EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO DIGITAL INNOVATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 12 AUGUST 2020**

SESSION TWO

Members

Ms J.M. Freeman (Chair)
Ms J. Farrer
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr R.S. Love
Ms S.E. Winton

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Hearing commenced at 10.53 am

Ms LISA RODGERS
Director General, Department of Education, examined:

Mr STUART PERCIVAL
Acting Director, Disability and Inclusion, Department of Education, examined:

Ms MELESHA SANDS
Executive Director, Recovery, Department of Education, examined:

Mr MARTIN CLERY
Assistant Executive Director, Statewide Services, Department of Education, examined:

Mr DAVID JAMES DANS
Chief Information Officer, Department of Education, examined:

Mr CALEB JONES
Principal, School of Special Educational Needs; Medical and Mental Health, examined:

Mr ALLAN BLAGAICH
Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards Authority, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide input and comment on remote learning, with particular reference to lessons learnt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This follows last year's inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education. My name is Janine Freeman and I am the Chair of the Education and Health Standing Committee. On my left I have Sabine Winton, the member for Wanneroo. Shane Love was here, but he had to leave for a meeting. Josie Farrer has put in her apologies, and the deputy chair, Zak Kirkup, has not arrived, so I figure that some sort of crisis is going on. We all know that there is lots going on at the moment, so I do apologise that he is not here, but we can proceed with just two in the committee. Our staff and Hansard are here as well. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything that you might say outside of todays' proceedings. Before we begin, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

Ms RODGERS: No.

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement or will we just head into the questions?

Ms RODGERS: No, head straight into questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you again for coming back after our report last year. We were pleased to see from the report that the vision and strategy got released in February. I feel like it was a bit prescient given what then occurred with the pandemic. I suppose I will start with the big, broad question. What were the biggest challenges in implementing remote learning, particularly in terms of technology and online learning? I understand that really for public schools it was a period of about two to three

weeks that you really had that remote learning. I know in the schools in the area I represent, and I am sure Sabine does, that there were many challenges around that. We have just also had a briefing from the association and they outlined some of the challenges that they saw in public schooling. That will be great.

Ms RODGERS: I will hand to Mr Dans shortly, but let me make a few opening remarks. The challenges actually were time and the pace of the policy settings. Because we did not know what we would have liked to have known about the disease and how it acted and how we needed to respond in regard to that—we were taking advice from the Chief Health Officer, and almost every half day it was being updated—so it was a real challenge to make sure that we were able to give schools consistent, clear information. Actually, the major challenge was timing and not knowing some of the things that we needed to know. What was really good was we made the decision really early on that schools had to maintain primacy and they had to have local autonomy in terms of connecting to their communities. They knew their communities best, and they were able to make decisions in regard to the provision of teaching and learning. It became more than teaching and learning, because of course in every community there is a school. It became apparent very, very quickly, particularly in the remote communities, that it was not just about the fidelity of the classroom program or access to learning; actually, it was about wellbeing, care and support, and providing that to our students.

In terms of timing, what we needed to do was centrally communicate what we knew as fast as we could to all schools and remote communities, so we set up an incident response team. It was somewhat of a command and control environment, so we were making some pretty fast decisions, and we were putting in place a framework in which schools could make decisions within. There were certain parameters that they could not go outside of. We were Webexing with those principals, as needed, to make sure that they had clarity of information and that information was fast. They were able to ask questions back straight to the centre as we were on Webex, so that we could get information to them as fast as we could so that they could make decisions.

The other thing in terms of remote communities was we set up, basically, a complex task team. So within the incident management team, we had particular teams that were looking after particularly vulnerable students and communities—one was remote communities; the other was the ed support community. We had two people specially deployed to make sure that we could attend to the remote community issues. In terms of the equity of connection and ICT, I will hand over to Mr Dans to talk about that, and then maybe, Melesha, you might like to make some comments in terms of teaching and learning.

The CHAIR: Just in the context of the comments, we also got a submission from Catholic Education. What was really interesting about their submission was that capacity to have some foresight into the fact that they may go to remote learning, and so they were giving guidance about starting that process to remote learning. Clearly, it was not just for remote communities but for assessing their different communities of disadvantage or people who had capacity, and things like that. In a context of the group that you put together to respond—the response group—if we can have it in terms of that sort of capacity as well, that would be good.

