

Division 24: Education, \$5 871 014 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Education.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General.

Ms M. Sands, Deputy Director General, Schools.

Mr J. Bell, Deputy Director General, Student Achievement.

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

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

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

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

Mr R. Thomson, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Mr R. Miles, Director, Teacher Registration.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point—no rhetoric and no preamble, please. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

We are dealing with division 24, Education. I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349, new initiatives and the line item “Inner City Primary School Business Case”. The business case project is over five years at a cost of \$1.3 million. How long does the minister foresee it will be before this school is actually built?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget allocation is for the business case, not for the actual building of the school. It is scheduled to open in the first term of 2028.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that, the minister visited Highgate Primary School. I have visited Highgate Primary School. Given that the inner-city primary school will be another avenue, I guess, for those students, what arrangements are in place and what does the minister see happening over those five years for Highgate Primary School?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Education has been involved in consultation with the school and the local government authority, and the school has been in negotiations with the local government authority. We are looking at the allocation of other open spaces that could be used for activities and whether we can purchase other land that would then relieve current school parking. The government gave money to Highgate Primary School and part of that was used for a car park. It is hoped that if we can purchase other land, or have some other land allocated to us, it will free up that parking area for school purposes. We are also looking at using double-storey transportables on the existing car parks to alleviate some of the issues. As I said, the City of Vincent is looking at adjacent public open spaces that could be used by the school.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess that the minister is referring to the oval across the road. Will that be used by students for recess, lunchtime et cetera. Is that what the minister is saying?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, member, negotiations are taking place. There has been no determination of the details of that agreement, but we are looking at available public open space nearby that could be used by students at Highgate.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the minister’s experience in the world of education, does he think it is appropriate that we jam more transportable buildings, whether they are single or double storey, onto that particular site?

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

The CHAIR: Member, that seems like you are seeking an opinion, and the minister has not actually mentioned another floor on that particular building.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: He mentioned a double-storey transportable, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: All right.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member had asked me that question 20 years ago, I would have said no, but if the member was to look at the transportables we have now, he would see that they are state of the art. I went into a transportable at one school, and I could not tell that it was a transportable. It is the clever use of available space, and if a double-storey transportable is the best use way to use that space, that is what will happen. I should also add that part of that business case allocation in the budget is to look at what needs to be done at Highgate in the interim. It is all part of the business case. The education department has been working on this for some time and, as I said, negotiations are happening with the school to see what it believes is the best option and how the City of Vincent can help in that process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have modelling on how many students would potentially go from Highgate to the new inner-city primary school near the WACA? I assume that a couple of hundred students might drift across and take pressure off Highgate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member is right. The proposed new inner-city school will alleviate a significant proportion of the enrolment pressure on Highgate Primary School currently. The initial capacity of the new inner-city school will be 600 students and up to 800 at stage 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349, new initiatives and the temporary regional incentive for teachers. There is an allocation of \$9.276 million and then nothing in the forward estimates. The program had an allocation of \$3 million last year and \$9.2 million is budgeted for this year. Has it had any success in attracting teachers to the regions?

[9.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Absolutely. In regard to that spending, 48 remote and regional schools were identified as being the hardest to staff. This initiative has been incredibly successful in attracting staff to those schools that have been hard to staff.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister enlighten us with any numbers for those 48 schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: All I can say is that those schools have been staffed. There has been a full allocation of staff for the staff they required. I should also say that that payment is only part of the strategy. As the member would know, there are other parts to that strategy, including the use of teacher flying squads for those schools if need be. It is not only for the attraction of staff; it has also been used to retain staff, which has been very, very important. The success is in the fact that those schools have been staffed. Moreover, 791 fewer days of flying squads were used in term 1 of 2023 compared with term 1 of 2022 because of the success of that fund.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister spoke about retention. Do the teachers who go out to the regions and get the incentive have to sign a contract that requires that they complete a two or three-year term or is it just the attraction of extra salary et cetera?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They receive an up-front payment, but they have to serve at least one year to get the full payment allocated under that fund.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has there been discussion around higher education contribution scheme relief for teachers in conjunction with this? We see the program for nurses, which is part of the government's budget. Has there been discussion about providing this relief to teachers who go to the regions?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At this stage, we have our policies and strategies in place. They have proven to be successful and we are working with that at the moment. We continue to progress the current policies that have been successful.

The CHAIR: Member, that question required only a yes or no answer. If the member wants more information, he will need to phrase his questions differently.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks, Madam Chair. We know that last year there were 672 student-teachers.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What budget item is that?

The CHAIR: What is the budget item? Is the member still on page 349, "Temporary Regional Incentive for Teachers"?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, that is right. How many teachers in their final year of training have ventured out with those regional incentives or are they all fully qualified teachers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: To be able to teach in one of these classes, a person has to be registered with the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was referring to temporary registration and when a principal brings on —

The CHAIR: You did not refer to that at all, member.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; further question. I am now referring to it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have temporary registration; we have limited registration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have any limited registration teachers gone out as part of this regional incentive program line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have those details. The member can put that question on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can I ask for that to be provided by way of supplementary information?

The CHAIR: It could be put on notice, member. There may be a bit of trouble getting information within the time frame of 2 June.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there any chance of it being provided by way of supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. The member can put it on notice if he wants.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; I will put that on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I beg your pardon, member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just another example of the transparency that we see from this government.

The CHAIR: I hope you are not canvassing my ruling, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I again refer to page 349, “Ongoing Initiatives” and specifically “School Bus Services”. This line item has suddenly appeared in the education budget. Have there been discussions between the Minister for Education and the Minister for Transport pursuant to the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework? Can the minister provide some detail as to why this has just appeared and what it is paying for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member trying to claim credit because he was a member of the review committee?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I do not mind if the minister wants to give me credit!

Dr A.D. BUTI: Things do not just appear. Obviously, they might just appear in the budget when we see the budget on the day. Discussions take place. We are a government that very carefully considers the policies and budget items that we put into the budget. As the member would know, school bus services are delivered and managed by the Public Transport Authority. The member is well aware of that, having been a member of the review committee that he just mentioned. This money has been allocated to cover the increased costs of establishing and continuing the budgeted bus services—that is why. It is additional money because of the increased costs of the service that is delivered, but it is still managed and run by the PTA.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What are the additional services? Are they extra services that go between district high schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are for nominated Aboriginal primary schools and students attending intensive English centres.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are they in regional or metropolitan areas?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have a list in front of me, but it would be a combination of both. Indeed, some of the nominated Aboriginal primary schools would be in the regions. I do not have a list of the increased bus services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide that detail as supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can give it to the member right now. The Aboriginal schools are East Kalgoorlie Primary School, Djidi Djidi Aboriginal School and Moorditj Noongar Community College. The primary IECs with pre-primary to year 6 are Eddystone Primary School, Koondoola Primary School and Nollamara Primary School; and those with year 1 to year 6 are Beaconsfield Primary School, Dianella Primary School, Highgate Primary School, Parkwood Primary School and Thornlie Primary School.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Highgate Primary School has a lot of English as a second language students. Is this to transport students from other areas to that school to help advance —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister see results coming through from the review? Have there been any discussions between the minister and the Minister for Transport? Some of the recommendations made by the committee are for implementation in 2024.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIR: There are a couple of questions there, member. Do you want to split them up?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were some key recommendations for the 2024 school year. Does the minister think they will see the light of day?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member for Roe would know, the government responded to the recommendations in the report of the committee that the member served on, as did the parliamentary secretary. He knows what the government's response was. The education department continues to work on it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: You are flogging a dead horse, but go on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No, I do not think I am flogging a dead horse. I know the parliamentary secretary is very interested as well because we put up a lot of recommendations and some were specifically for the 2024 school year, particularly in relation to district high schools and nearest appropriate school. Neither of those recommendations was taken up by the government; it said they would be referred for the 2024 school year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Education is working with the Public Transport Authority's *School Bus Services* to consider the four recommendations that relate directly to education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister confident that by, say, August or somewhere around there something will be in place for 2024 for those couple of recommendations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Why would the member say August? Why not September? Why not July? Why August?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were a couple of recommendations concerning the nearest appropriate school and district high schools. What I am asking is: will they be in place for the 2024 school year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In regard to the recommendations that have been accepted by the government, they are all on track.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair; I will take that as a yes. We look forward to —

