

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2013–14 AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2014**

**SESSION ONE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Members

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Rick Mazza**

Hearing commenced at 9.32 am

Ms SHARYN O'NEILL

Director General, examined:

Mr DAVID AXWORTHY

Deputy Director General, Schools, examined:

Mr JOHN LEAF

Deputy Director General, Finance and Administration, examined:

Mr CLIFFORD GILLAM

Executive Director, Workforce, examined:

Mr ALAN DODSON

Director, Evaluation and Accountability, examined:

Mr LINDSAY HALE

Executive Director, Statewide Services, examined:

Mr JOHN FISCHER

Executive Director, Infrastructure, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Can all of the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed the document headed "Information for Witnesses".

The Witnesses: Yes.

Ms O'Neill: Sorry, we have one left to hand in.

The CHAIR: There are two to hand in. I assume now that everyone has signed the document.

Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all of your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own motion or at a witness' request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to review agency outcomes on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The committee values your assistance with this.

Would any witness wish to make an opening statement? If not, I will throw it open to questions.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Can I start by thanking you for the answers to the questions that you provided prior to today's hearing. I have a few follow-up questions to some of those and then some other questions from the text of the annual report. One of the questions I asked was about the various financial assistance programs available to parents to assist them meet the costs of attending school. I asked about the secondary assistance scheme, the education program allowance and the clothing allowance. The answers included that in respect to the secondary assistance scheme there were

some 20 000 students from low-income families who were assisted. In respect to the education program allowance, I do not think I have the numbers for that; I have the dollar value, and for the clothing allowance I have the dollar value as well. I wonder if you can—starting with the director general—where students in secondary school choose core subjects that attract a fee and the parents are unable to pay that fee, how does the department assist those families?

Ms O’Neill: Are you talking about secondary —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes; the course fees.

Ms O’Neill: So you have your \$235 voluntary contribution at that point and then there are some other higher course cost options, or course costs. As I understand it, in the policy that we have, there are some of those courses where the payment is required, and some people choose not to take those courses because they cannot afford that. In some situations schools are able to offer that course because they are able to offer it at a lower cost, perhaps, so there is some variation in course costs. For example, outdoor education, which is a high-cost course option, depending what you are doing, there can be quite a variation in the cost. Some schools can keep those costs down. In some locations, some schools are able to assist families; they find themselves in the position where they are able to assist those families—there might be one or two. In other schools, those students might find themselves having to choose a lower-cost option. It would vary from school to school. There are the allowance schemes, as you have already outlined, and they are there for that purpose. Some of those arrangements are to pay for the \$235 cost that is there and not for the high-cost options. There is quite some variation. It will depend school by school. But apart from the allowance schemes that you described there, from a system perspective there is no further assistance provided.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Just to get a sense of it, my sense of it is that for some of those secondary courses that attract a fee, you could be talking about a fee of \$40, \$50 or \$60 and at the higher end, you are talking about many hundreds of dollars—close to \$1 000, I think, for the physical education one. It is quite a wide range. If the parents are unable to pay the fee, are they guided, advised or suggested that their student should choose another course?

Ms O’Neill: That would be part of the counselling. If the school found itself in a position where there were some students that were unable to pay for high-cost options, under the policy that would be the situation. They are either provided with some alternative, counselled to look at some other options or there might be another alternative that the school can offer.

Hon SUE ELLERY: If student enrolls in a course that attracts a fee and the parent does not pay the fee, does the department use debt collectors to chase up those fees?

Ms O’Neill: Historically, the department has used debt collectors for fee collection. I do not have figures with me today, but it is not used an awful lot, but, yes, we do have the capacity to use debt collectors. Schools have the capacity, and have always had the capacity to do so.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Are there policies in place about how much needs to be owing in order to trigger, for example, a debt collector? Would there be some course fees that might just be waived, or is there a kind of threshold at which if you owe so much money, that triggers the debt collection?