[11.00 am]

Mr DANS: Some of the things we did relatively quickly. I think probably a week before it really took off and I think a week before the IMT was stood up —

The CHAIR: When you say "a week before it took off" —

Mr DANS: So before we made the decision to stand up the incident management team—Melesha might have the exact date—we were already planning, seeing through the news what would occur, even to the scenario of evacuating Royal Street from the point where we could not go in and how we were going to continue to support schools from that process. When we started that process, we immediately extended that from an ICT perspective: what else do we need if we have to start shutting down schools and have to provide remote? That started very quickly and we identified what those challenges were. One of the challenges was the speed at which it moved, as Lisa said. We literally had teams working every night and adding more and more capacity because demand just kept growing, to make sure that we could keep pace with that, so we were able to do that fairly well.

The bandwidth program that we already had in schools was serving us well and we were able to keep that going in terms of connectivity to schools. Standing up the curriculum material in the hub we were able to do very quickly—we drove that very fast. That was available to all schools and all teachers across the state, so through the Connect platform that expanded and then through our intranet, through the materials for teachers but then also the learning at home materials that were stood up on the public website very rapidly as well, not only for teachers but for parents and students to access as well. That was all done very, very quickly and served us fairly well.

We also immediately tried to source technology resources for schools—things like connectivity dongles, SIM cards. We were immediately talking to our carrier around those. We were able to secure those or certainly secure a source. Freight was certainly one of those challenges that I think everybody had. We could purchase things but getting them into the country was one of the challenges that is only really coming out of that at the moment, and is still not back to normal. But we were able to stand up a mechanism using repurposed equipment from head office, to make that available to schools while we were waiting on that equipment coming in. That met the needs of the requests that we had. We are probably, as a result, better prepared for a second wave or a second pandemic in the future now as a result, because the good thing is —

The CHAIR: You have got all these SIMs in storage.

Mr DANS: The SIMs are essentially disposable, but we have, for example, wi-fi dongles that can be set up for schools and students and parents who need them.

The CHAIR: I am sure I could find a few schools that could use those now, but anyway, continue.

Mr DANS: We are also doing the same thing with student-focused laptops. That is a program that was held up by freight. While we have scaled it back, that is progressing, so we are in a much better position than we were.

The CHAIR: Is there something written about student-focused laptops? Is that in your submission?

Mr DANS: I think there is a reference somewhere.

Ms RODGERS: I think so. What David is talking about is we could not just send out our laptops that we had in the office, because of course they had to be repurposed for the students.

Mr DANS: Yes.

The CHAIR: So this was repurposing the laptops that were in the department already?

Ms RODGERS: Both. We had laptops that were in the department already and new ones.

Mr DANS: And ones from schools, so helping schools to loan those out where they had them available.

The CHAIR: Balga Senior High School just loaned theirs out. Then you introduced a policy to loan them out, but they had already loaned them out. He has already told the minister that, so I am cool to put that on the record. But that was that whole thing—if you did not bring-your-own devices, kids would go on with nothing. Okay, sorry.

Ms RODGERS: Just on that, again, back to the policy change. We were giving principals directions directly through Webex. We were saying, "If you've got laptops, you hand them out. Don't wait for the policy change." There was some work that we had to do in the background in regard to –

The CHAIR: Yes, I think he handed them out even before he got told that.

Ms RODGERS: That is right. We were literally just saying to principals, "We're changing the policy; it's underway. We're talking to RiskCover, but that might take a few days. You have our absolute authority to hand out your laptops." So it was that kind of just cutting through the red tape and giving the principals the autonomy and the authority to just do what they needed in order to support their community.

The CHAIR: I suppose the issue is that even if you hand out laptops, if you do not then have teachers who can do the online learning stuff, then you are sending home kids with a toy and it is not working. Anyway, sorry, I interrupted.

Mr DANS: During that process to that point, there was training and sessions set up for teachers using Connect that were relatively new or had not had a deep experience in Connect through the e-Schooling area. They did a lot of sessions with teachers to provide them with that skill. A lot of teachers were very much class-focused prior to that, so they were able to leverage that. We provided, obviously, more support. We set up, I think, three different call centres at one stage, very quickly, to provide different pathways in for different groups to be able to get additional help on how to use that technology and managing that.

