

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2017–18 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
TUESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2017**

**SESSION ONE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Members**

**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)  
Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Diane Evers  
Hon Aaron Stonehouse  
Hon Colin Tincknell**

---

**Hearing commenced at 9.30 am**

**Hon SUE ELLERY**

**Minister for Education and Training, examined:**

**Ms SHARYN O'NEILL**

**Director General, examined:**

**Ms JENNIFER McGRATH**

**Deputy Director General, Finance and Administration, examined:**

**Mr ALLAN BLAGAICH**

**Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards, examined:**

**Mr PETER TITMANIS**

**Executive Director, Innovation Performance and Research, examined:**

**Mr STEPHEN BAXTER**

**Executive Director, Statewide Planning and Delivery, examined:**

**Mr DAMIEN STEWART**

**Executive Director, Workforce, examined:**

**Mr JOHN FISCHER**

**Executive Director, Infrastructure, examined:**

**Mr MARTIN CLERY**

**Acting Executive Director, Statewide Services, examined:**

**Mr JAY PECKITT**

**Chief Finance Officer, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Good morning, members. This is the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations 2017–18 budget estimates hearing. We are here with the minister and the Department of Education. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you here to today's hearings. Can witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed the document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

**The WITNESSES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** All of the witnesses have indicated that they have. It is essential that your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be

---

taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting the committee to scrutinise the budget papers and the committee values your assistance with this. Would the minister like to make a brief opening statement?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I have no opening statement.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Minister, I refer to the spending changes table at page 160 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I will give a bit of a preamble so that you can find the table, minister. There are a number of election commitments there for which the existing agency's spending was reprioritised to fund. It relates to explicit instruction in schools and centres of excellence, improving teacher quality, mental health, education assistants, science and coding and science programs at schools. What programs and what spending was cancelled to fund these projects?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I would start from the premise that we had to do two jobs with this budget. The first was to undertake significant budget repair as a consequence of the mess that the previous government left us in. We had to do two things. We had to identify savings to address that. You would be aware, honourable member, that there was a significant writedown in government revenue after the PFPS, and so we had to address that as well. In addition, we did as we said we would do in the election campaign—which was to reprioritise some of the spending and pay for some of the election commitments out of royalties for regions, and in terms of some of the infrastructure commitments, spread them over five years. We did a combination of things to meet our election commitments. In respect of the specifics, a number of saving strategies were put in place. One was in respect of an equity adjustment to the student-centred funding model for secondary schools. You may be aware that there were significant differences as a result of the economies of scale that large public secondary schools are able to achieve just by nature of the fact of their size. We made an equity adjustment to 26 secondary schools, and, at the same time, noted that we would have a further look at the funding arrangements for large secondary schools as part of the review of the student-centred funding model next year. That was one of the areas where we made some changes. We stopped the administration grant to independent public schools. You would also be aware now that the vast majority of public schools are IPS schools, so the notion that IPS schools need some additional assistance when in fact the vast majority of them are doing exactly the same thing—everyone has a one-line budget and the differences between them are minimised now because the majority of them are IPS. You would recall the government announced that we would reduce SES positions, so we made some changes there. In terms of central office, changes were made to the central office fleet and to some of the other operational support areas in central office. There was also an arrangement in place—I might get the director general to assist me with the detail on this one—for the payment for working with children checks. I think what we have done—I will get the director general to correct me if I have got it wrong—is not provide a subsidy, effectively, for that. I think it is the second renewal of a working with children check; the subsidy exists for the first one. Then the previous government had made a decision in any event to transition the school of—no, I think that was a different one. In respect of SIDE, which is the School of Isolated and Distance Education, we charge fees to non-government schools who choose to access particular subjects through SIDE—that is, primarily for non-government schools outside Perth, but we do not charge cost recovery. We have increased the fees to non-government schools. We are still not at cost recovery, but we have increased them.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I refer to the fourth dot point of significant issues impacting the agency, as it appears on page 161 of the same budget paper. In relation to finding teachers with appropriate experience in the STEM and language disciplines, it is mentioned there that it remains a challenge to meet current and future needs. Could I get a sense of whether the department can quantify the

current gap in teachers with those skills, what practical measures are being undertaken to either train existing teachers or recruit teachers from other jurisdictions with those skills and what time line are you working to?

[9.40 am]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will get the director general to assist me with that in a moment. I will just make the point that, firstly, we have put significant effort into addressing STEM, not just in schools but as a government. Right now, the Minister for Science is leading with the Chief Scientist a STEM strategy. The director general, on behalf of the education sector, sits on the advisory group that is developing that strategy. They are expected to report in, I think, early next year, but the director general can confirm that. I would expect some recommendations out of that because I know that the Chief Scientist has strong views about what we should be doing in that space. I would expect some further recommendations out of that. In addition, the member would be aware that we put in place a capital election commitment around science labs in primary schools. We will need to do some work around that to make sure we have more primary specialist teachers in place. Those are two things we are working on already.

As well as that, there is an election commitment that we would convene a cross-sectoral task force, I suppose, to identify areas where across the non-government Catholic and independent and public schools we can work together. One of the most common themes when you talk to teachers, whether they are working in a Catholic, independent or public school, is that the most beneficial professional development they get is when they are all in the room together. We are doing some work in that space as well to share between the sectors what we can do to improve the number of teachers that we need, not just in this space but in others generally. I expect there would be some recommendations out of that as well. I think the first meeting of that group is in November. It is the case that not just government schools, but all of us are struggling to have enough teachers to keep up with the expectation of what we will do in the STEM space.

The other point I make before I hand over to the director general is about one of the really successful programs. It was controversial at the time it was introduced but I am a great fan of it now—the Teach for Australia program. That program takes professionals in a range of non-education areas, and there are many of them who have a science or STEM background, and put them through an accelerated and pretty intensive program to make them qualified to teach. They are then placed in those schools where there are high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. Many of those are in the STEM area and are doing sensational work. With those general comments I will ask the director general to make some comments as well.

**Ms O'NEILL:** We do not have today a target number in terms of STEM teachers who we need to recruit because schools are going through recruitment as we speak, so we will continue to work with them to see what is needed. It is fair to say that last year, and the years before, all classroom positions were filled. We do from time to time use staff who have qualifications in STEM-related fields to teach in maths, science, engineering and technology. We do not have a specific number here today; we are working through that with schools as we speak. It is a moving feast, as you can appreciate. We get at midyear, though, any additional graduates that come out from universities. We are working directly with the deans of education on supply issues, particularly around secondary STEM. The use of graduates obviously has been important historically for the department. We have had a program in place for a couple of years called the Switch Program. We have in schools already people who have STEM-related qualifications, but who, for example, might be teaching in primary school. We want STEM in primary and secondary. We did some conversion offering certificates through university for people to do summer courses and during the year additional study to be able

---

to switch. The total program will deliver around 700 additional teachers over the time period of three or four years. In terms of teachers we have who might have done, for example, a minor in a STEM-related subject, we have ongoing professional development through our teacher development schools for those people. We also have been involved with the commonwealth government through national partnerships funding for STEM school pathways, a career program. We also have 27 STEM partnership pathway schools. There is actually a large number—there have been for a few years—of programs and initiatives to ensure that we have an adequate number of staff. It remains a challenge, as it does in every other state. Certainly at the national level, with the ministerial council in which the minister is involved, we continue to talk about having enough qualified teachers in primary school. The teacher is qualified by virtue of their qualification and they tend to teach across. In secondary, it is a more discipline-based approach so we are looking for specialisations.

Teach for Australia, as the minister mentioned, has been very successful in having people with high level skills do a conversion course. We tend to be one of the states that has taken up that opportunity pretty robustly. The state STEM panel, of which I am deputy chair, as the minister mentioned, is also looking at industry, because there are people in industry who are keen also to make the conversion and come into schools. For those schools after all of that activity that may struggle to have a person who is capable of teaching higher end maths, for example, and they are in the country, our School of Isolated and Distance Education provides an opportunity for those students to continue their studies. But to date we have been fully staffed and we anticipate that to be the same for the start 2018. That being said, we do want to continue to build a much stronger capability within STEM with our staff.