The CHAIR: All right; there is no need for editorialising. Is anyone else seeking the call? I call the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to the line item "Additions and Improvements to Agricultural Colleges" under the heading "Other New Works". Could the minister please provide details of these works over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Could we what?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister provide details of what the works will entail? Where will the funds be spent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure we can.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is excellent.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In total, funding of \$6 847 000 will be spent on works for a number of colleges and farm schools, including the Western Australian College of Agriculture Cunderdin. They range from small amounts of around \$12 000 through to \$1.772 million for Cunderdin.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister provide the details of the funding across the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, I will not provide the detail. If the member wants that sort of detail for every single college—what work will be done, what bricks will be used, what angles will be followed and so forth—she should put it on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question. Can the minister confirm which of the agricultural colleges will receive funding over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Cunderdin agricultural college, Coodanup Farm School, Esperance farm school, Harvey agricultural college, Kojonup farm school, Manjimup farm school, Margaret River farm school, Morawa agricultural college, Mount Barker farm school, Narrogin agricultural college, Pinjarra farm school and Denmark agricultural college.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Minister, just to confirm, Cunderdin agricultural college is on that list. That is not what the minister said in Parliament the other day.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I did not say there was no funding; I said the funding that was being asked for was not being received.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. Can the minister confirm that business cases have been put forward by Cunderdin agricultural college over a number of years and that they have not been met by this government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: You tell me: has it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking the minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You know the answer, so why ask?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking the minister to confirm it.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

The CHAIR: Minister, it is the member's job to ask the questions. It is your job to answer them.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have been here for a while; I know how this works. It is an interesting dance.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is why it would have been better if, rather than being a smart-arse last week, you had waited until today.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is unparliamentary language, minister. I have every right to ask questions about issues in my electorate during question time. That was an inappropriate comment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It certainly was and I withdraw that comment.

The CHAIR: Excellent.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But the member also said something inappropriate, which we will deal with in another section. In regard to Cunderdin, the member knows the various demands and requests that have been made by the college. Not all those have been met in this budget, obviously, because of the allocation that has been made. I explained last week that an amazing number of demands are put on the education budget. We are prioritising what we fund, and that is the funding allocation in this budget.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. Given that the minister was very careful with his wording in Parliament last week, which was that the college had asked for funding and the full amount was not provided, could the minister advise what was requested and what will be provided over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is part of the budget process and remains cabinet-in-confidence.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member can correct me if I am wrong, but I assume that the focus of her question is probably the student accommodation at Cunderdin. That was not funded. That is what I imagine was the basis of her question last week. That is why I answered it in the way that I did.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I thank the minister; that is one of the requests that I know has been made, in addition to staff housing and upgrades to, I think, the piggery shed and other facilities on the school grounds. My interest in asking the question is that I know that when this government came to power, it started to garnish the agricultural education farm provisions trust and change the way that —

The CHAIR: There are probably about three questions there, if you can split them up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I can. Is the government still taking a 20 per cent dividend from the agricultural provisions trust?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just have a further question on residential colleges. I am wondering whether there is any update on St Andrew's residential college in Katanning, with which I think the director general is very familiar.

Dr A.D. BUTI: A final decision on the future of the St Andrew's Hostel is yet to be made. Discussions continue. As the member would know, the history of this is very sensitive. Community consultation is a key part of that decision-making process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree that it is a very sensitive issue. I also know that there is a high demand for accommodation, as the minister well knows. I have had many inquiries. I guess this question has been there for two or three years now. Can the minister give us any time line on the decision?

[9.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department is hoping to have this consultation process completed by midyear and a report made available for the minister's consideration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister saying —

The CHAIR: Is this still under the agricultural schools and farm schools item, or has the member gone off on a tangent?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is sort of linked to that in some way. I have a final question on that one. The consultation with the community will take place and the minister is confirming that a decision will be made midyear, or just after —

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

The CHAIR: That is not what he said. The member has to listen to the answers.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, chair, for listening to my answer. I said that the department expects that the consultation will be concluded by midyear and a report will be provided for the minister's consideration. Can I just reiterate that this is, as the member knows, very sensitive, because there are victims of sexual abuse. This has to be treated in a very careful manner, including the consultation process. I have said that the department hopes to have its consultation completed by midyear and to compile a report for the minister's consideration.

The CHAIR: Member for Kimberley.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just a further question.

The CHAIR: I have given the member for Kimberley the call.

Ms D.G. D'ANNA: I refer to the provision of menstrual products in public secondary schools outlined on page 349 of paper No 2. Can the minister provide an update of the rollout of this election commitment?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is a government policy that we are very, very proud of. We believe that there should be no barriers to education and that includes, of course, ensuring the health and wellbeing of our students who attend schools. No student should miss out on accessing period products. I am proud to announce that, as a commitment, public secondary schools began receiving their period products last term at no cost to the schools or the students. My understanding is that the rollout has been going well and will continue as the term goes on. The period products are now available. They are an essential fundamental health necessity, and cost should not be a barrier to accessing this very important medical assistance.

Just before I finish, I should also add that back in 2021, when a survey was conducted on this matter, it found that almost 125 respondents missed a class due to their period and three-quarters said that when they did attend school during that time, they found it difficult to pay attention. This is really incredibly important. I would also like to commend the Minister for Training for announcing that this initiative will now be extended to TAFE campuses across the state, which is another example of this government removing barriers to education for Western Australians.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there any measure of the uptake of it in terms of either the quantity of products or percentage of students or some such measure in the schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think so because there are privacy issues. We could work out how many products have been removed from the dispenser, and I am sure that is being done, but it was rolled out in only term 1, so it is a bit difficult to say at this stage.

The CHAIR: I am sorry to have cut off the member for Roe earlier, but he will concede that the questions he was pursuing were on a different line item. If he wants to go back to it, that is fine.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I concede that, chair. As the minister said, it is a very sensitive issue.

The CHAIR: Let us get on with it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I refer to the Rockingham Senior High School and Education Support Centre and Safety Bay Senior High School outlined on page 362. That pair of schools has been allocated a total of \$100 million. When were those schools built?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member very well knows, because he mentioned them in press announcements, they were built in the 1970s.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Were those schools involved in the statewide audit process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. That is why it is called a statewide audit, so they would have been involved.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thought that the statewide audit was still underway at the moment. Were those schools pushed to the front of the line as part of the statewide audit compared with other schools of a similar vintage?

The CHAIR: There are a couple of premises that we have not yet established are correct. The minister might want to expand on whether the audit has been completed.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The audits are done on a revolving-calendar system. An audit is done every three or four years. Not every school is audited in one year; it is a revolving system. On the member's question about whether these schools were pushed to the front, is this member making some —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to establish —

The CHAIR: It sounds like an imputation to me, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to establish how the statewide audit system works.