We set up not a technology-focused group but an actual needs-based group to make sure we were allocating the resources on the best need based on that. That was an assessment made not by the technology people but by educators, and people much more versed in that than myself were driving that. We facilitated that. We have continued to do that, so we still have a few minor elements out there. At the same time, we tried to continue the expansion of the ability for schools that were working in mixed mode as we came out of that, so we continued the bandwidth upgrade program through COVID. We had to shift around some areas we could not get into because of exclusions for the different regions, but we were able to work around that and, in fact, stay on track for that as well.

The CHAIR: Did you have the date of when that all started?

Ms RODGERS: The IMT was formed on 17 March, so that was the date that the IMT was officially formed.

The CHAIR: I have got the details somewhere, but when did we give the instructions that schools would shut?

Ms RODGERS: On 29 March. In terms of our time line, we were dealing with the international students coming into the country as of January, so it was probably about the second week of January that we were actively responding to COVID with the international students. It was not a formal incident management team set-up between mid-January and mid-March, but certainly we had a kind of skeleton crew responding to what was going on. Then I think it was week 6 and 7 that it was really getting quite critical, and we saw attendance drop from about week 8. Then on 29 March, the government made the announcement that on week 10 of term 1 we would ask parents to keep their kids at home for schools to prepare for online learning. Then we had one pupil-free day on week 1,

term 2, and then all kids were back at school. Actually, there was only a period of five school days where we either encouraged parents to keep their children at home or it was a pupil-free day.

The CHAIR: But there was period at the beginning of term 2 that only became mandated that they had to come back within the second week. It was 18 May.

Ms RODGERS: Yes, one pupil-free day on the first week of term and then, by week 2, we were up to I think it was about 90 per cent attendance.

The CHAIR: Which does go to show that people are reluctant to do online learning and all of the issues with that. What sort of scenario planning are you doing now if we have a situation like Victoria or even like New Zealand is now facing in Auckland? New Zealand had, what was it, 192 days of no infections and now they have been placed in this situation.

Ms RODGERS: Our IMT is still stood up, so we are actually still responding to events in the environment as a result of COVID. From our perspective, it has not gone away. Mr Blagaich might talk a bit about exams and the planning, even if we continue in this space, for what exams might look like. We still have a few things that come in on a weekly basis that are different operationally as a result of COVID. The IMT, albeit a skeleton staff at the moment, are still active.

In terms of the scenario planning, we have done an incredible amount of scenario planning and of course we cannot necessarily determine what will happen, but there are two key variables in terms of any scenario. One is the context, so whether we are talking about shutting down year 11 and 12s or K–10, ag colleges, residential colleges, so there is a kind of context scenario and then there is a timing scenario. So, are we shutting down a school, for example, for one day for a clean or are we shutting down a community for a certain period of time, or are we shutting down the state? Those two variables are the things that we cannot anticipate so we have various scenarios in regard to that. Underpinning the scenario planning are a series of principles that we have put in place as a result of how we ran in the middle of the coronavirus response in regard to flexible working arrangements, health and hygiene, provision of online learning, and continuity of care for our students. There are a series of principles that sit underneath those scenarios that we will just draw on, depending on what happens with the virus in WA.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIR: The report by the Australian Council for Educational Research described four models that schools used in that period of time. There was fully online, which seems to be what a number of independent or some Catholic schools used, so using a learning management system—in your case Connect, but depending on the schools, they could use Google Classroom or whatever. So, remote teaching, they were using Webex, and I have a question about Teams in a bit and why that cannot be used for classes, but we will go into that in a second. Paper-based packs delivered to the home—there was evidence given to us just before you that one particular school only had 20 packs picked up out of 1 500 that were produced, so that has its issues—and a combination of remote and paper-based. From your perspective in talking to schools and going out and investigating, what model was mostly used by public schools and do we now have a preference for what we want to do in the scenario where you close down one school, one suburb, the metropolitan area or the state, which is how Victoria progressed?

Ms RODGERS: I think we have to be really clear that one of the big lessons learnt is that you cannot replace a teacher, so the best place for a student to be is a school. There are certain exceptions to that. If you are at an age and you are an independent learner, then you will probably fare fine with good online provision, but first and foremost, we would want to make sure that kids have access to our schools. I will hand over to Melesha, but also I think there is no one preferred method. I think

each school needs to make decisions in regard to their community. Again, I think some of our remotes wanted to provide those paper packs. In part, one it was about the continuity of teaching–learning, but also they were sending out care packs. First and foremost, it became about health and wellbeing of those students and those families and they wanted to continue to touch base with those families, and they did that through care packs; almost the teaching–learning became secondary in that space. Whereas we have some of the big secondary schools that were really successful in terms of delivering online learning, particularly for years 11 and 12. I think it is a bit context specific.