Ms O’Neill: I am just consulting. I do not believe that there is a set standard beyond which you would then need to seek or choose to use debt collection. Obviously, the cost of debt collection might outweigh the actual debt itself. As I understand it, that would be a choice that the schools would make, and that is why I said that I do not think that it used in too many instances. Very often schools try to just come to other arrangements; for example, payment over time. I think many schools—certainly schools that I have ever discussed this with—go out of their way and to some extraordinary lengths to assist those families by offering other alternatives and by offering payment schemes which can go on for some years. I am aware of families that have paid \$5 a week or less. Or, indeed, the school has said, “We will seek that from you at a time when you are in a better position to pay it”, because sometimes families obviously have occasions where they are financially

worse off than other times. My experience and understanding of how schools work through that, first of all, is by providing good information up-front about what the course costs so that parents and students are well aware beforehand of what the costs will be and also trying to offer a range of options. Not many courses are high cost, but there are some that are by the very nature of the course. So good counselling, good information up-front and then I think good understanding when families find themselves in financial difficulty.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Are you able to tell me what you know today about the contractual arrangements that the department has in place with debt collection agencies? Is there one that you use? Is this something that is a common use agreement? Are there several that you use? Can you tell me anything about the contractual arrangements?

Ms O’Neill: I think it would probably be better for us to come back with some detail. I am not sure whether we have one-off a common use agreement or not. It might be better for us to provide that to you.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

Hon SUE ELLERY: The reason that I wanted to ask about the contractual arrangements was I also want to get an idea about how much it costs the department to use debt collectors. You flagged earlier that it may well be the case that there is a cost–benefit analysis done at some point which says that the amount of owing is so small that it would actually cost us more to get a debt collector to chase the money. If I can give you an example, I have been contacted by a mum. She is a working mum, but a single mum with a low income on a Health Care Card and she has three children. Her eldest child is in high school and she owes \$200 in course fees. Last week she got a letter from a debt collector saying, “You need to pay this money urgently.” It seems to me that \$200 is not a huge amount, and I am interested in what the cost–benefit analysis of that is. I have seen a copy of the letter from the debt collector. It is debt collector agency based in Melbourne. It seems to me that it is a small amount of money to be using a debt collector based in Melbourne to chase that up. I am interested in what comment you might have about whether you think that is in fact value for money. This is a low-income single mum. She is not paying the money because she does not want to pay the money; she is not able to pay the money.

[9.45 am]

Ms O’Neill: I just would not want to speculate on a case where I have insufficient information, because there is always a context that sits around any given example—what allowances is that family given? There are some families that receive allowances; it is meant to be used for school education. We would need to understand a bit more of the scenario before we even begin to want to make comment around a particular case. That would be important. Also, was the parent aware, before they entered the student in that course, of the course fees, and have arrangements been put in place? Because what I would want to say really clearly is that schools go to a lot of lengths to assist families, particularly in low SES areas of course, and the use of debt collectors is always a last-in-line strategy, not a first-in-line strategy. For example, in this case \$200 does sound like a small debt, but we would not know, until we looked at the school’s records, how many students have not paid the debt. Lots of \$200 matter, particularly in an instance where a school is offering a course and perhaps the students have accepted to do the course on the basis of a cost, and they have then outlaid the cost. I do not want to make comment about that particular case. Of course, we would be sympathetic to any family that is struggling to make that payment. Has the school offered payment over time? I am assuming that they have, because before you get to debt collection as a last resort, we would expect counselling, assistance, looking at the context, looking at the course, have other courses been offered et cetera. So rather than make comment on that particular case without the facts at hand, my general comment is that my very clear expectation is that schools use debt collection as a last resort—it is also my experience that that is the case—after they have exhausted other strategies to be able to achieve that. Mr Hale has been a long-term principal of low SES

schools; I am sure he would confirm many cases in Belmont, where he was principal, where people were unable to pay what they had committed to pay, and the experience would be that in Belmont, I am sure, extraordinary lengths are gone to before debt collection is invoked.

Mr Hale: If I may, director general, in that time I do not think we ever resorted to debt collection for that reason.