The CHAIR: I think the member is making an imputation.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister is saying that the statewide audit system is a revolving system. I am trying to get an understanding of how it works.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The McGowan government made a significant commitment to invest in our public schools. That is why the audit takes place. Not all schools are audited in one go; they are audited over a period of time. I do not have an understanding of the day in, day out mechanics of it. My understanding—my advisers may correct me on this—is that the auditors determine which schools will be audited at any particular time. That is my understanding, but I stand to be corrected. I should also add that it is managed by the Department of Finance, so it might be a question to pose to the Minister for Finance.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have a question on the funding for these schools. Can the minister please explain how this funding will impact on the Rockingham and Safety Bay communities?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member. I have paid a visit to these schools. It would be very hard to argue that these schools are not worthy of this level of investment. The investment in those two high schools will transform the two senior high schools into vibrant and engaging learning centres that will support the students, teachers and other staff members, including the gardeners. There is also an ed support centre in Rockingham. The idea of this investment is to more fully allow for not necessarily an integration, but the better utilisation of the facilities across the two centres. That is part of the \$60 million. If the member visited Safety Bay Senior High School, he would also agree that it is in need of this investment. That funding will be used to upgrade classrooms, provide specialist facilities and do other refurbishments. Our goal is to ensure that we provide a quality fiscal environment for our education system. As the member knows, we have over 830 public schools in Western Australia and the overall budget is over \$6 billion. The funding for these two schools that the member picked out also sits alongside more than \$350 million in new infrastructure spending in this budget.

[9.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Speaking of sensitive issues, can the minister understand how the community of Esperance, when the Premier —

The CHAIR: What is the line item for that!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — has two schools in his electorate —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me—line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is a further question about the statewide audit that the people of Esperance were told that they have to be involved in —

The CHAIR: The line items are Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — yet I cannot see any trace of how the Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools were involved in the statewide audit. The schools in the Premier's electorate were built in the 1970s —

The CHAIR: Minister, that question is rhetorical. I would not answer it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — and the Esperance Senior High School was built in the 1960s.

The CHAIR: Minister, I would not answer it—next question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In answer to the minister, were those schools audited as part of the audit program? Did this expenditure result from an audit?

The CHAIR: You will need to say “when” because the minister has already given evidence —

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, in this expenditure.

The CHAIR: Do you mean for this last year?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. Is this expenditure that they have announced as —

The CHAIR: That is not what you asked.

Dr D.J. HONEY: — the result of an audit?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Every school is audited as part of the building condition assessment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: How often should a school expect to be audited? For example, should a school expect to be audited every five or 10 years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said in a previous answer to the member for Roe, it is every three to four years.

The CHAIR: That is more like it.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will just add, for the local member, the BCA for Esperance Senior High School was completed last week and a report is due in August.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Pleased to hear it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, division 24, and the first table of capital appropriations. Mosman Park Primary School sits in my electorate. I think the minister is familiar with it; his predecessor certainly visited the school. This school is in desperate need of an upgrade and funding. I searched the budget papers and I could not find anything related to that school. In terms of facilities, it would have to be one of the poorest schools in the metropolitan area. Are there any plans at all for this school? I do not see anything about this school in the forward estimates.

Dr A.D. BUTI: My office and the department have been working closely with the local council and the Mosman Park School for Deaf Children on the proposal for an onsite car park. I would like to thank the council and the community for their ongoing advocacy in this respect. It is also good to hear that the local member is well aware of the situation. The member would be very pleased to know that funding to the tune of \$2.5 million of the asset and maintenance program will be allocated towards that project.

The CHAIR: That is a Dorothy Dixer, member!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am thrilled.

The CHAIR: Excellent!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister mentioned the school for the deaf children, which is, as the minister knows, co-located with the Mosman Park Primary school. Each deaf student has a helper to provide that student with individual care. At the moment, when a student needs individual care, the helper and the student have to sit on the verandah —

The CHAIR: Member, we are moving from capital to recurrent.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No; this is capital expenditure. Are there any plans to upgrade the facilities for the school for the deaf children so that they can have individual one-on-one spaces?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department is always actively considering how it can improve facilities, particularly for students with special needs, but I cannot give the member any commitment today.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry, I should have asked this next question as a follow-up to my other question. The minister may have mentioned this in his answer about the funding for the modifications to the car park and extending that campus, but what is the timing for that, please?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The decision was made quite recently. I do not have a time frame on it, but if the member just writes to me, I am sure that I can give him the answer in due course.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is a very easy question that we have already had conversation about. I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and the agricultural colleges. How much has been allocated for the Western Australian College of Agriculture, Cunderdin; and, what were the works for?

The CHAIR: The minister actually gave the answer, which was \$12 000, but the member has asked what it was used for.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure I have that information available—if the member can just wait a minute. The money for the preventive maintenance and minor works assessment program will be used for things such as the removal of asbestos; the assessment of deteriorating structural flaws; removing mould that is visible on the walls, ceilings and floors; removing corrosion from steel columns; roof repairs; termite infestation and damage; and any issues with the piggeries or sheds. I am not saying that all the \$1.772 million will be used for those issues at Cunderdin, but they are the sorts of projects that it will be used for.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 360 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Additions and Improvements to Residential Colleges: Minor Works”. Can the minister expand on where that funding will be delivered across the residential colleges?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I did mention the list.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No, this is not for the agricultural colleges. It is for the residential colleges, which is on a separate line.

The CHAIR: It is about a third of the way down under the line item on Harrisdale Primary School. The actual line item reads, “Additions and Improvements to Residential Colleges”.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have that information available, but if the member puts it on notice, I am sure we will provide it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there is no opportunity to provide it as supplementary information, minister?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Put it on notice and we will provide it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 and ongoing initiatives at the bottom of the page that lists “Suicide Prevention School Response”. A one-off figure of \$560 000 has been provided for the 2024–25 out year. Can the minister explain what this program is and why there is no other provision for future funding?

[9.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: That allocation in the budget under “Suicide Prevention School Response” relates to specific funding for that program, which is run by the Mental Health Commission, but there is other considerable funding for the wellbeing of students, as the member would know, for school psychologists, Gatekeeper suicide prevention training, strengthening interagency partnership, and activation of interagency communication processes. A number of other measures are not part of that specific program, including chaplaincies. The member should not think that just because we mention that amount of money under that provision there is not other money available for the wellbeing of students. Above that item is the “National Student Wellbeing Program”. We made a major commitment to increasing school psychologists.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline where in the budget these other measures are that he is referring to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member looks above the item he was at, there is “National Student Wellbeing Program”, which is obviously one of the areas. That is all part of it, under “Total Cost of Services”.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess I find it a bit strange that there is a one-off item in the 2024–25 year, nothing in 2023–24 and nothing in the further out years. Can the minister describe for me why this has popped up as a one-off item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That program is being funded now. The budget item that the member referred to, “Suicide Prevention School Response”, is for the continuation of the program for a further year, but as I stated, there are all these other measures for the wellbeing of students that come under the total cost of services. It would be a very wrong and mistaken attitude to have that the only way we can try to reduce suicide is by that particular program. That is one avenue. A considerable amount of money has been spent for wellbeing and more school psychologists are working in our public system than ever before. In 2021, the state government committed \$42.2 million to employ more than 100 FTE additional school psychologists over the next four years. For public schools, this funding will provide an additional 100 FTEs, as well as additional supervisors and lead school psychologists. We are providing significant amounts of money for the wellbeing of students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to the 100 school psychologists, have they all been employed? Are they in place, or are they still being attempted to be employed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are on track to meet the timetable of that commitment. As of 30 April this year, an average of 435.1 of the school psychologist FTEs were employed across the public system, which is an increase of 376.7 FTE since 2021.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to “Ongoing Initiatives” on page 349. Straight below, the bottom line item is “Swimming and Water Safety Program”. Last year was funded, this forthcoming year is funded, but there is nothing in the forward estimates. Can the minister explain the situation and what will happen to this program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The funding allocation is additional funding to the normal funding that provides for that program. We have provided that to try to attract swimming teachers to allow interschool and outer-school programs to take place. That is additional funding to the normal funding that takes place.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister confident that by the end of the budget year 2024, further funding will not be needed to attract teachers and that by 30 June 2024 it will be wrapped up and we will have enough swimming teachers for the next three or four years?