The CHAIR: In answering that—Melesha, I am happy to go to you—yes, I understand that schools are communities but how are we actually connecting with the community and the parent body to know that as well? I know that in the schools that I represent I think I can count 12 schools and I have two P&Cs so, public schools in the sort of socioeconomic, culturally diverse communities, contact with what communities actually want instead of just assuming what they want is another thing entirely.

Ms SANDS: Currently I am on secondment to the department. I am substantively the principal at Belridge Secondary College and previous to that was a principal at Swan View Senior High School for five years so I really understand the issues and challenges that schools faced around the equity issue with technology during this time. The director general has mentioned some of the learnings that we had was around nothing actually replaces the instructional relationship between a teacher and a student. That is probably one of the biggest lessons that we have learnt. The other thing from talking to principals, especially secondary principals, was that this has been the biggest disruptor to education that we have known—we know that. What they have tried to do is now utilise that momentum to implement teaching and learning in digital learning environments. As a principal, often you would really be wanting to engage teachers, but teachers need a reason to change. What we had this time was a reason to change, but we did not probably have enough time really to build their capability as effectively as we could, so I think that that is a lesson moving forward. I know in Martin's team that provision and the training in terms of Connect and Webex, all of that is continuing right throughout term 3. In terms of preparedness, moving forward especially, really now what we need to focus on is building the capability and quality of the teaching and supporting our staff to do that.

In terms of parents, again, really interesting. The IMT is currently doing some work around what are some prompts and considerations—resource—for schools to prepare and plan for possibly further outbreaks and really how they engage with those parents in those communities, rather than making assumptions. So, what are some key ways? How do we know which ways our communities like to work? I know at Swan View it was either face-to-face or Facebook. They were not going to reply to emails; they were not going to probably pick up the phone and have a conversation with principals, but they were really engaged with their parents. So, really building that into the next part of planning, actually the parents are a really key component of this planning—what do they want? It is not just about infrastructure for the parents. How do they think that they can best support their kids at home?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Obviously there is a lot of stuff going around in terms of the department being prepared in the various scenarios et cetera and out there in the schools some did it well, some did it not so well, for a variety of reasons. Do you think or is there some monitoring or assistance being given to schools who have not done it as well, were not as prepared, and are schools actually dealing with the scenario that if there was a lockdown what needs to be done to make them better prepared in their particular context to give the best, notwithstanding the teacher's best? Is that sort of audit

happening from the department—I do not like to use the word "audit"—in terms of assisting schools better?

Ms RODGERS: We are about to talk to schools about the emergency management framework, so as well as scenario planning we have revised and refreshed our emergency management procedures. This looks at whether we have a level 3 emergency, which is a pandemic, or it might be a cyclone or—I am trying to think of a level 1 event—the teacher in Rottnest is sick, you know! We have kind of got three levels of scenario whereby there might be a disruption to teaching and learning. Basically, we have built our emergency management procedures and we are about to go out to schools to talk to them about those emergency management procedures. We are about to undertake quite a big scenario exercise kind of testing them, and then we will be out at schools talking to them about, "Actually, this is the department's emergency management framework." How might schools fit into that and how do we support them to make sure they are actually prepared?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have to say, in going to the schools, there is certainly fantastic work happening around lessons learnt, what was good about it and there are all sorts of changes happening in schools in terms of digital uptake et cetera. I guess I am a little bit concerned that they are mirroring a little bit what is happening out in the general public that everything is great in Western Australia; and this is an opportunity to put great things forward in the schools—and is there attention being given to: what if the plug gets pulled out from us and we are back to where we were?

Ms SANDS: That is a priority for the work of the IMT currently.

[11.20 am]

The CHAIR: One of the things that came out of our inquiry findings and we were very strong about was having some kind of vision and strategy. I understand that you think there was a strength in individual schools responding in individual ways but that wide variety in digital technologies and resources between schools has been acknowledged in some of the federal reports and some of the university studies that mostly were done in New South Wales and Victoria, but that variation was really apparent during the pandemic. We have just had evidence about two different public schools and very different ways they dealt with it and how the leadership dealt with it differently. The response that you have given us was that public schools make local decisions regarding resources and programs to support curriculum development; this enables schools to select resources, programs, the best to meet their students. Is there any aspect of actually having some really clear framework in decision-making, like: this is how you engage with parents; you need to engage with parents to be able to say this is what the requirement is in terms of what you need to deliver; this is what you need to do if you do not have your own devices; and if you do not bring your own devices, we need to make provision that they have other laptops.

