

EMERGENCY SERVICES — EXTREME FIRE DANGER — SCHOOL CLOSURES

1961. Hon Ben Dawkins to the Minister representing the Minister for Education:

I refer to the closure of schools on 20 February 2024 in parts of the South West region, and I ask:

- (a) how many students were affected by school closures on 20 February 2024;
- (b) can the Minister confirm some students were forced to stay at home, often in remote locations, and possibly without parental supervision considering the short notice given to families;
- (c) in the event of a catastrophic fire, can the Minister confirm evacuation centres are often established at community facilities near schools or at schools; and
- (d) can the Minister explain how it is safer for students to not be at school on days when there is a catastrophic fire risk, and why it is safer for them to be at home?

**Hon Sue Ellery replied:**

- (a) 2,400
- (b) No.
- (c) The location of an evacuation centre is determined by the relevant Hazard Management Agency, in consultation with the local government authority and the Department of Communities. The location of an evacuation centre is determined at the time of the emergency.
- (d) The safety of students and staff is the Department of Education's foremost priority. Pre-emptive closure of public schools rated as 'Extreme' or 'Very High' on the Bushfire Zone Register removes students and staff from the threat of fire to life and property. Schools identified as 'Extreme' or 'Very High' for bushfire risk on the Bushfire Zone Register may be instructed to close when a Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) of 75 or greater is forecast. The Department provides schools with as much notice as possible when a pre-emptive closure is imminent in order for parents/guardians to plan for the care of children.