**The CHAIR:** Member, your time, about 10 minutes, has concluded. I give the call to Hon Diane Evers.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** My question relates to the fifth dot point on the same page. How does the department intend to have all schools completing the NAPLAN online by 2019 when many regional schools have minimal, intermittent or unreliable internet connection, and also taking into account the added stress this can put on children and teachers in trying to complete an exam when the equipment is not working?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you. That is a very good question because it is a case in point that right around Australia we are working out how we are going to get there. I will ask either the director general or Allan Blagaich to make some comments about that in a minute. The previous government signed up to a plan that would have us go completely online by 2019, doing some trials in a staged process before that. You might be aware that earlier this year, I cancelled the trial for about 100 schools, I think, that were due to go through the NAPLAN online trial this year. We had in place contingency measures in any event for them to use paper and pen because there were some technical glitches and I did not want us to be in a position of taking the risk. The technical advice seemed to be that the glitches were being fixed as they were identified, but I did not want Western Australian students to be disadvantaged if something went wrong at the time.

It is a live matter before the ministerial council on education, which is the council of all the education ministers and the federal education minister. We will revisit it in December. There is some talk that we consider pushing out the full implementation to 2020. In Western Australia, we are still working towards doing it in 2019, because I think you had to draw a line in the sand and you have to get everybody working towards a particular point; otherwise, you will keep dragging out how quickly or otherwise you fix the issues. We are on track to have a greater number of schools participating in the trial next year, but, like I said, it is a live matter. The contingency plan will be in place; that is, paper and pen will be available so no-one will be disadvantaged.

---

There are significant advantages to doing it online. The point of NAPLAN is that you take a snapshot, and you then give evidence to the teachers so that they can adjust where they need to adjust. If you do not get the information back in a timely fashion, and now we do not, it makes it harder to adjust within that existing school year. NAPLAN online will give us much faster results, and that means we will be able to adjust whatever interventions are necessary in response to the results. I might end my comments there and ask the director general to contribute.

[9.50 am]

**Ms O'NEILL:** Perhaps if I can just speak a little about the ICT, the bandwidth and the technological capability, which is part of your question. We have provided technical consultancy and support to the 276 public schools that have already been participating in NAPLAN online school readiness testing. We do not just throw them in the deep end and get on with the test. Quite a lot of work is done to ensure that schools have the capability to be able to do the testing, and that is why we were one of the states that were perhaps more advanced than the rest. But it is true to say that there will remain some schools that struggle already with bandwidth capability and with their technological position. We are in negotiations and have been in negotiations between the department and Telstra in terms of improvement of broadband services. By mid-2018, about 96 per cent of our schools will be connected to high-speed scalable fibre optics—so we are in a better position. It does remain that there will be some schools that will probably always struggle with capability in terms of bandwidth and access to ongoing technology, and we are looking at the options for that. Inherent in the NAPLAN online work across Australia is a strategy for low bandwidth. The whole project across the nation is giving consideration to options for schools that have low bandwidth capability.

That is one part. Separate to that, I think you also talked about the impost or the feelings of students and teachers and perhaps parents. Certainly, the initial testing that has been done with our teachers—it did take some initial work to get up to speed, but they were happy with the testing by and large that they undertook in the pilot testing phase. The reason we had good feedback from students is that it allows them to go in a stream of testing that is more consistent with their capability and their achievement levels. Rather than being compelled through a whole test, it has multi-levels built inside the test.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** My next question refers to page 165 and the key efficiency indicator of regulation review funding and policy advice. I note that the FTEs are increasing by 17, and at the same time the expected cost is to drop. What is being put in place there to reduce the cost while increasing staff?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Member, you are on page 165 and the efficiency indicator you are referring to is the “Hourly Cost of Providing Policy Advice and Support”.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** It is under heading number 3 “Regulation, Review, Funding, and Policy Advice”. The FTEs shown for that have gone up to 103 and at the same time the net cost of the services is dropping. What is being put in place there to have costs go down while you are increasing staff?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will ask Jay to provide an answer to that.

**Mr PECKITT:** The reason is that the number of FTEs in the 2017–18 estimated actual are lower because they had some vacancies in the year, so the budget is actually staying fairly consistent, but it just appears on paper that there is an increase between the two years, mainly because there was a level of vacancy in 2016–17. The number of funded positions will remain fairly much the same between the two years. It is, I suppose, due to some vacancies in the year rather than a reduction or an increase in funding.

---

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** It looks that the total cost of the services drops by \$1 million. Maybe that is related to something other than the FTEs?

**Mr PECKITT:** That one is due to transfer of funding between the Department of Education to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation relating to international education for \$1.5 million.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** Okay; thank you.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Referring to page 160 under line item “Mental Health”. Referring to some comments made by the minister about the government’s commitment to fund Safe Schools after federal funding ends in June, I assume that comes under the line item “Mental Health”. Is that correct?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No, it does not. The election commitment was around that there was no additional money and the department was required to find it from internal resources. So, if your question is about the Safe Schools program, I can tell you where we are at with that. If your question is about mental health, I will —

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** It does not appear as a line item in the papers at the moment.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** The commitment was \$1.4 million over forward estimates. How many schools have currently signed up to that program?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I probably have a note about that; let me find it. There are a number of existing schools that are already using the Safe Schools program. Prior to our election commitment, there was a number of existing schools. I think I have a note about that, so if you just bear with me, I will find it.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Sure. I would also like to know, minister, whether any private schools have signed up to that program?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** They have. I am not sure that I would have the number of private schools, but I know that they have. It tends to be some of the bigger private schools that have signed up.

The best advice I can give you today, honourable member, is that we think it is less than 20 schools across Western Australia in total. Bearing in mind that what the Safe Schools program does is effectively fund a contracted organisation to provide train-the-trainer training for the school and to work with the school community about how it wants to implement and which bits it wants to implement. It is not funding that goes directly to schools; it is funding to a contracted provider who then assists those schools that indicate that they want to participate. Understand as well that our commitment is different to the Victorian government’s policy. Our commitment is that that funding will be made available for effectively a train-the-trainer-type program for those public secondary schools that choose to participate. There is nothing mandatory about it.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Does the commitment of \$1.4 million over the next four years envisage further sign ups or is it simply allocated to cover the cost of those schools that have already signed up to the program?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No, it is not related to the number of schools that might choose to participate or not; it is about funding a contracted non-government organisation to have the human resource and the physical resources to provide effectively train-the-trainer services to those schools that choose; it is not linked to a particular number.

---

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** If it was 20 schools or 40 schools, the funding for that contracted agency would remain the same.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** It remains the same.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Referring to page 160 of budget paper No 2 under “Improving Teacher Quality” and some of the supplementary information provided at the budget, what criteria was used to select the 50 per cent of state schools that will receive the 0.1 FTE level 3 for mentoring and leadership roles?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thanks for the question. We made an announcement a month or so ago about how we would allocate that. Although, I have to say, it is a work in progress. I am trying to figure out and work through a way to maximise the number of level 3 positions in public schools across Western Australia. The election commitment will still be honoured in that the total FTE that we promised will still be delivered. It is: is there a way of doing the allocation that spreads the number of level 3 positions? As I said, we made an announcement maybe a month or so ago about the way we would do that, but I am actually working through now with all of the stakeholders to see if there is a better way to spread the same FTE outcome but spread it amongst a larger number of schools.

[10.00 am]

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** How many level 3 teachers are currently employed by the department? Do you have any numbers on that?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We would have. I am sure somebody can provide that.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Would you have any indication of how many teachers are currently undertaking level 3 qualification as well?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** While the director general is looking for that information, I can advise that the level 3 position was created to provide an opportunity for excellence in classroom teaching to be recognised. It effectively gives a classroom teacher time out and the money is used to provide relief teaching into that classroom while the teacher comes out and is, if you like, one of the school leaders in excellence in classroom teaching. This has been in place for some time now. It was designed to ensure that the only pathway for teachers was not into administration. We needed to recognise that excellence in classroom teaching was really important. I will ask the director general to provide some additional numbers.