What sort of work has been done around that to make sure that we have something that is a little bit more cohesive than just this scattergun approach that it felt like—I am sure it was not. I know from speaking to the principals in my area, they really appreciated the Webex with you, and leadership. They really, really appreciated that and really felt like they were kept in the loop. As you said, there was not time, but to get that sort of direction that makes them feel a bit more consistent in judgement. Sorry, that is a long way of saying: what are you doing?

Ms RODGERS: Can I answer that, and then I will hand to you. I absolutely agree with you. We have got 818 autonomous schools, and they are largely doing really, really great things by their kids and their communities, but we need to get them better connected to the centre, and I think the centre needs to take a position on particular things. People look at what the Webex is, but the Webex is, basically, we were telling them, we were saying, "This is the framework, these are your operating

parameters; don't go outside of those, but actually use those and make decisions locally." I agree with you that this now gives us the opportunity. Principals are saying they want that response from the centre. There will be a tension between local autonomy and local decision-making and some of the conditions that we might require to be put in place, but actually I think this has given us the impetus to do that and the reason to do that.

Ms SANDS: It also corresponds to our strategic directions document that we released last year, where we clearly said we need to prioritise support for schools that need it. We know there are particular schools that do not necessarily need our support and they were probably the ones that you would have heard about that went solely online. I think at one point I had spoken to Neil Hunt at Churchlands and we had, behind the scenes, audited how many schools had how many devices and were ready to take them off the schools that did not need them and give to the schools that did. We never needed to get to that point because of the time. Speaking to Neil, they only had to loan out five devices, whereas a school like Swan View, you loaned out everything. There was definitely that degree, but we are doing that work now. Now that we have a little bit more time, I understand the feeling that there might be a little bit of complacency across WA in regard to "that's over", but we do not think it is and we know that some schools will need extra support and other schools will not, so we are developing that. We are calling it a "considerations list" for principals to work with their teams, and it has a whole range of different categories.

The CHAIR: I think the reality is that we are more likely to be like New South Wales, which has these outbreaks and then closes and stuff—that is the hope—than Victoria, and we feel for them, but who knows.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I was just going to say also, I am particularly interested in the year 11s and 12s, because I would imagine they would be a priority to deal with. Can you give us a little bit more information about the year 11s and 12s? I know that is dependent on SCSA and outside things, but what work has the department been doing to try and grapple with those two difficult cohorts for this year? I know in Victoria the priority was everyone was locked down except year 11s and 12s would come to school, but then they had to change back on that. What is your thinking in that regard?

Ms RODGERS: They are a priority. Again, we were providing advice to the minister as the things were kind of rolling out. We were providing advice to the minister in regard to how might we manage provision of schooling. Luckily we never had to go to particular cohorts being privileged over others, but certainly we were in that position whereby we were saying if we had to privilege any particular group of students, it would be year 11 and 12s and, of course, our kindy and preprimary students. I wonder whether it would be helpful for Mr Blagaich to talk about the provision of support we were putting in place for exams in the year 12s?

The CHAIR: I am not sure—not necessarily at this point in time, but we might come to that if you want to. There are a couple of questions I quickly want to ask. One is a really direct question, which is: why are students not given access to Teams?

Mr DANS: Are you talking about Microsoft Teams?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr DANS: We were in the middle of a pilot. We were actually in week 2 of a pilot when all this occurred, and that was to make sure the governance was structured correctly. One of the challenges with any of those tools is things like chat and those sorts of things is making sure there are cyberbullying measures, so we were working with the policy area and schools area to work out what

is the best way to do this. We accelerated the deployment to teachers as a result, and every school has access to that.

The CHAIR: For teachers, but they do not have it for students.

Mr DANS: The guidance is really about how we do it safely for kids. We were literally in the middle of week 2 of the pilot when this all occurred.

The CHAIR: Are you collaborating with independent schools and Catholic Education?

Mr DANS: Yes, Catholic Ed more directly. We are in fact sharing lots of experiences and we have met with them several times around that. They are heavily invested in that already when this occurred. We have other tools like Connect, so we have not restricted any of those platforms at all. We have said "How do we make them safe?"