The CHAIR: That is a yes or no answer, member. If you want to elicit more information, I suggest you maybe rephrase it differently. Minister, you are either confident or you are not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am confident that the programs in place now are addressing the issues that have to be addressed. We continue to build our swimming instructor workforce, including funding of increased swimming instructors and targeting year 12 and university students to be swimming teachers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member for Central Wheatbelt and I share concerns about the number of swimming teachers in the regions. We seem to have a situation in which our schools —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

The CHAIR: Ask a question. Is the problem specifically acute in the regions, and are you undertaking any special measures to address that? That is the sort of question you ask, but fire away.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I am getting some good guidance from you; thank you, chair.

We are concerned about the regions. Does the department have any specific programs aligned to meet the need for extra teachers in the regions?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do everything possible to ensure that every school has a swimming program. That is part of the additional funding and part of the policy to target year 12 and university students. We are doing everything we can to ensure that we have swimming programs in every school. It is, of course, a challenge, as the member very well knows.

The CHAIR: I will not be doing that again, I just thought I would give you a little hint.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Any hint is always appreciated, chair.

I refer to Government Regional Officers' Housing on page 350. Firstly, what houses and where? Do we have a description of what areas the government is targeting throughout the state, and how many houses and in what locations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is really a question that the member should direct to the Minister for Housing, because Communities does an annual audit of what houses and what deficiencies are in what areas. The member can address that to the Minister for Housing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Surely the Department of Education has some target areas? There is \$3.5 million, then \$4.3 million and then \$5 million in the out years. Does the minister have a particular area that the Department of Education is targeting?

The CHAIR: I will allow that, minister, because it relates to your portfolio.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are targeting every area that needs to be targeted. We need to work on this in conjunction with the Department of Communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it the south west, the wheatbelt or the Kimberley? What areas are the most difficult to house and what areas are the department targeting?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As part of that allocation, are there any improvements in the security arrangements, especially in the wheatbelt, the Kimberley and the Pilbara areas?

The CHAIR: I suspect that might be in the minister's portfolio purview.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What areas in particular, though?

[10.00 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In the Kimberley and the Pilbara where we are having difficulty with teachers being traumatised by various parts of the community. Is the minister looking at improving security there? I can start naming towns if the minister likes? I am just worried about security for those young teachers up there in the regions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. We all worry about security, member. The member mentioned the Kimberley, and the member for Kimberley will let him know that it is a large area, but I assume the member is referring to Halls Creek as one of the areas; is that right?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have just done a major investigation into the Halls Creek situation, and we hope to look at what measures we can put in place to improve safety. I should also add that the Department of Communities, which is the department that runs housing, has a standard security remit.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My question is about security on the school, not that.

The CHAIR: No. We are on Government Regional Officers' Housing. Is that it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a follow-on question about the safety aspect. I refer to page 355 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the asset investment program, but the minister might be able to direct me to where it fits better. Where would I find the installation of perimeter fences for schools? Specifically, so that I am being up-front, Northam Senior High School has had incursions, like I suspect many schools have, of outsiders coming onto school grounds, causing problems for students and staff. I am trying to understand whether there is funding, and how does a school get it if there is no funding? I presume this is an issue at many schools.

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is not actually a line item; is that right? Is this just general budget matters? Is that what the member is looking at?

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I asked that under the asset investment program on page 355 because I could not find the upgrades to senior high schools' infrastructure anywhere in the budget. I am happy to be instructed that it is somewhere else in the budget, but my general question is: is there funding for a perimeter fence for Northam Senior High School; and, if not, what do we need to do to escalate that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are a couple of things. Obviously, sometimes there is a need for fences to be put up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I agree.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I feel that it is better for the community to be invited, but I know that in some cases that is not possible. Schools have to have funding in their one-line budget for minor works or maintenance, so that is where significant amounts of the funding for this would be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Therefore, the minister's advice is that it should be funded from within the school's budget, or is there another opportunity for the school to seek funding from the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a one-line budget, but there is also an annual opportunity to make an application for measures to combat vandalism. Therefore, there will be an assessment of vandalism in various schools and then there is an application process in which they can seek funding to assist in that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister said "vandalism". There is vandalism at the school on occasion, but this is actually about people coming onto school grounds during school and causing altercations between students and staff. Therefore, is there a specific program that deals with school fencing from that perspective? I am sure it is not just an isolated issue for Northam Senior High School.

Dr A.D. BUTI: From my understanding, member, this has not generally been raised with the department—not with me anyway and I do not think with the department. However, if Northam Senior High School or others have that issue, I would suggest they raise it with the Department of Education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question.

The CHAIR: Is it on this, bearing in mind that we have trespassed a little way from the line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Chair, may I add something?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is also the option of hiring security guards, which the department will fund.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. Thank you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But, hopefully, we do not get to the stage at which we need to have a security guard during school time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That might be a bit much.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question to what the minister was saying. When we look at a situation like that at Churchlands Senior High School the other day that had an incursion of people who do not belong to the school —

The CHAIR: Member, we are completely off the line item. This was asset investment. The budget lists the specific schools, and I gave the member for Central Wheatbelt a bit of latitude, but it is a bridge too far.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will move to a new question. I refer to page 350 and the support for teaching and learning excellence. Paragraph 4 states —

The Department continues to strengthen support and resources to improve the quality of teaching ... to deliver the highest quality of education ...

Once again, we saw the situation at Churchlands high school the other day. What strategy does the minister have in place to support teachers who are involved in these incursions onto the school grounds by people who are not students?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member would know that the previous minister released the 10-point strategy to combat violence. As the member also knows, this incredibly challenging issue has been around for some time; it is not that the situation has just started happening now. Obviously, with the advent of the filming of these events, it is receiving a wider audience. The department, through this strategy and other initiatives, has made a major statement about not accepting violence. Governments will not be able to solve everything. We need parents, students, the community, the Department of Education, teachers, principals, gardeners and cleaners to all say no to violence. That is what will solve this issue. Therefore, if the member is looking for the government to have a magic wand, it does not. But we have, as I said, made major inroads here; for instance, since 2019, principals have been directed to suspended students who intentionally attack or instigate a fight with another student or film fighting between students. Principals have been instructed to move to exclude any student who physically attacks school staff. A school with special education needs and behaviour engagement must provide assistance to students who may have complex needs and engage in

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat;
Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

violence. However, the number one issue is that we as a society have to say no. There is this policy in place now, and I, as minister, am looking at other ways that we can strengthen this policy going forward. But if the member is asking how we are going to stop it, I say “we” is not just the education department; it is us as a community.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree with what the minister is saying. It is very challenging. It is a community issue. Does the minister have any strategies for the use of mobile phones in schools—perhaps some sort of change of scenery—because it is not working?

[10.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department and I banned the use of mobile phones basically in all primary schools. In high schools, they can be in a student’s bag but cannot be used. The situation that happened that the member referred to, maybe not that one, but a lot of situations happen offsite. In regards to mobile phones, we banned them. Primary school students are not allowed to bring them to school. In high school, students may bring phones to school but they must stay in students’ bags and not be used.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We saw a situation the other day in which there was a fight inside a classroom, obviously during school hours, and it was filmed.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The students broke the rules and the principal is responding as a result.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have a policy change that might alleviate some of the situations in relation to usage of phones on school sites?

The CHAIR: I think the minister has already answered that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure what else the member would expect me to do.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the policy that students cannot use a mobile phone at all during school hours in a secondary school?

The CHAIR: Minister, I think the answer is yes, is it not?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question relating to supporting teachers. I know this issue is a challenge because teachers are told not to get involved in fights, but, at the same time, they have a moral obligation. Will there be any change in policy in relation to teachers having to break up fights or the like? It is a double-edged sword. They are told not to get involved; that is the policy.

The CHAIR: They will not be using one of those, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to lay out the challenges that our teachers have in schools. They are told not to get involved, but, then again, they should be involved.