**Ms O’NEILL:** This is the head count as of 7 September this year. We have 1 187 level 3 teachers, broken up into 649 primary, 454 secondary, 74 who are in support roles and 10 who are doing other roles at the moment. In terms of the number—I think you asked about the number of applications—I can only talk about 2016, because obviously we are in the process now. There were 111 applications in primary in 2016, of which 48 were awarded, and in 2016 for secondary there were 67 applications, of which 39 were awarded that status.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Thank you.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I refer to page 159 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under “Total Appropriations”. I note that there is an increase in funding in the 2017–18 budget estimate, and then the funding appears to flatline in 2018–19 and obviously in the forward estimates, and actually reduces in 2019–20. Can the minister explain the reasons for this?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, honourable member. You would be aware that the state budget was put together in a very tight fiscal environment. We had a situation of having to institute budget repair and to address the fact that, subsequent to the PFPS, there was a further \$5 billion worth of writedown in revenue. Despite that, we have managed to deliver an increase in funding in 2017–18,



so we have cracked the \$5 billion point to be spent on education. It is an increase of about 2.9 per cent from 2016–17. It is also recognising that there is an additional 3 700 students in public schools across the state. It is generally a recognition of a combination of those things. I will ask the director general, who might in fact send us off to somebody else, to comment on the out years.

**Ms O'NEILL:** At this stage, as it is for every other year, the out years will be subject to ongoing budget processes. We do have ongoing savings measures built into our budget from previous years that are reflected there, so that would be known from previous budget situations. In terms of the out years, we have got increases in each year. There is growth in each year as we look at the total appropriation, certainly for 2018–19 over the previous year. Like we would say in every year when we come here, with those out years we are still working through the detail, but there are, as you can see there, percentage increases in the appropriation.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I appreciate that each budget stands on its own, but the reality is that the forward estimates do indicate a flatlining and, in fact, in 2018–19, a reduction. My question is to the minister and/or the department: can they assure the house that there will be no reduction in funding to public schools in those out years?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We are locked into funding models that are driven by the number of students and driven by the industrial arrangements in place about teaching numbers as well. In terms of that, in fact it is a great protection for this agency compared perhaps to some others, because we have formulas that we have to meet. We need to deliver enough to meet growth. That is what we have done. The growth that is in the out years in this budget allows for EBA increases and it allows for staff increases in line with student growth. While you might refer to it as flatlining, it in fact allows for both the things that we know we have to meet. You would be aware, as a former minister yourself, that the budget process starts anew every year and we go through the processes that we need to go through. But I think the advantage that this agency has, perhaps over some others, is that we have formulas that dictate how much money needs to be allocated. One of those is the student-centred funding model and the other is the industrial arrangements in place around the number of teachers and sizes of classrooms et cetera. We have an obligation to meet those requirements, and I am confident that our budgets will.

Can I just add this point as well: we are still not sure what we are going to get out of the commonwealth government, which is a significant contributor to the cost of education, as the member would be aware. If I can do this in the shortest amount of time possible, you would be aware that the commonwealth government published some figures which the previous state government relied on in its final budget to anticipate what we would be getting out of the commonwealth. The commonwealth then changed its mind, as is its wont to do, and there was effectively about a \$9 million deficit between what we were anticipating getting out of the commonwealth and what they said we would get out of the commonwealth. The member would be aware of all of the negotiations that went on in the federal Parliament with the crossbenchers et cetera. They came up with this new act, which still puts Western Australia at a disadvantage because, to give credit where credit is due, we are coming off the highest base in the nation in respect to funding for education. The commonwealth wants us all to lift our game to reach a certain standard in respect to the student resourcing standard. Because we are coming off the highest base, our problem is that they are expecting us to do it at the same rate as those that are coming off a much lower base. Even worse than that, they are applying a degree of indexation of 3.56 per cent, which is significantly higher than both our indexation costs here in Western Australia and CPI in Western Australia. We are still working through the detail with the commonwealth on what that will look like, but our budget will have to shift once those details are finalised. I am confident they will be investing in education in Western Australia, but I am deeply worried that it will be less than

what we need and that the requirements to match and to, kind of, fast track will put us at a disadvantage. I have raised these things personally with Minister Birmingham. I have said that over the full length of commonwealth funding, I think Western Australia will be better off under the current model. The problem is that in the next four years, we are at a significant disadvantage. I have asked him to take that into account, so far without great success. If you are able to exercise any influence there, I would appreciate it. That will see an adjustment in those figures as well, because the commonwealth has got to contribute to Western Australia and we know that it will.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Thank you, minister. When do you expect or understand the final figures, if I can put it that way, will be finalised in terms of the contribution from the commonwealth? You said that you are still working through that with them.

[10.10 am]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, we are. There is another meeting in December. Something I share with Hon Peter Collier, which I developed very quickly, is a lack of enthusiasm for attending these meetings because I am not sure that they are particularly constructive.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I think that all ministerial councils could be put in that category.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You may well be right. Anyway, there is a further meeting in December. I expect where we are up to now is we will have an interim arrangement in place for 2018–19. We will have to go beyond that. I am just being advised that we need to have the final arrangements in place by September 2018.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Okay. Minister, you also referred to student enrolments and growth. That is also referenced at page 160 under “Spending Changes”. You may need to take this on notice, but could you please provide the forecast student enrolments in both primary and secondary schools for each year between 2018–19 and 2020–21, and also provide those figures as a percentage growth in each of those years?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I think we can do that now. The FTE average student growth percentage in 2017–18 for primaries is 1.4 per cent. I will do all the primaries first. For 2017–18, 1.4 per cent; 2018–19, 1.2 per cent; 2019–20, 1.3 per cent; and 2020–21, 1.8 per cent. For secondaries the FTE average student growth percentage for 2017–18 is 1.4 per cent; 2018–19, 1.7 per cent; 2019–20, 2.5 per cent; and 2020–21, 2.8 per cent. We know that for 2018 it is an additional 4 115 students in public schools. I am not sure what the split is primary to secondary. If you wanted that we can take it on notice.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Could you, please?

**The CHAIR:** Okay. We will give that number A1—the split between the number of primary and upper.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The increase in students for 2019 split—I can give it to you.

**The CHAIR:** We will take that back then.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** FTE average student growth numbers for 2017–18 primary is 2 637 and secondary is 1 478, to a total of 4 115.

**The CHAIR:** One more question, member.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I have a couple of questions in and around a particular issue. Can I just explore that?

**The CHAIR:** What I might do is move on to another member and come back to you.

---

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Okay. I will ask one other quick question then. I will take the advantage on that one and I will come back again.

**The CHAIR:** Never let a chance go by, member.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Absolutely not. Could I perhaps just seek some clarification in and around the answer that you gave to Hon Tjorn Sibma at the beginning with respect to the internal reallocation to fund election commitments. You referenced a number of efficiencies. Are they the \$69 million that is referred to as savings under—that is identified in budget paper No 3? If it is, in any event, could I please have a full list of all of the efficiencies and savings that have been re-prioritised across the department?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That list that I read out is the full list that does add up to the \$69 million.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Okay. All right.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. That is your question, member.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Thank you. I look forward to more.

**The CHAIR:** We will move to Hon Alison Xamon.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I just want to pursue and get a little bit more detail. I think that Hon Donna Faragher has started talking about some of these key issues. My question relates to two line items—“Adjustment to Commonwealth Grants — Universal Access” and “Adjustment to Other Commonwealth Grants” under the heading “Spending Changes” on page 160. Can the minister elaborate on those spending changes and the reasons for them and whether the state is worse off because of the changes to those grants?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** In respect of universal access—perhaps while the officers are finding information on the second one—this is regrettable but the federal government has decided, again, to renew that funding just for one year. We have funding for universal access, the four-year-olds program, for the 2018 school year but it is just for one year, which is what they have been doing in the last few years—renewing it one year at a time. I made the point in fairly blunt political terms to Minister Birmingham that given the federal electoral cycle, we know that they are going to keep funding this. They are not going to cut it because politically it would be crazy for them to do it, but it is regrettable that they have decided, yet again, to only do it for one year. It just does not provide us with certainty of funding going forward. The point that Minister Birmingham made to me was that he is trying to engage some of the other jurisdictions in a conversation about where their four-year-olds do the four-year-old program. Ours do it in a school setting. For those jurisdictions that do it in a childcare setting, he has the view that those parents are, effectively, double dipping, because they are getting access to the childcare benefit as well as access to the universal access funding from the federal government. I can understand him having that point of view but what that means is—it is not necessarily a view I share, but I can understand how he could form that view—that he has put off making an ongoing commitment to universal access. He wants to use it as a bargaining chip, effectively, for conversations with those other jurisdictions. It will not be a conversation with us. It will be with those other jurisdictions. That is meaning we have more uncertainty.