The CHAIR: Did you know that principals—some principals were, depending on locale—were not counting attendance through the online learning portals?

Ms RODGERS: They should have been—no; they were reporting attendance directly to our data team. There is quite a story around that, but because we wanted to track and monitor attendance, literally daily—so if you imagine the system inside the department, to be able to understand attendance rate on a daily basis it is quite hard to get the upload from all schools overnight and have it cleaned by about seven o'clock in the morning. Whilst that was going on in the background, which was the standard kind of operating procedure for the department, it is not a great reporting tool if you need it quickly. So, principals were actually required to report every single day via a link directly into our data team what their attendance rates were.

The CHAIR: So they were required to do attendance?

Ms RODGERS: Every day, and we were reporting on that.

The CHAIR: I do not want you to think that year 11s and 12s are not important, so we will get to that, but I just want to know this. I know that you employed some additional teachers to do online teaching during this process. Do you want to talk about that, what that was for and whether that will continue and what happened there? I just know because you hear out there that different teachers got picked up at that time to do online teaching.

Ms RODGERS: We had a whole range of staff deployed wherever they were needed, so we were using —

The CHAIR: But these were additional, as I understand it—but, yes, keep going.

Ms RODGERS: We had the issue whereby we were worried that we would not have enough teaching staff. What transpired was actually almost, not quite, the opposite, but because people were not going on leave—they were not going anywhere—we had our full complement of teaching staff, and we had this issue whereby all of our casual teachers then were out of work. So, there were pockets— and Mr Jones might talk about the school of medical and mental health—where we needed to deploy teachers in particular areas.

We used fly-in squad teachers, we used our fixed terms and our casuals, and we just deployed whatever teacher pool we had in an area of need. Wananami, for example, the principal there, Stacie, just had a baby—her husband and I think there was one other staff member at Wananami, they have normally got a roll of between 20 and 30 kids. All of a sudden everybody left their residential facilities, they were back in community and they had 90 kids they had to teach. Again, we were deploying staff from around communities in the Kimberley and additional staff, particularly our casual and fixed terms, wherever the need was. One of the biggest challenges was the cleaners.

[11.30 am]

The CHAIR: Did you want to add anything to that, Mr Jones; I am happy if you did not need to.

Mr JONES: The department saw that as we were in recovery phase for some people returning to school that there was going to be those that may not be able to at that point in time and we wanted to make sure that we were able to continue to deliver remotely to them. We already have an existing program within the School of Special Educational Needs, and Medical and Mental Health, so we really just expanded upon that and then just scaled it up. I say "just" but actually it was pretty enormous with 450 referrals in two to three weeks initially and 30 teachers on board at a new location, IT, and classes scheduled—just secondary classes, if that is the context, 110 classes a week for that group. We had existing staff who, with our digital revolution for our school, we were quite prepared with tools to use, but we also had to prepare those new staff that you were just speaking of. We had 30 FTE new staff at the time till week 10.

The CHAIR: So tell us about year 11 and 12 because I would hate you to think that I am not worried about year 11 and 12, because I am very worried about them.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I appreciate it is a moving feast.

Mr BLAGAICH: It certainly is, especially at this time and as we are heading forward. Probably if I go back a little to the adjustments that we made to the requirements for year 12 and year 11. We reduced the number of assessment points that were required. We gave that option to the schools. Under the rules, for each assessment type—think essay, think short answer, think all of those—we have said in the past you had to always assess everything twice, and we reduced that to once. That immediately took some pressure off schools, and schools started acting on it, but as we have been the blessed state so far things are fairly well back to normal and most teachers have put things back. The reduction in the amount of excursions that were going on and overnight camps et cetera at schools—I will quote Neil Hunt, who has actually reported that the year 12s have actually had more time on task this year than they have ever had before because they were not off to excursions. So he said, "Don't stress about that, they have actually had more focused time, so can we keep this rolling?" So that was that.

So, 74 per cent of the schools in the state that run secondary ran first semester exams. We gave them the option, because if you reduced twice, you do not have to do that. That was interesting. Some schools, for example, Collie Senior High School, rather than making it an exam they did three hours of tests—same conditions, but spread it out because they had made an undertaking to their community that they were not going to run exams, but they would run them as tests. So schools have modified, as the DG said, schools have taken it on board and gone forward. That has worked well. In terms of these next set of exams, we have just met with Andy Robertson to go through all the contingencies—we have had to put in a lot. For practical examinations—I think dance, drama, music—increase the size of the rooms, make sure we have got social distancing, even though not required we thought we should do it anyway. Phys. ed.—we have provided parents with the option that if a student does not want to participate in a game with kids they do not know that there is an optional examination, which is a viewing and a commentary examination, so interestingly very few have taken the option. I think we are in that sense of everything is normal, but the options were provided.