Ms O'Neill: So, it is not common practice, but it is a practice that is allowed and has been allowed, and has been used from time to time for many, many years.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Certainly, it has been my experience in the nearly two years I have had the portfolio that our public schools in low SES areas do a fantastic job at assisting families who find themselves in all sorts of pickles, not just financial. I certainly appreciate that. It does seem to me—I appreciate you do not know the circumstances of the case I am talking about—that as to the cost of using a debt collector, at some point you have to make a judgement about whether it is going to cost you more to chase that money than not. That is why I am interested, I guess, in any more information you are able to provide me about the policy. I appreciate you saying you might not have it with you today, but I would certainly appreciate it because it does strike me as being—well, first, what we are doing is just adding more stress to a family already under stress and, second, we take great pride as a nation and as a state in offering universal education; that is something we hold to be kind of a core value to us. It is unfortunate if families are not able to choose the best educational options for their children because they do not have the money to pay a \$200 course fee, or whatever that course fee is. So, I would like any further information you are able to provide me on what contractual arrangements are in place with debt collection agencies, how much does the department spend on debt collectors, and what is the cost of using a debt collector to chase outstanding course fees? You may have, in your contractual arrangements, an understanding of the unit cost per service, so you might pay a global fee for the contract—I do not know this, but you might—but within that you might understand that the unit cost of each service you get from that debt collection agency is worth \$X. That is the kind of information that would be useful to me.

Ms O'Neill: I guess this is a supplementary question, if that is how it is treated, and there were a number there. We will provide information as requested. Just to go back to something you did say there, however, I just want to be clear that students and high-cost course options do not hold students out of comprehensive, quality education. We are required to provide students with a comprehensive education, and inability to pursue a particular course would not equal not having that access to a quality education. Just for clarity, I just want to put that on the table. But we will provide information as we can. If those debt collection agencies are dealt with school by school, we might not have the depth of unit cost information you are seeking, but we will provide as comprehensive information as we can. If it is school by school, we might just need to look at the time frame to get that information.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I might just need to clarify this as well: do you think the contractual arrangements would be between the department and the agencies, or do you think schools would have contractual arrangements with debt collection agencies?

Ms O'Neill: I am told that today we just do not have that information for you, so rather than guess one way or another, we will come back with that answer.

The CHAIR: Following up on that—some of this, I think, may have already been picked up in Hon Sue Ellery's questions—I would certainly be interested in the total amount of debts you have sought to have collected; so not the amount you collect, but what you actually ask to have collected, the total amount of debt that you have actually had recovered by debt collectors, the total cost across the education department of using debt collectors, and also how the fee payment is determined. Is it per action, so it is just a flat fee of \$50 per debt, or is it a percentage of the debt that is collected? How is the cost of the payment to the debt collector determined? The total number

of debts, the total amount of the debts sought to be collected, the total amount collected and the total cost.

Ms O'Neill: Chair, because some extensive analysis may be required, we will do the initial analysis. If we need to come back because of the time frame, we will seek an extension.

The CHAIR: Your computer system would not pick up anything based on payments to the debt collection agencies, even if they are being done by the schools?

Ms O'Neill: It is whether that information is brought together at the system level. That is why we are needing to go away and provide that to you.

The CHAIR: That also then raises the question whether it is all completely left to a school decision about debt collection, or are there any internal protocols that schools need to follow in terms of using debt collection?

Ms O'Neill: I do not recall that schools have to seek our endorsement. Because we came prepared to discuss the issues of the annual report, we just do not have that level of detail with us today. I am happy to chase it up.

The CHAIR: If that is the case, can you also identify whether there is a policy in place about the use of debt collection?

Ms O'Neill: If we can have all those questions, we will provide comprehensive answers.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: I think we are talking about elective courses here and the fees you are pursuing, but with the annual levy, is that a voluntary fee paid by parents?

Ms O'Neill: Sorry; levy?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is there not a levy at the beginning of each year for primary schools, and a higher amount for high schools?

Ms O'Neill: Yes. There is \$60 voluntary contribution for primary, and \$235 for secondary, and then on top of that are these things I am referring to—higher course costs. They are general years 11 and 12 course costs that are not voluntary—they are compulsory—and some of them are higher still because of the nature of the actual course.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What percentage of the voluntary fees are paid?

Ms O'Neill: Are collected?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes. Break it up between primary schools and high schools.