The second part of your question was about adjustment to commonwealth grants. The adjustment to other commonwealth new and revised specific programs includes these things: NAPLAN online, the One Life Gatekeeper training and train-the-trainer project, which sounds fascinating—I have no idea what that is—the low socioeconomic status school communities, rewards for great teachers, independent public schools, universal access 2016–17, support for students with disabilities, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, collecting nationally consistent data on students with disability and the review of the disability standards in education projects;

improving outcomes for students with disability, funding for the Indian Ocean territories, and support for students with disabilities capital funding. If you wanted any more information about any of those, I would have to ask one of the officers.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** What I would like to know generally is: are we worse off because of the changes around those grants in any particular areas?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am advised that it is actually about timing differences. It is less about less money and more about adjustments in timing.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. I have another question as well. The ninth line under “Other”, “Revisions to Student Enrolment and Cost Growth Forecasts”, why has that been revised and what are the drivers of lower predicted enrolment?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Just tell me where you are again.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am on page 160 and the ninth line under “Other”, “Revisions to Student Enrolment and Cost Growth Forecasts”. I am wanting to know why that has been revised and what are the drivers of lower predicted enrolment and what changes in number are predicted for each year over the forward estimates?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The main changes incorporated into this adjustment are the revised student enrolment forecast based on 2017 semester 1 census figures, which incorporated the April 2017 revision to state population projections and cost indexation updates—you might recall there has been some public debate about the population projection changes; revised transition adjustments for schools transitioning to the student-centred funding model following a review of the school level factors; the 2020–21 0.5 per cent indexation dividend; a reduction in insurance premiums as advised by RiskCover; and a revision to the projected growth in funding for students with disabilities. It does not result in less funding for students with disability; it is a reflection of a change in the growth projections. Because there are fewer of them, all those costs come down, because there is a smaller pool of those students. There is also a revision of the salary rates, due to the average cost of school staff growing by a lower rate than anticipated as a result of changes to the composition of staff, and a review of superannuation.

[10.20 am]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Again on page 160, the sixth line item is “Local Projects Local Jobs”. I am happy to take this on notice if necessary, but can I request a breakdown of the projects being funded under this line item?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** There are many.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** If so, I am happy to take it on notice.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I also refer to the seventh line item, “Mental Health”. I am just wanting to get some more information about the programs that are being run under this area—the programs being done and to which schools—and also I was wanting to get some information about who has developed those programs and, importantly, who is going to be delivering the programs.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** This is around the level 3 positions. We made two election commitments around how we would add teaching FTEs by increasing numbers of level 3 teachers, and one of those was around evidence-based programs and schools being able to identify a level 3 teacher who would effectively be, if you like, the school lead or the school coordinator for whatever program that school

chose to engage in. You would be aware, I am sure, that there are a range of programs in place now. Schools now use a range of programs. What we said in our election commitment was that we would provide this additional resource so that more schools could run those programs. They do need to be evidence based, so there needs to be identification that the program is sound. Schools will choose which program will meet their particular needs. You will be aware, I am sure, given your role immediately prior to coming into this place again, that there are increasing numbers of students now presenting at school with what I would characterise, as a nonprofessional, low to mid-level anxiety issues, and then there are far more serious mental health issues presenting as well. That means that those children are not ready to learn in the classroom and our teachers, while highly professional, are educators; they are not mental health professionals. We wanted to provide schools with additional assistance so that they could pick the evidence-based programs. We would anticipate that the school will choose a particular program. We will engage with the non-government organisation, generally, that provides that program, and the level 3 in the school will be the lead—the coordinator—for that program in that school.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So, minister, pursuing this further—I agree that evidenced-based programs are quite critical, because you can actually do more harm than good if you have poorly conceived mental health programs—can I get a little bit more information about what guidance is given to those individual schools when they are trying to ascertain what appropriate programs to be running in their schools?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The schools will use the resources that they already have, to a certain extent, which is their school psych team, so they already have access to school psych services, and there is a resource available centrally, I understand, but I will get the director general to add to that. They will work closely with the mental health professionals already in the education system to identify the programs that best meet their needs. I might ask the director general to add some additional information to that.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Schools already work really closely with our school psychologists, as the minister was referring to. We now have a very strong relationship with both the Mental Health Commission—we are in partnership with them particularly around the school suicide response and prevention project, and so we are a lead partner with the Mental Health Commission—and also the child and adolescent mental health service and the Department of Health school health services, not only the school nurse, but a broader range of agencies that we can work with then. It is quite evident, when you are in schools, that teachers are confronted with students that they feel have potentially some mental health issues, but we do not leave it to teachers to make that diagnosis. While they are terrific, they are not qualified, so we have the full range of mental health support for teachers—not only for the students, but also for the programs themselves. Most often in our secondary schools where a lot of the programs are run—and primary, but mainly in secondary—they will do it in partnership with the school psych, with CAMHS and with Mental Health Commission workers. We are making sure that the programs that are chosen—it is hard to get one program for a whole school that will suit all the kids, so we are looking at individual interventions and whole school interventions to make sure that they are evidence based. We have behaviour, and we have health—particular schools, with people with expertise in there who go out and do outreach work to work with the schools around programs and around individual student intervention plans, but it is all done in concert with health professionals.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I please ask, on notice, for a breakdown of what programs are being accessed and in which schools?

---

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We can endeavour to provide you with a list of programs that schools use now. As to what programs they might use in the future, or which ones they are considering now, I am not sure we can do that. We will endeavour to give our best effort at it. I know I asked a similar question in opposition, and I was given quite a small list, and there were more programs beyond that. We will do our very best to get you a list of the programs that we are able to, bearing in mind that every school gets to pick, now, their own programs, so it could be quite labour intensive. We will take it on notice, and we will endeavour to get you as much information as we can. It may not be completely everything that everyone is doing at this particular moment. I am also being advised that we might have to take—we will give it our best shot, that is what I can say. We may struggle to survey every individual school and get the answer back in the time that the committee requires.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** In which case, I may need to just put a question on notice.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I think that might be safer.

**The CHAIR:** So we will not be taking that on notice?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I will not take that on notice, but I will be putting it on notice through the normal process, if that is okay.