In terms of the written examinations, we have a whole heap of contingencies. If it is one student that becomes ill, then we have sickness and misadventure. If it is a group of students, we have just run through with the Chief Health Officer what we would do in the school, so options of moving, options of basically adjusting for that group of kids or the sickness and misadventure process, which is essentially that we would use school marks to generate an examination mark for the calculation

of ATAR. Probably the biggest thing—and this is yet to go to the minister, so we have to be mindful we are just in the final stages of preparing—but we have booked the entire Convention Centre. It will seat 2 000 kids in examination format. If we thought a school had to close down or a cluster of schools had to close down, Andy is very supportive of you could pick those kids up and move them. It is on the railway line, it is on the bus line; it is away from other schools—there are only two schools in the 6000 postcode—St Andrews and Mercedes; Trinity just sits outside of it—so we would be fine to be able to have alternative measures.

Equally, because of supervisors and what we do back at the office, we need an alternative receival and removement centre for the papers coming in and out. I think we are doing pretty well—the contingencies are there. The final solution is that if we were in a situation, which hopefully Victoria will not end up in, which is no exams, then we have Professor David Andrich from the University of Western Australia, who has worked with our psychometrician then we have a mathematical process that would be able to generate the mark that we give to tertiary institution centres to actually generate the ATAR. I think, though, that does not actually solve it, because remarkably there are a lot of kids who want to do their examinations because it is the closure of a course, they are going to give it their best shot; they have not tried as well during the year, but they have really gone through. It is a double-edged sword, these exams, but I think we are ready. We have got every contingency possible, I think, to present to the minister prepared under that one student, a group of students, a whole school, a cluster of schools, the whole state.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Well done! It does raise lots of questions about the ATAR process, does it not? Anyway, there is a hot philosophical debate about that one.

Mr BLAGAICH: That will be another question some other time.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I did hear that there will be a lot of good things in the education field that come out of this long term.

Ms RODGERS: When we get a chance to actually deal with it rather than send you a lot of scenarios.

The CHAIR: I do want to acknowledge that there was a survey by Children and Young People with Disability Australia with eight per cent of respondents from WA and they found that many students with disability were left behind during the pandemic, saying that more than half did not have learning materials in accessible formats and that individual education plans had not been amended. I would not mind your comment about that and how we are addressing that for that really vulnerable community.

Ms RODGERS: Mr Percival led the kind of complex tasking, if you like, within the IMT for students with disabilities.

Mr PERCIVAL: That report was an interesting report; eight per cent was from Western Australia, and that was a cross-sectorial report. Probably the biggest outcome from that report was the finding that you have just picked up there around individualised planning. What we realised very quickly when we were setting up the connected learning program was that if we were to develop it in the same way as the streams for primary and for secondary, and the senior secondary streams, we recognised that no two kids had the same learning profile. While one child will have the strength in, say, English, they might have a weakness in maths—a child with disability. So, we needed to make sure that teachers had access to curriculum and support materials that were various support levels so they knew what to teach, so the content of the programs. We needed to make sure that teachers had access to developmentally sequenced teaching and learning materials, so they could almost go to the shelf and pull something off and say, "That matches the development profile of my child."

The third area that we realised they needed was an understanding of actually how to teach. You might know what to teach and you might have a resource, but the methodology about how you would implement that and how that might be different in a remote context of delivery. We focused very much on making sure that teachers had ready access to the materials that they would need to develop programs that were matched to the individual needs of students. The second area that we focused on was to make sure that throughout our schools, the special educational needs, that support was available to teachers to do so, and was available in a remote sort of a context. So, it did not matter whether teachers were preparing support materials or teaching and learning materials in their study or whether they were doing it in their office at school. In the same way, it did not matter whether the consultant teacher was providing support to teachers to differentiate the curriculum whether they were at work at the Padbury Statewide Services Centre or whether they were actually doing that from home.