Ms O'Neill: We provide that pretty much annually probably several times a year, but we have not brought that with us today.

Hon RICK MAZZA: How much follow up is there on parents to pay that levy?

Ms O'Neill: Schools end up in this place eventually, but there is a fair degree of follow up from individual schools. I think it differs from school to school. As Sue has indicated, some families do it so tough that they have standing arrangements in place where they might pay it off over a period of time. For Health Care Card holders they have various allowances, which is where this discussion started from. We have a secondary assistance scheme and we have a clothing allowance. For low-income earners there are a range of assistance programs that are in place for them as well. But schools do pursue it; some families who are even more able to pay choose not to pay because it is voluntary, unfortunately, and we would like to see an improved rate of collection of that because it is part of the school's make-up of its finance. But it is certainly not 100 per cent; it is well down on that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Des that vary considerably from school to school?

Ms O'Neill: It does, and there is enormous variation between schools, depending on how that school community views that kind of contribution to the school life.

The CHAIR: Just to finish off on the issue of debt, note 22 on page 109 refers to the reconciliation of changes in the allowance for impairments of receivables. You have a balance at the start of the period that covers the doubtful debts expense, the amounts written off during the period and the balance at the end of the period. Would the sort of fees that Hon Sue Ellery was asking about be recorded in there, or are they other debts owing to the department?

Mr Leaf: They would be largely not related to the recovery of school charges. They would relate primarily to where we might have made an overpayment of a salary for a period of time and that has become unrecoverable and we write those debts off. I can get you a complete breakdown of that in some detail if you would like, but I would probably suggest that the amount of charges in schools is a very small proportion of that.

The CHAIR: But should it still be recorded in that note as a debt owing if it is still there at the end of the financial year or if it is written off during the financial year?

Mr Leaf: If a school has entered into a contractual arrangement, albeit reasonably —

The CHAIR: Small?

Mr Leaf: Not couched in terms of there is a 40-page agreement that the parent signs for their child to take a course of study; nevertheless, there is an understanding that that debt is incurred by the parent on behalf of the child and would be recorded as a debt, and theoretically it should be included in this amount here as a receivable to the department.

The CHAIR: I think you offered to provide us with a bit more of a breakdown of those figures?

Mr Leaf: Yes.

The CHAIR: In particular there seems to be a bit of jump from \$128 000 to \$1.4 million in doubtful debts: if you could give us an explanation as to why that has occurred. Also, in 2012-13 you wrote off about \$6 million; if you could give us a breakdown of that, at least by category, and what that writing off in that particular year was compared with what you are writing off in the 2013-14 financial year?

[*Supplementary Information No A3.*]

Hon RICK MAZZA: On that page there is a line item there for livestock and farm produce at cost, at just under \$3 million a year: what does that relate to?

Ms O'Neill: That would primarily relate to our agricultural colleges, and we have some related farm schools, so that would be an expression of cost for them.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thank you.

[10.00 am]

Hon SUE ELLERY: One of the questions I gave notice of was in reference to table 21, which is on page 60 of the report, which is the expenditure on advertising and market research. That table lists five ad agencies—marketing agencies—that the department engaged to do a variety of work. I asked in that question: what the expenditure was for each of those providers, so what did you contract them to provide you with? In the answer, the provider Carat Australia Media, previously known as Mitchell Partners Australia, was used by you for placement of newspaper, radio, online and social media advertising in respect to a range of things, including the September 2013 and April 2014 industrial action. Then you also contracted with Rare creativethinking for creative services, including design, direction, copywriting production and despatch, for the September 2013 and April 2014 industrial action. I wonder if you can give me a bit more information about whether they were doing different things. It says in the answer to the first one that Carat Australia was doing placement, and Creative Services was doing design, direction, copywriting production and

despatch. I am trying to get my head around exactly what it is you contracted those two to do in respect to those days of industrial action.

Ms O'Neill: I think, as described there, one group purchased media space for ads. Whenever you place an ad, you go through an agency and they purchase their particular space. The other one, and I missed the name of that agency there —

Hon SUE ELLERY: The second one was Rare creativethinking.