Again, referring to page 160 and the tenth line under “Other”, “Non-Government Human Services Sector Indexation Adjustment”. Can you please explain what that is?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** There are a range of organisations, the member would be aware, that the Department of Education contracts to provide a range of services, and there is a reduction that represents a revision down of the indexation rate. The reduction for 2017–18 is 0.83 per cent; for 2018–19, it is 2.25 per cent; and there is a reduction of 2.5 per cent for the forward estimates. The total reduction across the forward estimates is \$589 000.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Have there been any decisions, or are there any plans, to close any schools across the forward estimates?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No; no decisions have been made. There is a formula in place which effectively puts schools on a watch list. It is the same formula that was in place under the previous government. For regional rural primary schools—someone, I am sure, will pass me a copy of the formula in a minute—they have to have had less than, I think, 10, or it might be 15, students over the past two years, and then there are other elements to the formula as well. Ultimately, however, the decision is made by the minister. There are a handful of schools now on that watch list. I have made no decision. This is the criteria: there has been a consistently low average enrolment for at least two years, being 10 students or fewer for remote community and isolated schools, 15 students or fewer for rural primary schools, and 150 students or fewer for metropolitan primary schools; there is no indication of growth in student numbers in the foreseeable future; for rural schools, students are within the daily travel of another school; the nearby school has the capacity to enrol students from the closing school with minimal or no capital works; and the school does not cater for special groups of students, such those enrolled in an intensive English centre, and there is no intention to change this in the future. The ones that were previously closed in the last three years included Buntine primary, Latham primary, Tincurrin primary and Grass Patch primary and Ballidu. I am sure this is where the member is going to go; based on current census data, the watch list today includes Spearwood Alternative School, Woodanilling, which I never pronounce correctly, and there is a remote one, Jungdranung. I have had a conversation with the member for Woodanilling —

[10.30 am]

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Peter Rundle?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Of course; thank you. I have had a conversation with him about this already and I have asked him to go and consult with the community and come back to me. I would not make any decision about this without talking with the local member and making sure that they are engaged in their local school communities. I spoke to him a few weeks ago now. It is a difficult decision to make because schools matter to their local communities. I do not have a view about whether I am going to make a decision to close any of those. Right now, I have identified two respective local members. They need to be having the conversation with their communities and getting back to me.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Thank you. I think you answered my first three questions in response to my first, so I will move onto another area.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I knew where you were going.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Very helpful, minister. I will move onto another area—the questions that I put on notice which you answered in relation to residential boarding costs. There is quite a marked difference between the boarding costs that are associated with residential colleges versus the residential component of agricultural colleges. Is there a reason for that?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I suspect it is a quirk of history. The member would be aware that effectively they were two separate agencies —

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Until very recently.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** — under the Country High School Hostels Authority, which is now part of the Department of Education. Historically, they have come from two different places, but I might get the director general to talk a little bit about that.

**Ms O'NEILL:** There is a differential in the cost that you have referred to then. At this stage, it is probably pretty directly an economies-of-scale issue. In one group there are nine; in one group there are five, and so similar costs are spread across numbers of students. Economies of scale give residential colleges, of which we have nine, and five of the ag colleges, and the numbers of students spread across there gives an economy of scale in the residential colleges that we have not quite got in the ag.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I understand in relation to the application of the boarding away from home allowance that there is a component of that which is for, I think, an agricultural special subsidy which applies only when a student cannot claim the assistance for isolated children. Is that correct? Could you perhaps explain why that is the case? I guess that might then further alter the differential between the two residential boarding costs.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am not aware of that component that you are referring to, so I am just going to get some additional advice. I will ask Stephen Baxter to provide the answer to that.

**Mr BAXTER:** The special subsidy for the students attending agricultural colleges who are not eligible for the assistance for isolated children came in around 2008. At that point in time, it was seen as a way of supporting families whose students went to an ag college who were not traditionally isolated students; that is, they may have lived in the metropolitan area, but were choosing to attend Harvey Agricultural College, for example. They did not meet the AIC's 56-kilometre rule from the nearest school providing that year level education. It was really supporting choice rather than isolation.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** If you were an isolated student, say, in Esperance, and you wanted to choose an education path in agriculture, and obviously Esperance does not have an agricultural college so you would be off to Cunderdin ag, you would only be eligible for the BAHA component; you would not be eligible for AIC. Is that correct?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will ask Mr Baxter to answer that.

---

**Mr BAXTER:** It depends how far out of Esperance you lived. Again, it is that 56-kilometre rule or there is another distance from the nearest transport to the school. Esperance has a farm school down there, and a particularly good farm program, but you are quite right; we have students attending Cunderdin who come from Esperance. It is really down to individual circumstance. If the student lived in the town of Esperance, they would not be eligible for the assistance for isolated support, obviously, but they would have been eligible for the special subsidy for the \$785 portion of BAHA.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** On this same issue, I take it your answer to question (2)(b) of my question on notice relates to estimated revenue from student boarding fees.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not have that in front of me; I am going to see whether I can get it in front of me.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** With the estimated revenue, there is an asterisk against the forward estimates years which relate to projected CPI. Is it therefore safe to assume that boarding fees at residential colleges as well as the boarding component of agricultural colleges increase annually in line with CPI? Is that the policy?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is a very good question, and I do not know the answer to it, so I will find someone who does.

I am advised, honourable member, that we are required to review it every year as part of our fees and charges. Yes, it will be subject to an annual review, but that is as it has always been.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I want to move on to another area and that is in respect to question 3 on notice with regard to the Moora residential college. Your answer to (3)(c) refers to some work that is currently being undertaken to mitigate some of the most urgent works that are required at the college and you provided me with a building condition audit report from 2012, I think, from memory. You talk about these works being funded from the maintenance budget. Are you talking about funds held by the Moora residential college itself, or would they be funds that would be appropriated from the department to the college?

[10.40 am]

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** It is the department. It is funds from the department; there is an overarching maintenance budget.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Do we know the quantum of funds that might be available to deal with the task of mitigating the risks and noncompliance items at the college?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Your question is: what is the total pool of funds available?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** That would be able to support this effort.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am not sure I can give you an answer to that; the maintenance budget is large. It is never large enough, but it is large, and flexible enough that if something urgently needs to be done, it is done. It just means you shift the priorities around. I am not sure I can be more specific than that.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Okay. Obviously some consultants have been engaged to determine the scope of works, so that will be separate from but in addition to the building condition audit of 2012 and the PDP of May this year.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is my understanding. That it is in addition to certainly the BCA and the additional work you referred to, yes. Additional to.

---



**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Okay. Do we know when that consultant will be able to report to government?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I might ask Mr Fischer. Are you able to give us what the expected time line is?

**Mr FISCHER:** The report is imminent. We have received a draft of some of the information. A number of inspections have been undertaken to determine the required work. I have received a portion of that, so we are putting that together at the moment.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Okay. Has that identified the approximate cost of the most immediate works that are required?

**Mr FISCHER:** There is some funding identified but it is not the total funding as I understand it. We are still reviewing that.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 161, under the heading “Significant Issues Affecting the Agency”, and the second last dot point regarding the student-centred funding model and the review of that. Is it possible—this might have to be taken on notice—to provide a list of the larger schools that will have funding reduced and the smaller schools that will be receiving additional funding under that change?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No, because the review has not been completed yet, so there was an adjustment made in this budget to 26 larger high schools and money taken from them as part of an equity measure and reallocated to a number of smaller schools, but the review of the student-centred funding model is a work in progress. We anticipate it to be completed in the first half of next year, but we are not going into it with a list of what schools will be affected. We actually want to look at the model itself and make sure that if there are any other anomalies like this one that occurred as a result of economies of scale, under which the larger secondary schools did well, we can pick them up. In the review we want to look at how the funding is allocated and distributed, based on the learning needs of individual students; we want to make sure that funding is responsive to the difference in circumstances of individual schools and their students; we want increased flexibility for principals with regard to financial and workforce management decisions; and we want a simple and transparent funding model. I have to say, all of those things were elements that were canvassed in the thinking behind the first iteration of the model. We just want to make sure that it is still on track and meeting those general objectives.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Further to that, is the full amount of the change from the larger schools being passed on to the smaller schools; is there any loss along the way?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The full amount, no; it is about half, I think. Half was used for general savings and the other half was reallocated to 37 smaller secondary schools; so, from 26 schools to 37.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I refer again to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 172, and a line item towards the bottom of the page, “Funding Included in Royalties for Regions Administered Item”. I am wondering if we can, again maybe on notice, have a list or breakdown of what that administered item is.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am on page 172.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** The very last line item before “Total Funding”.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes. I am advised that it is administered funding for the election commitment we made to upgrade Broome Senior High School.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Thank you. I refer now to page 169 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and planning for City Beach Residential College. I would like to know a bit about what that entails and also the proportion of students boarding at that facility who are from regional areas.

---

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You are asking about the dot point under the heading “Residential Colleges”?