In that process, what we were very much focused on is the content and how to deliver. What we were less focused on—because we made an assumption that personalised planning was something that schools were automatically doing—in that process we were less focused on personalised planning through individualised education plans and making adjustments to individualised education plans. That is certainly—we have picked up on that one from the report on children and young people. We are now looking at incorporating that element into the connected learning process.

[11.40 am]

The CHAIR: I note that we have to be in Parliament at 12 noon, so I am going to have to wrap it up. We have got a list of questions, still. Are you okay if we put some questions in writing to you? There were two quick questions I want to get in before you go.

One of the things that came out to us in our previous report was how student teachers through the universities were getting really good stuff on pedagogy, teacher planning and stuff like that but not the sort of training that they probably need in delivery of remote learning and IT, even teaching with digital technologies in classrooms. I think there was an undertaking at one stage when we were talking about it that you as the DG, or someone in the department, were going to talk to the deans of education about some of the things that the Department of Education requires preservice teachers to know, learn and understand. Given this experience, is there anything you now know that really is something that needs to be a focus of teacher training? Even if it is as basic as they also need to know how to deal with the unexpected; really, that was what we all had to learn in this process.

Ms RODGERS: So, we promised that we would be meeting with the deans, and indeed we have met with the deans. It is an ongoing conversation with the deans in regards to what we require from teacher training. That is going well. My frustration, of course, is that the standards for teacher training are set nationally, and they are quite permissive. We would like to see more prescription in terms of particular things. We have now got further prescription in terms of teaching of literacy, but there are other areas that we will be raising nationally in terms of this particular situation. There are certain things that we need to make sure are in teacher education. Yes, the conversation is ongoing. We will have that discussion nationally as well. I would have to check this, but I think that Western Australia was the only state that managed to get all of our preservice teachers into practicums. Most of the states stopped practicums because they were not seen as essential workers. We thought it was absolutely key that our preservice teachers got into the classroom in such a context.

The CHAIR: I do know you did have them in practicums.

Ms RODGERS: Yes, because they need to respond in this environment. This is not going away any time soon, and so they needed that context.

The CHAIR: Good work. My last question is: if you could think of the positive out of this—never waste a crisis—other than funding, in terms of IT and digital technologies in our schools and a negative, I would really appreciate that as a bit of a wrap-up.

Ms RODGERS: I think one of the best things that we did—and it is still a work in progress—was the Connected Learning Hub. I have worked in the UK, New Zealand and across Australia, and I have never seen a portal whereby teachers are uploading and curating their own resources to a central base that any teacher can access. That is phenomenal.

The CHAIR: That is Connect that we talked about?

Ms RODGERS: The Connected Learning Hub.

The CHAIR: Is that Connect?

Ms RODGERS: No, not Connect; it is the Connected Learning Hub. That is just extraordinary. I do not know if Martin wants to say any words.

The negative—actually, we had 818 schools used to leading their own schools, which is a really good thing, but when push came to shove, they needed central support, and there needed to be parameters and frameworks for them to operate within. I think they needed a bit more direction.

Ms S.E. WINTON: In a way, that is hard to live in when you are used to —

Ms RODGERS: Yes, really tough. I do not know if there is anybody else around the table —

Mr DANS: I think the positive is that we leveraged the investments we have been making—things like the Webex stuff that we had been making that we had. We have been able to prove the value of those investments, and they have continued beyond that peak of process. We have not seen everything go back to normal; people have latched on to those digital technologies now and are actually leveraging real value out of them in the schools. That is something that was a lot of push pre-COVID, and now we have got schools pulling, which is a much better place to be in because we can respond to the demand. We are not forcing something on the schools all the time.

Mr BLAGAICH: The director general would be pleased that what it has shown to schools is that you actually do not have to assess the kids to death. You actually have the opportunity to reduce the number of valid, reliable assessments and focus more on teaching rather than assessing. That has got to be one of the biggest positives we have got. The message is there now that we expect less, and we will be reducing the requirements. We will have some push, but it is a real benefit.

Ms S.E. WINTON: And getting teachers to go outside their comfort zone by engaging in technology because they have to. That is the way to push PD from now on—we have to; we need it.

Ms SANDS: That is our positive and our negative. The workload on teachers was significant but the positive was there was the best reason for change that we have seen in terms of moves to digital platforms.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. We really appreciate you all coming here today and that you all got an opportunity to contribute so we did not waste any of the taxpayers' money by having you all here!

Hearing concluded at 11.48 am

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