Ms O'Neill: Yes, okay. So they are the creative agency that helps with, once you have the information, the layout and design and figures and colour or whatever else you want to use to get across that message. That is a fairly typical approach if you are developing a communication that goes into the newspaper.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Okay, because the Parliament has been told that there is a senior person in the Premier's office who is responsible for saving the government loads and loads of money—those are my words, not the Premier's words—on this kind of advertising and placement. I am just wondering: is it normal for you to go through the Premier's office, or do you contract these agencies separately yourself?

Ms O'Neill: Ordinarily for an operational piece of marketing, we do that, not on a day-to-day basis, because we are keeping the costs down, but there is an approvals process that exists for advertising that we go through. I do not recall if it is in the Premier's office; certainly it is whole of government. So, before you embark on a campaign of any sort, large or small, you need to get approval to do that.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Still on that question, in the answer that you provided, the provider Rare creativethinking was also involved in creative services for the student-centred funding model, the year 7 move to secondary school, the child and parent centres, independent public schools, and secondary schooling options, and then the second last dot point says "Education reform in Western Australia". At first I assumed they must be the ones that did the design for the ad campaign—the \$1.18 million ad campaign—on all those different components fitting within the government's message about education reform, but then I wondered why they are listed separately. So, all the components are listed separately, and then there is an additional dot point which says "Education reform in Western Australia". I wonder if you could explain to me what the contract was in relation to education reform in Western Australia?

Ms O'Neill: I do not have the answer, the breakdown, that you have.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will pass it to you.

The CHAIR: What question number is it?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is question number 40.

Ms O'Neill: So, this is Rare—we are talking about Rare for the creative services that they have undertaken. We have got a dot point there "Education reform in Western Australia". Most of the education reforms, including independent public schools and year 7s et cetera, are itemised there. Then we had, as you would have seen, the TV and other campaign about the Bigger Picture, which is the general education reform in Western Australia. So, while we have some itemised there, I am thinking that this reference is possibly to the Bigger Picture education reform campaign, which is more like the totality and the vision. We had some feedback from people in the community that they were unaware or less aware of some elements of the reform over others, and of course that is understandable. In the early years, if you have young children, you are more attuned to that message; if you have students who are going to high school, you are more attuned to the year 7 message. But as a totality, some members of the community were less aware of some of the reforms that might be impacting on them. So, my assumption here is that this dot point is more about the

general bringing together the reform, whereas the other items here specify specific and individual products.

Hon SUE ELLERY: You referred in your answer there that you got some feedback. You paid for that feedback, because you commissioned—I saw the tender—some market research. Are you able to tell me today what that market research cost? Was it done by any of these people in the table on page 60?

Ms O’Neill: We spent on market research in the financial year, \$26 750. I have not got a breakdown for you on whether that was specific to that particular campaign, but that was the totality on market research.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Sure. So, that table tells us that that 26 was paid to Taylor Nelson Sofres Australia. Are they the ones that did the market research on what people were thinking about education?

Ms O’Neill: I understand that they—I would have to clarify that for you.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Okay. I wonder then if you could undertake to provide—

Ms O’Neill: I am sorry, Taylor Nelson Sofres, in the answer that we gave you, is the contracted market research supplier for the department. So, I am assuming that we —

Hon SUE ELLERY: That they did it?

Ms O’Neill: — used them for that purpose.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Okay. So, in respect to the things that are listed in the answer under “Rare creativethinking”, I wonder if you could double-check for me if the work that they did for you in respect to the separate components of what the government says makes up its education reform package was different to what you paid them for education reform in Western Australia.

Ms O’Neill: So, clarification around whether that one dot point on education reform had its own particular cost?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes.

Ms O’Neill: Sure.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

The CHAIR: Do we have the total figure for the cost of those Bigger Picture adverts?

Hon SUE ELLERY: So the \$1.18 million is the cost of the education reform—I am going to use inverted commas—“advertising”.

The CHAIR: Maybe I can clarify it. The Bigger Picture adverts, the total \$1.18 million, has been spent on those; is that correct?