The CHAIR: Okay: are there going to be any changes to instructions for teachers as to how they intervene in these instances?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, chair.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Principals work closely with teachers in regards to how they should control and react to violent situations. That is all part of the 10-point action plan. Action 4 reads —

Clear advice for principals, teachers, and education assistants on authority and responsibility to take action.

We have these new guidelines —

School staff to get clear advice on what actions are expected, appropriate and considered reasonable. This includes guidance on when physical contact is reasonable.

That is the situation now. Will there be a change in policy? As we speak, this is the policy. We will wait and see what happens in the future.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the new Minister for Education, are you looking to implement any further additions to the 10-point plan to improve the situation that seems to be deteriorating?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will tell the member: I take this matter very seriously and I am always considering how we can improve the situation.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What support network or mechanisms have been put in place by the Department of Education for teachers? I do know a bit about this matter, having a teacher in the family. The anecdotal information I received from teachers is that they are terrified to intervene and that they will not get support from the department, and that they will be charged with assault. It seems to me, from the information I have received, that teachers do not feel they get support. Is there specific support —

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

The CHAIR: There are about four questions there.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am asking one specific question.

The CHAIR: What is the specific question?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there specific support for the teachers to assist them in this matter and give them guidance?

The CHAIR: Full stop.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sorry to hear that assertion that they feel they will not be supported by the Department of Education. That is not the case. If that is how they are feeling, they should speak to their principal to change the attitude or the feeling they may have. They are supported. They are supported by their principal and they are supported by the education department. If they require counselling due to the stress that these violent situations may place on them, they will receive that assistance.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister outlined the good increase in school psychologists to support students in schools. Is there a parallel formal support process outside of simply talking to the principal or deputy principal for teachers who need assistance when they suffer violent acts?

The CHAIR: Excellent question, member.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, there is. There are school chaplains who provide assistance to principals. We also have collegial principals—outstanding principals who provide a mentoring advisory role for principals. That is in place. As I said, the education department will assist in any way that it can.

I add in regard to this violence issue and so forth, we have set up schools of alternative learning centres that will assist schools with intensive support of students proving to be particularly difficult. In 2022, 170 places were provided in schools of alternative learning settings in 10 sites around the state.

The CHAIR: I think the member for Cottesloe asked about support for individual teachers rather than the hierarchy in the school.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You are right, chair. I was just adding what else we do in regard to the violence issue. The department also engages external providers to help in regard to employee support services and occupational physicians to assist employees with non-work-related matters and medical conditions. It also provides counselling services for staff and immediate family, and mediation services and training to resolve any interpersonal conflicts between employees.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any intention of increasing the exclusion and suspension policy in relation to this school violence?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This estimates process appears to have the habit of wanting me to announce every new policy or program that I will do over the next year. We are dealing with this budget; we refer to this budget. In regard to any announcements I make in the future, the member will probably be the second person to hear.

The CHAIR: The member for Mirrabooka has a new area of inquiry.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2 under “Additions and Improvements to Primary Schools” and “Additions and Improvements to Secondary Schools”. Can the minister provide an outline of the funding for the Waggrakine Primary School and the Wanneroo Secondary College and the provision of education support facilities generally in Western Australia?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is an incredibly challenging area with an increase in the volume of students with complex or special needs. We have increased funding significantly in this year’s budget, which includes the expansion of specialist learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder and an increase to the educational adjustment allocation to support more students with undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties. The 2023–24 budget continues to support students with disabilities and additional needs with an additional \$137.6 million allocated over the forward estimates. This includes a \$12.4 million investment into the establishment of a new inclusive education support program with facilities at Wanneroo Secondary College that will accommodate up to 80 students. That program will be inclusive to enable students to access education at their level of need. I am really proud of the work that we are doing in that space. Waggrakine Primary School in Geraldton will receive funding for improvements and new infrastructure. That is \$53 million for the regions and \$9 million for Waggrakine Primary School.

The CHAIR: I have one question from the member for Central Wheatbelt and an indication that the opposition wants to continue with this division until about 11.30 am, so members can let me know if and when they want a comfort break.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 353 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and public secondary education. My question specifically relates to the provision of School of Isolated and Distance Education. I could not find a better

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

reference in the budget papers, but I presume it comes under public secondary education. Could the minister reflect on whether there has been an increase in the number of students participating through SIDE?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, there has been an increase.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further question.

The CHAIR: Maybe the minister can answer the first question—or has he?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I said there has been an increase.

The CHAIR: Sorry; further question.

[10.20 am]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will go again. If I have to do it by pulling out fingernails, I will. Could the minister reflect on the increase in the last four years and what he anticipates they will be over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In regard to the primary school numbers, in 2016, there were 134 students enrolled in SIDE. There were also some students who were enrolled in a school but did part of their studies through SIDE.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In primary school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They might engage in SIDE because they are travelling. Anyway, let us stick with current students enrolled in SIDE. In 2016, there were 134 students and in 2023, there were 106.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that primary or secondary?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is just primary. There were 134 students enrolled in SIDE, but some might have been doing just one course, and that increases it. That bumps it up. In 2016, that was 590 students and in 2023, it is 1 025. That significant increase is for languages. Students might be in a school that offers Italian but they want to learn German or whatever, and they can do that through SIDE. In secondary, in 2016, it was 152 students and 331 external; and, in 2023, it was 154 and 1 152 external.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It was 1 152?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. They are the students who might be travelling or doing one course here and there.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: For clarification, are those 154 students fully enrolled in SIDE and that is all they do?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, that is right.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Are the 1 152 students doing a combination of being enrolled in some classes and doing some —

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are enrolled in a school somewhere but they would do one course or some courses, or they might be travelling. I would add—it might be of particular interest to the member and the member for Roe—that obviously in some smaller schools it is not possible to offer the full range of subjects that larger schools can offer so we hope that SIDE can assist with that for some of the more remote and smaller schools.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry; it is hard following this without the figures in front of me. There has been a significant increase in the number —

Dr A.D. BUTI: In external students but not in current students—not in those who are fully enrolled in SIDE.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further to that, has there been an increase in staffing for SIDE? I understand that it is a separate school that is staffed with a principal and teachers. Has there been a commensurate increase in staffing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There has been an increase in staffing. I do not have the actual numbers, but I can provide the member with that number at a later stage.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister. I will follow that up. Can the minister comment on the subjects that have seen an increase in student numbers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In primary schools, it is particularly in languages, but SIDE has also become a registered training organisation offering certificates, and that has seen a major increase.

The CHAIR: I welcome students from Como Primary School to the public gallery. I note that their local member, the member for South Perth, Mr Baker, is down here working very hard and listening carefully.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has there been a large increase in the use of SIDE by district high schools, especially for years 9 and 10?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have a figure for districts but I have it for the regions. There has been a decrease. If we look at secondary education and compare the figures for 2016 with 2023, we can see that there are 27 students in 2023 but the number of students taking one subject or doing training has increased significantly from 248 in 2016

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

to 1 081. I think it is a very good story. We are enabling regional students to do courses that they otherwise might not be able to do. Also, there is the RTO aspect of it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It certainly is, minister, because we have an issue with having two or three students in years 9 and 10 and SIDE provides that assistance. There was no teaching in the first week of SIDE; it was all about enrolment et cetera. That put students behind the eight ball by one week. Does the minister have any comments about that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Although, as the member mentioned, the first week was taken up with determining student numbers, that was partly because the new principal, who is incredibly keen that SIDE students do not feel isolated, was working out the number of students, where they are and their particular needs so that over the course of the year teachers can also travel to the students to do some face-to-face instruction.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Should that sort of preparation not be done the week prior to school starting because the SIDE students doing ATAR did not get one scrap of learning in the first week? That has put them behind the eight ball by a week.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would know, there are industrial issues with what can be asked of teachers prior to the beginning of the school term. It was done during that week in order to ensure that proper preparations could be made and the principal was able to allocate teachers efficiently, which will have beneficial effects later on.