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Yes, City Beach.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That residential college was established on that site primarily to take country students who were enrolled at Perth Modern School. The previous government, as part of its western suburbs strategy, announced some upgrades, particularly around the kitchen and the living space. As part of our election commitments, we agreed to honour the previous government’s commitment to carry out those upgrades to that college. It primarily takes students who go to Perth Mod; it might take students who go elsewhere as well. I think it does, but I am led to believe that most of the students who go there attend Perth Mod.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I refer now to the boarding away from home allowance on page 160 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I am just trying to get some understanding of the proportion of students who receive the boarding away from home allowance and are attending regional residential colleges versus schools in Perth.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, I think I have a note about that. If I get my act together, I will find it! Honourable member, there are in total 1 556 students receiving the boarding away from home allowance. Of those 648.25—do not ask me how that works!—attend public school, and 907.75 are attending non-government schools.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Is there a proportion of those who are in regional schools?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Do you mean attending regional schools?

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Some of them would; the government ones would be. I do not have the numbers. I would expect that most of the non-government students would be in Perth; not all of them, but most of them.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** There are a number of Anglican and other schools in regional areas, too.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not know if I have that information.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Can we perhaps take that on notice?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I do not know if I could get it, because if they are not enrolled in public schools, I would not necessarily have access to that information. My sense is that most of them would be attending non-government schools in Perth, but I am not sure that I could answer that. Let us see what I can find for you.

It turns out that I have got a list of the schools. It does not tell me where all of them are. I can probably give you this list; I will have to take it out of the piece of paper that it is on. Perhaps if I take that on notice. I can give you the list of the non-government schools and you will be able to tell from that where they are. It is certainly the case that most of them are in Perth; I can tell that just by looking, but I can see some in Geraldton and places like that as well. If we can take that on notice to provide the list of non-government schools.

[*Supplementary Information No A2.*]

[10.50 am]

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** I have a couple of quick questions, minister, about schools in my electorate. If I could take you to page 171. Under “New Works”, you would be aware, minister, that Collie Senior High School had a particularly difficult period during the eight years of the Liberal–National government, being promised money at election time and then not getting it. But I am very pleased to note that in this budget we have \$7.5 million there for Collie Senior High; we can see that halfway

down under new works. Could you just give me an idea of how that money will be spent, seeing as it is split over two years?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I can. I was really pleased to be able to fix this issue for Collie Senior High School and I was pleased to be with the local member, Mick Murray, when we met with the school board and the school community prior to the election. The commitment is long overdue but it is \$7.5 million to replace transportable buildings with new buildings and to refurbish some other areas of the school. The scope of the project has now been developed to include a new building for English and social science, six general classrooms, a science lab, two ed support classrooms and a staff and study area and other associated amenities. There will also be some refurbishment with respect to the canteen, the food and textiles studio, the visual arts studio and five general classrooms. Architects have now been appointed. We expect construction to start in late 2018 and to be completed by the end of 2019.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** That is very good news. I know that the people of Collie are celebrating that. I will go back to the significant issues affecting the agency on pages 160 and 161. Another school in which I have a particular interest in my electorate is Newton Moore Senior High. I notice that at least four of the five dot points on page 160 would be interesting to review in light of what is happening at Newton Moore Senior High. I wonder if you could give us an idea about what the government is planning to do to skill students up for emerging industries and technologies, given that that is a particular interest in the south west?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes, I can. Due to the advocacy of one Don Punch, we are able to make a commitment to Newton Moore to assist them to build on what they already do in respect to STEM. There is \$3 million in 2018–19 to build a new STEM centre to include engineering, a robotics studio, a science lab and some storage, prep and staff study areas. The planning will commence in the second half of 2018, with building expected to be completed at the end of 2019. It is important that students' access to STEM is not limited to those students who live in metropolitan Perth. It will give those students access to contemporary facilities and new technology. They are already a STEM innovation partnership school and they have a strong history themselves, so this will really, I think, lift their capacity in that area in particular because they already run specialist programs and they have embedded STEM in much of what they already do in the curriculum. They are also a teacher-development school in respect to teaching and learning science. Other schools in the local area—but not just limited to them—share their expertise as well. I think that is going to be fantastic. There is no doubt that we have to keep up. It is the case that a student in kindy this year will be doing jobs in STEM areas that we have not even thought of. If we want to prepare Western Australian students to be able to take up those jobs internationally, which I think will happen more and more in the future, we need to make sure that every student, no matter what their postcode, has access to the very best STEM education. The changes that we are going to make at Newton Moore will ensure that that happens in the south west as well.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I have a couple of brief questions in a similar vein to those of Hon Dr Sally Talbot—regionally based questions. Firstly, I refer the minister to the spending changes election commitments on page 160 of budget paper No 2, in particular, putting education assistants back in classrooms. Can the minister advise which schools in Esperance, Geraldton, Katanning, Narrogin and Northam will receive an FTE allocation, how many will each school receive and when each school will receive these allocations?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** So you are asking about education assistants?

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Yes, minister.

---

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you, honourable member, for your question. What was really interesting when we did the allocation of education assistants was we did them on the basis of equity, if you like. We did it on the basis of those schools in low socioeconomic areas, and there was a huge number—more than I had anticipated—in regional Western Australia. I took the opportunity to write to members, whichever party they were in, advising them of the allocation, because allocations were made across the state. In Geraldton, the schools that will receive additional education assistants are Allendale, Beachlands, Bluff Point, Rangeway and Waggrakine Primary Schools. The funding is spread over two school years—some in 2018 and some in 2019. In Katanning they are Katanning and Braeside Primary Schools. In Narrogin, they are Narrogin and East Narrogin Primary Schools. In Northam, they are Avonvale, Northam and West Northam Primary Schools. In Esperance, Nulsen Primary School will receive additional education assistants as well.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Thank you, minister. The other question I have refers to the election commitments under “Spending Changes” on page 160 of budget paper No 2, and the allocation of funds for a regional learning specialist team. Can the minister please advise where the team will be located and how regional schools will access its expertise?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Thank you for that. This was part of our commitment to recognise that for those students in particular who are doing ATAR subjects in regional schools, it is often difficult for them to get the one-on-one assistance that students doing ATAR subjects in other schools will get, because often it is a teacher with an existing full class load who provides additional assistance to those students. We put in place a two-tiered system of independent learning coordinators and regional learning specialists to provide assistance to those students in particular. The team is going to be based at the School of Isolated and Distance Education in Leederville; that is, the regional learning specialists. The independent learning coordinators will be in 10 regional schools; this is the overarching support. They will be based in Leederville and will be available to support science and humanities teachers in regional schools, particularly graduate and PE teachers who do not have the collegiate support of specialist teachers around them. I am hoping that we will see that make a significant difference for those students doing ATAR subjects in regional schools.

[11.00 am]

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Minister, I draw your attention to the “Statement of Financial Position” as it appears on page 175. I have a question in relation to the provisions line under current liabilities and, in particular, the nearly \$602 million for 2017–18 set aside for provisions. Does that relate to employee leave entitlements? If so, what is being done to actively manage that large liability?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** For 2017–18, it is projected to increase slightly by 0.1 per cent. The department over recent years has decreased its leave liabilities through the leave management strategies. Remind me again of the specific thing you wanted to know.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I want to know whether or not that entire sum of nearly \$602 million reflects leave entitlements, or are there other components to that?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** You are correct; it reflects leave entitlements.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** There is an active strategy in place to manage that liability down to a more acceptable figure, I hope.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If you go and ask the individual staff, they will tell you they have been under significant pressure in recent years to reduce leave liability, but, yes, an active strategy does remain in place. I might be able to tell you some more about that! A range of strategies are in place to ensure that long service leave is excised on a timely basis within two years of its accrual. There is encouragement of booking leave on a double pay for teaching staff; allowing increased work

