schools.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry, in government schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The line item that the member referred to does not relate to government schools. Which line item is the member referring to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am referring to students at risk under “Expenses”.

[4.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is non-government schools. I will answer your general question because I like you. We need to be careful.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Obviously. I understand.

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Dr A.D. BUTI: We also need to be careful with the language that we use. The whole issue of radicalisation can be quite emotive, and we need to be careful because there are often other issues involved.

We are always looking at what can be done. There is a working group that was established in 2022 that has representatives from specialist areas within the police, the State Security Investigation Group, the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, the countering violent extremism unit, the Department of Education, Catholic Education WA, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia and the Departments of Communities and Health. The purpose of the group is to develop and formalise an agreed set of protocols to follow when managing threats on education sites, including students who exhibit risk factors relating to mass casualty threats and violent extremism. These protocols are currently in draft form and are being reviewed by the department's legal team.

The protocol outlines the responsibilities and expected response from schools, respective agencies and the police in responding to and supporting students who demonstrate engagement in violent extremism activities. The protocol has a cross-sectorial approach including non-government schools. The Department of Communities works closely with the specialist areas within WA Police to strengthen capabilities in preventing and responding to mass casualty incidents and violent extremism.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many WA schools have deradicalisation programs, or whatever you would like to call them, operating?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can provide the number of students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That was my next question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are 23 public school students. There is actually one fewer now—for obvious reasons.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There are 22 students. I have no further questions on that.

I would like to ask a question on works in progress on page 365. The funding for the universal access program ceases after 2024–25. The program is to provide structured, play-based early childhood education delivered in accordance with *The early years learning framework for Australia* and the National Quality Standard and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. If this program has been successful, why is it being defunded from 2024–25? Am I missing something?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Mr Peckitt to answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: That was a commonwealth-funded item through the previous universal access program agreement. The Department of Education has a separate budget item for early childhood education that provides between \$1.5 million and \$2 million a year for early childhood projects that may be required year on year for the types of issues. There is a funding line for that. This one was just a previously commonwealth-funded item, so it is no longer relevant.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Near the top of page 366, transportable classrooms are mentioned. I notice that the funding drops down fairly radically in the further out years. Given our student population seems to be increasing, we seem to need more classrooms and our State School Teachers' Union wants smaller class sizes, can the minister explain why the transportable classrooms allocation is dropping down?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Interestingly, transportables are actually of incredibly high quality. The issue is sometimes about space because they might take up green space. But to your question, this is actually an additional \$79.6 million over two years that we have provided for transport and accommodation. We made the judgement and commitment that for those transportable classrooms, we need to put that funding in over the next two years. We hope that we will deal with the enrolment issues that we may have. In addition, there are new schools being built, and there is also uplift in other schools. It is not our only measure to deal with enrolment pressure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just going back to students at risk in the line item on page 374. The minister has spoken about the *Let's Take A Stand Together* plan to tackle violence in schools and also the School of Alternative Learning Settings, which has 12 sites operating in WA. How many incidents of a violent nature were reported through the department's reporting process in the year 2022–23 and the year 2023–24 involving primary age students, secondary age students and also parents and carers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member is testing our friendship because that line item is non-government; it is not government. What year did the member ask for?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The year 2022–23 and then 2023–24.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The total reported incidents of physical assault, threatening behaviour and contact in 2022 was 3 585. In 2023, it was 4 511 and to 15 March, the total is 791. The member is right to raise concerns about violence, but

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please be careful because this is complex. I will not go into it, but it is a complex issue. In some cases, it does not matter what we do, it will always remain an issue, and we are trying to address it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand there are 12 School of Alternative Learning Settings sites spread around the place. Is there a set scenario for when a student goes to that particular alternative learning setting and are they are in there for a certain length of time, or are they returned depending on their behaviour? Could the minister explain how that works?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the director general to answer.

Ms L. Rodgers: There are sites where students can go if they are temporarily excluded or, indeed, permanently excluded, or if principals can identify students who might benefit from time in those alternative learning settings. Ordinarily, those students will be there for 10 weeks.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister see these alternative learning sites expanding or contracting, which would be a better scenario?

[4.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have a crystal ball, but it is always under review. They form part of our education ecosystem and we will wait and see whether they need to. We will just wait and see.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the works in progress on page 365. Under the heading “Other School Facilities” is the line item “Covered Assembly Areas”. Why is there no allocation in the years 2024 to 2027 and then a significant reallocation of \$2.063 million in 2027–28?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to answer that.

Mr J. Peckitt: In some years we need to reprioritise funding across various funding line items. In those middle years, in some cases we have reallocated the funding between other projects. As the member noted, that funding continues in that last out year, but in the middle years we have reallocated funding to basically deal with urgent priorities that we have identified in those years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just above that is the line item “Interim Schools”. That shows the same thing. The funding fades going into the out years. Can someone explain what interim schools are?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Thomson to answer that.

Mr R. Thomson: Thank you, minister. It is an allocation to deal with urgent priorities and is an ongoing allocation. It is prioritised as we receive project requests from schools that are priorities for us to deliver. It enables us the agility to respond to emerging priorities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Could it be called a sort of holding account to tackle urgent issues that crop up?

Mr R. Thomson: Correct.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. The minister spoke earlier about early childhood education and the Department of Communities. I am looking at budget paper No 2, volume 2—that is outside the minister’s responsibility.

I have a question on page 365 under the heading “Land Acquisition”, about one-third of the way down the page, and the line items “General” and “Land for Primary Schools”. Why is there no figure under the line item “General” from 2025–26? We discussed the inner-city Perth primary school. The estimated expenditure for land for primary schools drops quite dramatically from 2023–24. Can the minister explain that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Peckitt will answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: It is based on need. Each year we will obviously submit requests through the budget process for land that we need to purchase, and that is funded through that process. There is no amount in the out years because we need to identify exactly where we need the land and the time we need to acquire it. That is why the funding is there only for the next financial year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. Going back to the inner-city primary school, there were suggestions about potential land swaps et cetera. That would potentially come under that line item. Is there no contemplation of that at all by the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think I need to say anything more on that, but I will reiterate to the member that the investment we are putting into the inner-city primary school is the greatest ever for any primary school. As the member knows from basic economics, there is one pie and the more you take from one part of the pie, the less there is available for other areas such as Esperance Senior High School.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 21 May 2024]

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Chair; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Yaz Mubarakai; Mr Geoff Baker;
Ms Meredith Hammat

The appropriation was recommended.