[10.30 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: An Australian tertiary admission rank student doing School of Isolated and Distance Education —

The CHAIR: Not quite so argumentative, member, because you are breaching the standing orders.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will an ATAR student doing SIDE have to reconcile themselves with the fact that they will have one week less of learning?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. What they will have to reconcile themselves with is the fact that for the first time, they will have face-to-face learning. They have not had that previously.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister enlighten me as to the location of SIDE? I have heard that its headquarters will be shifted; is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Given that SIDE has been so successful, we are considering options for its location.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the Leederville site potentially going; and, if so, where will the new headquarters be?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Leederville site is not going anywhere.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know that it is not going anywhere, but will it be off-loaded to a different department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the moment, the Leederville site remains its base.

Meeting suspended from 10.31 to 10.41 am

The CHAIR: Members, we continue with division 24.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 350, “Other”, specifically the line item “Revision to RiskCover Fund Insurance Premiums”. Why is this funded in 2023–24 and not in the out years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That item in the budget primarily relates to increased costs in workers compensation and property insurance and it is in line with the government’s approach to managing revisions of premiums. Forecasted increases beyond 2023–24 are subject to a future report back on strategies to mitigate premium increases in future years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What does RiskCover insure?

Dr A.D. BUTI: RiskCover funds workers compensation, property and business interruptions, general and professional liability, motor vehicles, cyber risk and miscellaneous.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the current workers compensation liability held by the Department of Education and what categories are the most claimed?

The CHAIR: I suspect that is relatively detailed and may not be appropriate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Chair, you are right. I will provide what I can and if it is not sufficient, the member can let us know. In regard to workers compensation, examples of the causes of injuries include being hit by a moving object; body stressing; falls, slips and trips; hitting objects with part of the body; and mental stress.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many principals are currently on workers compensation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member might want to provide that question on notice.

The CHAIR: I think that is probably better put on notice, member; I suspect it is not readily to hand.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister said that the budget line item for the year coming will cover a future premium increase right through the out years, and that is why it is not listed in the out years.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. In regard to future years beyond what has been allocated in the budget, as I said, that is part of the whole-of-government approach. If it is beyond 2023–24, it will be subject to a future report back. It is projected at the moment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am interested in the projections for student numbers.

The CHAIR: What line item and page?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry. It is page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, division 24, on the capital appropriation for future capital works. What work has been done on the projection of student numbers in the western suburbs? The minister would realise—there was a fault on our side on this—that projections around student numbers some while ago led to City Beach Senior High School being shut down. In fact, Swanbourne Senior High School was also shut down and Shenton College was constructed. That college is now pretty well overwhelmed with students. There is also Bob Hawke College. Considerable infill is now going on in the western suburbs. Will Bob Hawke College be sufficient to meet the future projected growth of student numbers in the western suburbs?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget provides funding to look at enrolment pressures across the state, including in the western suburbs.

Dr D.J. HONEY: A number of people from the area have indicated that it was a mistake to shut down City Beach Senior High School—as I said, that was not the minister's government's decision, I believe—and that this site should be kept for a future high school in the area. Are there any plans to divest that site from the Department of Education or is that site going to be retained for future potential use as a high school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is being retained at the moment. It is retained by the Department of Education as we speak.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister aware of any plans to divest that site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not aware of anything. At the moment, there are no plans to divest it, but there have been no decisions. Its long-term future may change in the months ahead, but, at the moment, divestment of that site is not on the agenda.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What is the projected number of students at Bob Hawke College once the expansion of that campus is complete?

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

Mr J. Peckitt: We expect the projection for Bob Hawke College to 2025 to be between 1 893 and 2 032 students. The school is built, with stage 2, to accommodate 2 000 students.

The CHAIR: A luxury, but anyway.

Dr D.J. HONEY: If there are almost 2 000 students on that campus, will there be adequate sports facilities for that campus? It is quite a constrained location.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is shared usage of the famous old Subiaco Oval. I must say that I am a great fan of the shared use of facilities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 350 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to the third paragraph on the significant investment of \$533.8 million to support students with disability and complex behaviour. Considering the length of time it currently takes for children and families to get an autism assessment, how is the department supporting children who show signs of complex behaviour conditions without the funding and physical resources required to assist the families, students and teachers?

[10.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member raises an important issue. Obviously, the diagnosis aspect is within the Department of Health's parameters, but in regard to what the Department of Education is doing, we have changed the eligibility criteria for individual disability allocation. It is now aligned with the 2018 national guidelines for the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. This means that when an assessment team determines that it is appropriate, autism spectrum disorder diagnoses can now be made by a single practitioner and that will then be verified by a second practitioner with the skills and expertise in the assessment and diagnosis of ASD, which will streamline the assessment process and reduce the impost on families. I should also add that I think it is \$8.9 million—I stand to be corrected by my advisers—of additional funding for undiagnosed challenging behaviours.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, at the moment —

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: Sorry. Just wait a minute, member. I am checking whether it is \$8.9 million in the 2023–24 financial year. It is actually \$31.9 million in extra funding over the next four years to help students with additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, we have 17 000 children waiting for paediatric assessments and a two-year wait for autism assessments. Given this funding, what does the minister anticipate the time frames will reduce to, or will they reduce?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, I do not know what it will be reduced to. We put this money in to help the situation. I hope that there will be major improvement, but I cannot give the member a number by how much it will be reduced. It is a problem and we have put significant amounts of money into it. As I said, we are changing the eligibility criteria with regard to the assessment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will there be any further funding of education assistants within this particular program?

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

Ms L. Rodgers: In terms of our funding for EAs, this government, as the member is aware, has increased the commitment for education assistants in schools. In terms of the commitment for disability, an additional \$533.8 million is being invested to support students with a disability. As the member knows, principals manage their one-line budget, and we would expect them to undertake a functional-needs assessment of the students who have learning difficulties and make sure they support them in the most appropriate way. That might be a dedicated EA or it might be other supports within the classroom, but at the moment we have met the government commitment within the department and there has been an increase in education assistants.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to contaminated sites remediation under “Other” on page 350. That is the fourth line down. Does this funding include the removal of asbestos?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It does include the removal of asbestos.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that there is no further funding in the out years, does this mean that all schools will be asbestos free at the completion of that budget allocation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not the end of the funding. In regard to asbestos, there is also an asbestos remediation program that provides funding up to 2026–27.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is no further funding in the out years. Is this minister saying that there is —

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is under another program. It is another line item, but there is further funding for asbestos removal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline to me the amount of funding in that particular line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In 2021–22, there was \$2 403 000; in 2022–23, it is \$3 million; in 2023–24, it is an estimated \$3 million; in 2024–25, it is an estimated \$3 million; and it is the same for 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. Has the contaminated site removal et cetera been completed for East Fremantle Primary School and also Merredin Residential College?

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

Mr J. Peckitt: East Fremantle Primary School is not a contaminated site, but the department has worked through the asbestos issues at that school. The funding that we have, which the minister just outlined, is for broader asbestos work across a range of schools where it is deemed required.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has any further progress been made at Merredin College? For context, I think the solution was to fence off the site and put a sign on it saying “Don’t Enter”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will give some initial comments and Mr Peckitt might want to elaborate. Any site where we think there may be an issue will be fenced off. I will see whether we have information for Merredin College. We do not have the details with us at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can that be provided by way of supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will help members to not waste their energy on repeating themselves. They can make whatever comment they want, but I will not be providing supplementary information. If members want to put the question on notice, they may.

The CHAIR: It is almost time for the changing of the guard. I want to say a couple of things for Hansard. I was poorly advised; it was not Como Primary School but Caversham Primary School. If the *Hansard* could be altered

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

accordingly. I also welcome to Parliament House members of the Milparanga Established Leadership Program who are in the gallery.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the rate of participation in education, which is the top line under the heading “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 352. Can the minister inform me what the rate of participation is in the key Kimberley towns of Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra?