fraction for part-time staff to book extra leave; not allowing deferrals of leave for circumstances other than medical or strong site operational reasons, so if there is something going on at school; allowing employees with accrued leave a cash-out of up to 100 per cent of their long service leave until 30 June this year; and regular and consistent email and newsletter communication about the requirement to clear it. There was an upgrade to the department's payroll system which generates automatic reminders to staff and line managers about the requirement to book and use leave. Long service leave liability has reduced from \$514 million as at 30 June 2016 by about \$72 million down to \$442 million on 30 June this year.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Perhaps tangentially related to that, with reference to the government's 3 000 positions targeted for voluntary redundancy, what is the department's likely contribution to that overall target and how are you going about finding those numbers?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Government is working through that now. The two key elements of that scheme are the first two words; it is voluntary and it is targeted. Any targets that are ultimately set would be indicative. It does need to be voluntary and it needs to be targeted. The director general of each agency will be responsible for determining whether a position can be allowed to let go. I make the point with respect to an agency like the Department of Education, where most of our staff are working in schools, where there are formulaic requirements, it could be argued that we might have an ageing teaching workforce, for example, and that there might be many teachers who might be interested in taking a severance scheme. They could all go tomorrow and I would need to replace them the day after tomorrow because you need to have teachers working in schools. It will be an interesting exercise to see what we can do with respect to school-based staff, different to what we can do with respect to central office. This agency was one of the agencies that changed as a result of the machinery-of-government changes, so there are some identifiable positions out of that where people might be interested in taking the severance scheme as well. We are working through it now. I reiterate that the key elements are the first two words: it is voluntary and it is targeted.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Those two conditions apply to every agency. Obviously you are a large employing department and I understand the difference between the school-based staff and central office staff. Nevertheless, are you working towards at least an order of magnitude or an approximate number? Is that directed by the director general or mandated by Treasury and do you work within particular parameters?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Across government we are working through that now. Literally as we speak we are working through what we might be able to identify as indicative goals for agencies to meet. I am not in a position to talk about specific numbers now across government; that is being managed. What I can tell you is that every agency is in, so every agency by now—I am hoping the director general does not tell me that this has not happened—should have invited expressions of interest from staff. We are in the process of it, so every agency is in. The kinds of numbers remain a work in progress.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** On page 160 under "Spending Changes", near the bottom is "Regional Workers Incentives Allowance Funding Change". I understand that in the next three years that has decreased due to lower regional rents and insurance premiums, but why has it increased in the fourth year by \$3 million?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I am not sure that I understand the accounting language behind this—I am sure the honourable member, given that is her profession, will understand it a lot better than I—but I am told that it is for the purposes of populating that year. I might ask one of the officers to provide you with a better explanation than that.

**Mr PECKITT:** The reason for the increase in the last year is about populating the last year of the forward estimates. Each year that process occurs where we need to populate the last out year. The

other reductions are due to changes in district allowance rates because of the mining boom and the cost of living in those areas coming down.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** So that means that that year it would have been just blank had you not had to put something here?

**Mr PECKITT:** That is right.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** I refer to budget paper No 3. On page 168 the budget contains provisional savings of \$249 million over three years for the service priority review savings to be achieved through the machinery-of-government announced on 28 April 2017 and the government's commitment to reduce the number of senior executive service positions by 20 per cent. These decisions have not been incorporated in this budget that I can see. How many senior executive service positions are there in the Department of Education? What is the department's expected contribution to the government's measure to reduce the number of senior executive service positions?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The reduction in the SES is reflected in this budget, but perhaps I will get the director general to take you to where it is. We have already begun that process.

I am advised there is no line item in the budget papers, so that explains why you could not find it. However, very early in the estimates hearing today, I was asked to identify where we had made savings, and one of those was in respect to reducing the SES positions. We will have gone from 39 to 31 in the Department of Education by March of next year. That will save \$840 000 in 2018–19 and around the same amount in 2019–20 and 2020–21.

[11.10 am]

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Going back to budget paper No 2 and page 163 and looking at the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators for literacy and numeracy in national tests at years 3, 5, 7 and 9, I note that in the 2017–18 budget target writing for year 3 students is 98 per cent; however, it drops for year 9 students to 81 per cent. Why is there a decline from year 3 to year 9 students?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Good question, and I am sure somebody here can answer it.

We are looking at page 163 and the key effectiveness indicators. If I can paraphrase you, member, you sought an explanation for why our target for year 3 writing was 96 per cent and our target for year 9 writing was 81 per cent. Is that correct?

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Yes.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I will ask the director general, and then I might get the CEO of SCSA, Allan Blagaich, to add some comments. But I will start with the director general.

**Ms O'NEILL:** If you go back in time and you look at the education outcomes, it is generically, unfortunately, understood that, in particular, the performance of students' writing over that period is not necessarily going forward. There have been some changes with NAPLAN over time with the sort of writing test that has been undertaken. It was always historically a narrative, and that has changed over time where they introduced other composition types. It is a real challenge for us. If you take most year 9 classes, and particularly the performance of boys in writing, that continues to be a challenge for us. Some people would say that the introduction of computers has affected some students' capacity in terms of composition and narrative and other forms of writing. We do not necessarily think that is the case, and, I guess, the NAPLAN online assessment will deal with some of that. There is a shift with the way in which writing itself is taught. It is obviously taught in primary schools in a pretty deliberative way. By the time you get to high school, in the past there has been

an assumption that those writing skills are in place, so we are doing much more explicit teaching of literacy in secondary schools.

The setting of the targets usually reflects some of the performance of the year before. So, some of this is taken up in terms of the way in which the targets are set, which are usually end on year end from the performance of the year before. You could even argue why are all the targets not 100 per cent, which is exactly what we want; we want all children to be literate and we want all children to be numerate and to achieve the standards as they are. But, by and large, the targets are set on the basis of the year before. Sometimes we have the problem that we have to set the target, in fact, before we have the year before actual performance data.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Would you attribute some of that to perhaps shortcomings in the last six years or going further back to the underperformance of year 9s?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** If I may just add, I think you would find even if you went back 10 years, 15 years or 20 years that there is this disconnect between how strongly they are performing in year 3 and how strongly they are not performing in year 9. I do not think it is a particular cohort; I think it is something much bigger than that, but I will get the director general to further comment.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is not all bad news around writing in year 9. In fact, we had, in 2015, 76.7 per cent of kids achieve the national minimum standard and that increased to 80.2 per cent. It is not that we cannot improve. In fact, the OLNA test introduced previously sets a high standard and students, I think, have really stepped up in terms of their performance, as has the instruction in schools—the teaching in schools. I think what we are seeing is comparative to writing performance in year 3 not just in the last six years and not just in the last 10 years. You would see right around Australia the performance of year 3 students on writing generically is stronger than the performance of year 9 students in writing.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I refer to pages 164 and 165 under “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators” for public primary and secondary education, and specifically around employees. I am not sure whether this is the exact spot to ask this question, but I will ask it anyway. Hopefully, you can answer it. What is the current number of permanent employees requiring placement in primary and secondary schools—I will bundle them up together to get through it a bit more quickly. On top of that, and this part may need to be taken on notice, what is the breakdown of these employees requiring placement—for example, teachers, admin, education assistants and also central and regional offices?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We do have that information. There are 421 permanent employees requiring placement as at 30 June. That goes across all categories in schools and includes administrators, teachers and school support staff, as well as staff from central and regional offices. Of that 421, 250 are teachers—I think it is 227. If we cannot get the exact numbers now, then we will take it on notice, but we do have the information.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Can I just clarify is that a combination of primary and secondary?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Yes.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** So you have combined it. I suppose, there are two things: can I have it separated out and the breakdown? I am happy for that to be taken.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** We will take that on notice and then we will get you exactly what you want.

*[Supplementary Information No A3.]*

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** The minister would be aware that I asked her a question in Parliament last week with respect to IP schools and any change to the policy around staffing. She indicated no from

her perspective. However, I understand that there has been a recent change to the process that will now require IP schools to have permanent staff requiring placement to be referred to a school when a vacancy arises prior to them advertising. Can I get an understanding if that is correct, what the process is and when it will take effect?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** The honourable member asked me last week whether there had been a change to the effect that schools would be now required to take staff who had been identified on placement. The answer to that was no and remains no. The difference is that they are being asked to consider the staff who are on placement. There is a process in place—I will get the director general to talk about that—but it includes making sure that we match what they are looking for with the people who might meet that requirement in the placement. The bottom line, though, remains, ultimately, that the decision will be made by the school. I have not changed that.