[11.00 am]

[Ms C.M. Collins took the chair.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the director general to provide an answer, but we do not actually have the detail for the region at this stage. We could get it if the member wants to put the question on notice, but I do not have that information here.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does the minister believe that participation in those communities is at a satisfactory level?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I want participation to be as high as possible. I have given the member my answer.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry, I thought the minister was going give me some further information. I asked whether the minister believes that attendance is satisfactory. I am sure that he has visited those communities; I know that he is a diligent minister. My understanding is that in Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra the great majority of students do not attend school, and there is almost no attendance by students in years 11 and 12. When I was last in Halls Creek, not a single child in year 12 regularly attended school. In my question, I do not mean a child that has attended school once during the census at the start of the year; I mean children repeatedly attending school. That lack of attendance is reflected across those regions. Does the minister believe that that is satisfactory?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, I want attendance to be as high as possible. The department has a number of initiatives in place to try to improve attendance. Before I outline some of those initiatives, I should add that with a strong economy, some, but not all, of those students who would normally be in school are in employment, which is a good thing. Some of the programs that we have put in place seek to case manage targeted groups of students. We have reinstated communication strategies and introduced events to make the school more attractive so that it is seen as a cool place to be. We are focusing on contacting parents about unexplained absenteeism. We have formed partnerships with other third parties such as the Stephen Michael Foundation in the Shire of Laverton to implement rising leaders’ programs for high school boys to improve the level of attendance. We have run a senior leaders conference in Kununurra that included a focus on sharing attendance improvement strategies. Attendance officer support is also provided at community meetings and on home visits and on country learning. This is a very difficult area. As the Minister for Education, it concerns me when students are not at school, but the Department of Education is doing what it can. As the member would know, this is about more than just the education department; other community initiatives also have to be addressed.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Given those programs, have we seen any material improvement in attendance at those schools in the last 12 months?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, in some schools, and not so in other schools.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Do you have any —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have that information in front of me, but if the member wants to put it on notice, we will try to help him. The director general has told me that we can provide that information.

The CHAIR: Member, would you like to put that on notice?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, I would like to put that on notice. Are there attendance officers at those major regional centres who help students to attend school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are those attendance offices located in those communities or do they travel to those communities from a major regional centre?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the DG to address that.

Ms L. Rodgers: They work from the regional office. In some instances, they are school based, but they work directly with the schools in need.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will do this question in two parts; hopefully the minister can be tolerant of this. Is the regional centre Broome; and, in which communities is an attendance officer located?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The region is the Kimberley.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, where are they located? The director general said that they were located at a regional office in some communities.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: We might be able to provide further information if the member puts the question on notice. We have an officer in Broome and we have just appointed a dedicated youth attendance officer to start in Halls Creek during term 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to new initiatives on page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and specifically the independent review of Western Australia's university sector. Nearly \$1 million has been provided over those two years. When will the review be released and will it be made public?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The university review should be completed in October. It is a six-month review and the final report should be handed to government in late September 2023. What happens after that remains to be seen.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is this review looking at universities and their early offers? Does the minister have any comments to make on the early offer situation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not directly related. I do not know what the independent review panel's final report will say on this, but the member knows that there has been a lot of commentary on this matter. I believe that the member has agreed with some of my comments on this subject. The department and the School Curriculum and Standards Authority are looking at this issue of university pathways.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree with the minister in some ways. Does the minister think that there is a concrete way forward with this? The Premier said that we need to have an inquiry about the early offer process and the minister tends to agree with him. Can the minister enlighten us as to where he thinks this is going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have met with the vice-chancellors and outlined my expectations. As I mentioned, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is looking very closely into how we can improve the ATAR participation rate. We are also looking further at the whole issue of pathways to university. SCSA and the education department are both looking very carefully at this issue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister foresee that the early offers will return to being made in September, like in the eastern states, so that students—as the minister said when he first came into office—do not take their foot off the pedal too soon with their studies?

[11.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Universities have agreed to delay it to July, as of now. We are still seeking clarification, but at least three universities have said that they will not be giving unconditional offers anymore. We are still working out what it means when they say “unconditional offer”.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 under “Spending Changes”, following on from the member for Roe's question on the review of Western Australia's university sector and the line item above, “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”. The note about the two states —

Existing Department spending has been reprioritised to meet some or all of these costs.

Could the minister advise what was unfunded to fund those two line items? What was bumped down the list and where did the funding come from?

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

Mr J. Peckitt: Each of our capital works projects have a level of contingency associated with them; they do not always get fully utilised. When that is the case, we redirect a portion—that will not impact any project—to help fund that line item.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister elaborate on the line item “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We continue to look at the whole issue of school enrolments and the staffing requirements of that. We will continue to look at that throughout the state.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, minister; I am not quite sure what problem the department is trying to address with the development of the business case.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are looking at what relief needs to be acquired in our education system to meet increased demand.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the minister mean in relation to staffing or the additional funding of secondary schools? Sorry, minister; I do not understand.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will pass this to Mr Peckitt.

Mr J. Peckitt: Not long ago, the former minister announced the Shenton modular to take place to support growth at Shenton College. Part of that announcement was to do a business case to look at broader relief in that area. This line item will be about developing a business case to look at broader relief to Shenton College and the schools around it.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Specifically, is it in relation to Shenton College numbers and the impact that is having on the schools in the surrounding catchments?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. My general response earlier was to say that although this item is looking at particularly what Mr Peckitt just said, we are always looking at what needs to be done to provide relief to enrolment pressures.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 6 on page 350 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Can the minister tell us what strategies the department has engaged to attract and retain high-quality professionals, particularly to locations that have proven to be difficult to staff?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the director general to provide a response.

Ms L. Rodgers: We have been undertaking some global initiatives to meet the challenge of teacher supply. One of those particular initiatives is the Teach for Australia initiative. Our pre-service teachers are also given the opportunity, through the board, to work in schools under limited registration. We have a teacher relief pool. We have launched a casual staff seeker app. Although schools often have a catchment of relief staff that they access, we now have a statewide app that enables all schools to access teachers who would be outside their immediate remit. On top of that, we have been recruiting internationally. We have 1 100 teachers in the pipeline who are interested in coming to Western Australia. We brought some international teachers into Western Australia at the start of this year and we are lining up further teachers to bring into the state at the start of semester 2. We are providing opportunities for our staff to be retrained. The member will appreciate that some of our science teachers might want to teach maths or other things. We are providing the Leap program for those teachers to train in different curriculum areas. We spoke today of the attraction and retention initiatives. We have put in place that additional funding to support teachers to either stay in regional schools or, indeed, be encouraged to go to regional schools. We have in place the teacher service induction program and the remote connection program under Teach in WA to support our staff in country regions. Two incentive programs have additional benefits for those in remote locations and, indeed, country regions: they get additional travel allowances and weighting in regard to their salary. There is one other thing I have forgotten to mention, but I will stop there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, there is concern about some of our experienced teachers leaving the system. Is there any attempt or program to bring them back onstream?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, we are always trying to make the profession welcoming, and also as attractive as we can for people who are there. There has been a decrease in those leaving and retiring from the profession.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am pleased to hear it. How many principal positions are currently vacant?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We would like the member to put that on notice. We do not have an answer for the member at the moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is the Department of Education. Surely it must know how many principal positions are vacant at the moment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As far as vacancies, there are none.

The CHAIR: There are no vacancies.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There are currently 28 principal positions advertised on Jobs WA.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a principal in every school. As the member would know—he is experienced in education—there could be an advertisement because a school might have an acting principal or a permanent position has come up. The advertisement of a position does not necessarily equate to a vacancy. I am told that, at the moment, no school in Western Australia does not have someone in the principal role.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that there are acting positions and people in every school. I understand that, but the question was: how many substantive principal positions are currently vacant?

The CHAIR: Member, that question has been answered by the minister.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think he sidelined it with a bit about acting principals.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me, we do not need the member’s commentary; this is not a football match. I am doing all right as a centre half-forward! We do not have this right in front of us. Is the member asking what substantive positions are vacant? I am not 100 per cent sure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will provide that on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the standard number of applicants for substantive principal positions, say, for levels 3, 4 or 5?

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat;
Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is no standard number. It varies from school to school.

[11.20 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to both page 364 of budget paper No 2 and the “Statement of Cashflows” on page 367, but I will focus on employee benefits at the top of page 364. We go from about \$4.5 billion to \$4.985 billion, which is an increase of about 10 per cent in the cost of employees, yet when we look at the total number of FTEs, it went from 42 719 to 43 266, which is only a 1.2 per cent increase. Given that the wages policy of the government was for a 3.5 per cent increase, can the minister please explain this significant increase in employee costs of around 6.5 per cent above that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I can, member, but I will allow Mr Peckitt to do it. He can do it much, much better than I can.

Mr J. Peckitt: There are two main contributors to those increases in costs. The first is, as the member mentioned, wages growth—the rising costs of salaries across the forward estimates. The second is enrolment growth. The budget includes funding for projected enrolment growth across the forward estimates so that when enrolment growth comes, we have additional teachers, education assistants and others to support those additional students. Therefore, those two combine to be the main contributing factors to those increases in costs across the forward estimates.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The papers indicate that the FTE growth was only 1.2 per cent. I appreciate that, in total numbers, it is a reasonable number, but in percentages, it is a small number. I would have thought that the wages budget would have grown in proportion to that or somewhere around it on top of the 3.5 per cent. Maybe we would get to a five per cent increase, but we have seen an almost doubling of the increase in wages cost. Therefore, are some FTEs not accounted for in the budget papers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Peckitt.

Mr J. Peckitt: There are other additional costs; for example, leave liability is forecast to increase across the forward estimates, and when that increases, it causes an increase in employee benefits.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is also the attraction and retention benefits scheme of \$8.4 million.

Mr J. Peckitt: That covers the main items of leave liability, wages growth in terms of salary growth, and enrolment growth. In the current financial year, we also had the cost-of-living payment, which was a one-off payment that boosted it for that one year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is it possible to give me an approximate breakdown of that? Even if we look at the 3.5 per cent and 1.2 per cent figures, we might say that accounts for around half of the increase.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can do it, chair. There is a \$354.8 million increase of school-based salaries due to a combination of the new public sector wages policy and forecast student enrolment growth. There is a \$49.3 million increase in non-school salaries under the new public sector wages policy. There is a \$21.1 million non-cash adjustment to reflect the department’s forecast leave liability expenditure. There is a \$9.3 million increase in attraction and retention initiatives to address teacher supply pressures. There is \$8.4 million in additional attraction and retention benefits for teachers and principals from the bargaining for the School Education Act Employees’ (Teachers and Administrators) General Agreement 2021. There is a \$7 million reclassification of contracts and expenses to employee benefits following a review into the employment contract of casual employees. There is also \$3.2 million for Government Regional Officers’ Housing rental payments. Those are the main things.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Good luck, Hansard!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much. Yes!

I have a further question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not as fast as that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Has the leave liability expenditure increased because government incentives are causing teachers to stay longer, which is growing that leave liability, or has there been a reassessment of leave liability for teachers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure how long the member has been in Parliament. This was a policy back when Troy Buswell was Treasurer. Teachers and other public servants have notoriously not taken long service leave, so this policy tries to ensure that they take the long service leave. The member’s question is counter to his argument because if teachers did have that stress and so forth, they would take their leave. They are not being forced to stay on. We are actually trying to make them take their long service leave; we are not asking them to remain.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was not trying to allege some failing of the government on this. I was interested to know whether there had been some unusual increase in leave liability that arose out of an audit or whether this was just normal growth of leave liability.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to add to this.

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat; Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Mr J. Peckitt: There is some complexity as well in the calculation of leave liability. It picks up things such as the projected wages growth as well as the connection to the bond rate. Therefore, when those things go up, the leave liability naturally increases. Given our workforce is increasing year on year, naturally the leave liability will increase year on year because of those additional staff, but also the cost of staff is going up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is nothing unusual.

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to page 350, budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under the heading “Support for Teaching and Learning Excellence”, it refers to delivering a high-quality education to Western Australian students. Can the minister provide some more information about the phonics initiative?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As we all know, literacy skills for students are very important from an early age, and we require all public schools with primary-age students to deliver an early-years literacy approach that includes the planned and structured teaching of phonics. The teaching of phonics is an essential component of an effective literacy program, alongside other essential components including oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and writing. The term “phonics” refers to the ability to identify the relationship between letters and sounds when reading and spelling. The phonics initiative requires principals to confirm in the second semester census that the phonics knowledge and understanding of all the year 1 students has been assessed. The department has established an expected proficiency in this assessment to ensure that teachers are delivering a rigorous phonics program for students and they are reflecting on their impact on student learning. The expected proficiency is being developed in consultation with major stakeholders, including the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation.

We will of course continue with this program and its initiatives, which support schools in assessing phonics progress early with frequent and ongoing monitoring to effectively identify and support students requiring intervention and extension across all year levels. To implement the initiatives, support, including consultancy, training and professional learning, is available for schools when required. Schools also have access to the quality-assured set of departmental-endorsed resources, including evidence-based instructional practices, curriculum-allied phonics programs and assessment tools to monitor, assess and support early intervention, and a self-reflection tool to assist schools to ensure that evidence-based and research practices are being implemented in the teaching of phonics.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Adopting and Adapting the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0” under the new initiatives. Obviously, we have \$3.792 million in the 2023–24 budget and it then goes up substantially for the two following years before dropping off. Can the minister explain what year it will be fully in place?

[11.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will get the director general to answer. Chair, I am mindful of the time. We were going to 11.30 am, so this might be the final question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is one or so more questions, and then we will wrap it up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is 11.30 am now. Yes, director general.

Ms L. Rodgers: I thank the minister. The funding will provide for resources to update and develop the curriculum and support materials, as well as assist teachers to prepare to deliver those materials and become familiar with the Western Australian curriculum. We know that WA will adopt and adapt the national curriculum, and this program will enable us to do that. We will also have additional targeted support in areas of mathematics, humanities and social sciences. These have been the areas in which we have seen the most significant changes in the Australian curriculum, and indeed there are additional resources in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

The funding also provides a half-day of relief for teachers of pre-primary through to year 10 mathematics across the public, Catholic and independent sector. For the program’s rollout in 2023, we are looking at English from pre-primary to year 6 in phonics, and health education and physical education, which includes consent education and first aid; that is already being looked at. In 2024, the focus will be on English, health and PE, science in P–6, and we will be looking at the implementation of English, health and PE, consent and first aid, in regard to what is going on in the classroom. In 2025, we will be looking at science, mathematics, humanities, social science and technologies. Implementation in 2026 will be science, mathematics, humanities, social science and technologies. In 2027, the final year, the implementation will be in the arts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have one final new question, if I can, Madam Chair?

The CHAIR: Noting the time, I will check with the minister. Is it okay to do one final question?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is fine, so long as we make sure we have time for the other divisions.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p80c-101a

Mr Peter Rundle; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Mia Davies; Ms Divina D'Anna; Dr David Honey; Ms Meredith Hammat;
Chair; [ms C.M. Collins Took The chair.]; Mr Geoff Baker

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 and the item “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”. What is this for and why is the funding coming out? Obviously, it is for enrolment —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will just cut you off there, member. The member’s colleague the member for Central Wheatbelt asked exactly the same question. It has been answered.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Apologies.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can we finish education now?

The appropriation was recommended.