[11.20 am]

There is some debate about whether in fact that will assist to address the equity issue between IPS and non-IPS. The honourable member would be aware that for the small number now—the minority of schools—who are not IPS, part of the reason they may not be IPS is because of the particular socioeconomic cohort that they look after or the environment that they are in. They may never be able to demonstrate that they have met the government's requirements that are attached to IPS, but, in fact, as a direct result of the cohort they serve, they need the greatest flexibility, and they are not getting it under IPS. So there is an equity issue. What I have asked all schools to do is to consider taking those staff who are on placement. We are going to track it to see if that makes a difference, but I have not changed the autonomy of the principal to make the decision about who they hire. I will get the director general to give you some detail about how the process will actually work.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Just before I do that, it is important to note, I think, that the numbers of staff we have requiring placement, or redeployees, is the lowest that we have ever had on record, which is terrific. The minister gave information before about 421 redeployees. I have now found in my notes that 236 of those are teachers. That compares to 2015 when we had about 315. So we are in a better place than we have been previously in terms of numbers of redeployees. In fact, the total number of redeployees is down to 423; it used to be over 1 000. It has been a lot of work to get that in place. In terms of the vacancies going forward, I think the member asked when does it commence. It has already commenced, so schools are recruiting now. What they are required to do—the kind of the process that happens—is that a vacancy comes forward and they register it on our system, as they have always done. I guess previously they would have just gone straight into recruitment, except that it is fair to say that a lot of IPS have already been considering the pools of redeployees, because many of them are terrific and they are well placed to take the position. They are required now to consider the names that get put to them. They have a look at the location, the FTE, the type of position and do a matching. If the person matches, then they may elect to take the redeployee. If the person does not match their situation, they will not. It is not vastly different to what many have done. I guess it formalises the requirement to at least look, but the capacity to choose at the end of the day remains for the school principals.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Is it also, though, the case that now under this new regime that if they choose not to take on a referred employee for whatever reason, they will now be required to make a written explanation advising of the decision and that that will now be provided to central office? If that is the case, beyond providing those reasons, is there any recourse back to the school as to why they made that decision and asking for a reconsideration?

---



**Hon SUE ELLERY:** No. We want it to be formalised. We want them to demonstrate that they have considered, but I am not changing the autonomy. Ultimately, the decision is theirs based on what they determine they need. What has changed is that I want them to consider and I want them to demonstrate that they have considered, but ultimately the autonomy remains with them.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** But you also did mention, in your first part of the answer, that you are going to track it and see if there is any improvement in terms of change. If it does appear over a period of time—whatever that time period is; the minister might tell me the time period you are going to track it over—that there is no, I suppose, reduction in terms of the number of permanent staff requiring placement, do you intend at some point in time to revisit the idea that principals will no longer have the autonomy to choose either/or?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I have no plan to. I have met with a couple of groups of principals since we made the change. What I have said is, “I intend to treat you like grown-ups. I am asking you to consider it.” They would acknowledge—they do acknowledge—that those schools who are never going to be IPS have got limited flexibility and in fact they need the most flexibility. I use the word “tracking” in fairly loose terms. I do not have a time line on it. I want to look at the numbers in the pool and see if anything happens there. I want to see what are the kind of reasons. Is there a pattern in the reasons, which might mean we need to do something to assist those people in the pool? It might mean we need to do something different. What I have said to people is that addressing the equity issue, in my mind, is a work in progress. Do I have a time line? No. Do I have a view that at the end of the day I intend to remove principals’ autonomy? No. IPS, as a system of governance, has been warmly and roundly embraced by principals and school communities. As a system of governance, I do not have an issue with it. I think we need to do something about the equity between those schools that are still not IPS. In terms of tracking, the department already monitors recruitment practices in any event, so there is nothing additionally scary about that; they have already done that.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 164 of budget paper No 2, “Explanation of Significant Movements”, and to the third point, which details the changing requirements for the WACE, including requiring OLNA to achieve secondary graduation. Can I please get an idea of how many students did not graduate last year because they did not achieve OLNA?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I can get you that number, but I will make a general comment if I may. Again, I would say credit where credit is due. There were people who were very dubious—I may well have been one of them—about whether or not the introduction of OLNA would actually have any impact on lifting literacy levels to the extent that it had an impact on the number of students for whom we could demonstrate improvement. On the limited information that is available so far, I am really impressed with the difference it has made. I will perhaps get the director general or Allan Blagaich to talk about that. They can give you the specific numbers, but it would appear to me—the director general made a comment about this earlier—that it did require teachers to focus and it required students to focus. I think the result so far has been positive. I am conscious of the time.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am conscious of the time, too, minister, so if I can help direct, perhaps, part of the answer. What I am actually also wanting to know, apart from how many did not graduate as a result, is how many of these students were from a non-English speaking background, whether there were any allowances made for students with a diagnosed learning difficulty, and also whether there is any specific support which is being provided for early intervention to help prevent students failing to achieve the WACE?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Sure. I am going to refer the question to Allan Blagaich in a minute, but I will just say this: those issues you raise about particularly vulnerable groups have been addressed, and are in the process of being addressed, by SCSA. Work is literally underway to ensure that we take

---

account of the needs of particularly vulnerable groups. I will ask Allan Blagaich to provide more detail.

**Mr BLAGAICH:** I will take the second section first. It is difficult to track students from a non-English speaking background because we do not have a common system of identification across public, independent and Catholic schools. However, we have put in modifications or adjustments that can now take place as a result of watching what was happening last year. We have now altered it for this year. If a student identifies, and we have got criteria, as being from a non-English speaking background and would qualify to do English as a second language in year 11 and 12, we will provide adjustments, which provides them additional reading time. We know that these kids need longer time to process. They just need longer reading time. They can generally get to the response if they are given that additional time. That is being introduced this year and will be run out. We also have made some adjustments for students who perhaps require additional support getting through; that is, to be able to access the foundation courses. These are new courses that were written for year 11 and 12, specifically for students who have not met the minimum standards at the end of year 10—not the NAPLAN 9, but the end of year 10. We are going to allow students to access those programs. Many times we have got kids that have arrived from interstate, kids who have not sat NAPLAN along the way or who do not sit OLNA in year 10. Our previous ruleset excluded them from participating in the foundation courses. As a result of some forums we have held with principals of schools where those numbers were high, we have decided to make that adjustment. That communication is going out to schools next week, which I think will alleviate a lot of the concerns that people have had.

[11.30 am]

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, member. I am going to move on to —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I just ask that the numbers be quantified?

**The CHAIR:** No. I am sorry.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I want to ask a question, which you might not be able to answer, in relation to the school chaplaincy program. I am not sure when the agreement comes to an end with YouthCARE, but one of the frustrations that I have in the Agricultural Region is the religious affiliation requirement, which, I think, is a stipulation of the federal government, resulting in some of my schools having funding that they cannot access because they cannot attract a chaplain to some regional locations. Is there anything that the state can do to try to resolve that or perhaps deal with some of the schools that might have funding but, because of the religious requirements, cannot get the chaplain at the school?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** It is a vexed issue. In terms of when the funding runs out, we are funded for the 2018 school year by the commonwealth, so we are locked into the requirements of the commonwealth. Having regular conversations with Stanley from YouthCARE, I know that they struggle to find chaplains outside the major rural centres—some of the smaller towns and smaller communities. They do, I am told, provide some outreach services. I might take that on notice and have a bit of a think. I would not want to raise expectations because I do not have a bucket of money that I can throw at it. I think we are locked into the requirements of the commonwealth. I am not sure how much flexibility, if any, I have, but I am prepared to have a look at it.

[*Supplementary Information No A4.*]

**The CHAIR:** Thank you to all agency representatives, minister and members. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice, highlighted on the transcript, within seven days of the hearing. Responses to these questions are requested within 10 working

days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these via the new electronic lodging system on the POWAnet site by 12 noon on Monday, 23 October 2017. Once again, I thank you all for your attendance today.

**Hearing concluded at 11.33 am**

---