Ms O’Neill: I am just looking at \$1.7 million is what we spent in 2012–13; that is in totality. You are asking specifically about that?

The CHAIR: For the Bigger Picture campaign?

Ms O’Neill: We would have to get a final cost because it has not finished; it is continuing.

The CHAIR: But you must have a budget for it.

Ms O’Neill: Yes.

The CHAIR: So, what was the budget for it?

Ms O’Neill: We do not have line-by-line detail here.

The CHAIR: For something like that, none of your staff sitting here today can tell me what the current budget is for the Bigger Picture campaign off the top of their head?

Ms O'Neill: It is one campaign, and none of these particular staff are specifically responsible for the marketing and budgeting campaign.

The CHAIR: So, what level is it run from? Where in the department is it run from?

Ms O'Neill: We have a director of marketing and communication, and because that campaign is ongoing and the budget, therefore, is set across financial years, they would have that level of detail. We simply cannot at a hearing, Chair, have line-by-line levels of detail across the whole agency. We are offering to provide it to you.

The CHAIR: I would have thought that something the CEO would want to be across is how much you are spending on a political advertising campaign, rather than directing it into student services, and that you would know that figure and you would know whether or not there would be a budget. You know, the way that you are describing it today is that it is almost like it is open-ended and it will keep running until someone tells you to stop it.

Ms O'Neill: No, Chair, I think that is not a fair characterisation. I did not actually say that. What I said is that there is a budget across a couple of financial years. Yes, it is in the order of \$1 million, but we do not want to give you an exact figure today if we do not have it with us, and I did not make comment about a political campaign. That campaign was about informing the public around reforms that are going to affect their children, and that is a reasonable thing for a department to do.

The CHAIR: So, that campaign was developed in the department—the concept for that campaign was developed in the department?

Ms O'Neill: In response to our market research, we believed that there needed to be more awareness-raising around the reforms that we were undertaking.

The CHAIR: So, there was no request made to the department to consider that Bigger Picture campaign from anyone outside of the department?

Ms O'Neill: Of course we spoke to other people outside of the department, and including, as was mentioned earlier, people from the Premier's office. But the idea for needing to better inform parents was one, of course, that is our responsibility.

The CHAIR: Okay, right. I am going to put a supplementary question. I want to know what was the initial budget for the Bigger Picture campaign, what is the current budget for the Bigger Picture campaign, and when is that due to be completed; and if you can provide us with a copy of all of the research—the research that caused you to consider the campaign, and any research that you have done, and the cost of that, and also a copy of any reports that have been provided to the agency by the research companies.

Ms O'Neill: Absolutely, and we are in the middle of the ongoing test back to the market about whether that has assisted and improved people's understanding, and the initial feedback is that it has done that.

The CHAIR: I am sure those reports that you will send us will tell us that.

[*Supplementary Information No A5.*]

Hon SUE ELLERY: I might move on. I want to talk about the Switch teacher training funding program. This is referred to in several places in an annual report. This is the teacher training program that when it was announced by the government was \$22.4 million to retrain 525 teachers in preparation for the transition of year 7s to secondary schools in 2015. I have asked some previous questions in the Parliament of the minister about how that \$22.4 million was to be spent. Some of it was on university postgraduate fees for teachers wanting to retrain; some of it was on short courses and training materials and travel and accommodation for regional teachers; some of it was on teacher relief so that others could go and study; and some of it was on school-based professional learning. The question that I put on notice prior to this hearing was: in preparation for 2015, how

many teachers will have completed the Switch training by the end of 2014? The answer was that a total of 407 teachers will have completed their Switch training prior to the start of the school year, and that there is a further 61 that will be part way through that. That still leaves, I think it is 58, or something like that, short of the 525. So I am asking about where the 525 figure sits now, to start with, and perhaps you could comment on that.

Ms O'Neill: Sure. I will ask Mr Gillam if he would like to respond.

Mr Gillam: Yes. In relation to the 525 figures, we are short, as you indicate, at the commencement of 2015, but by mid-2015 we anticipate that we will have in fact exceeded the 525. The costings originally done for the 525, when tested against the market for short-course provision, have given us a sufficient degree of flexibility to extend the numbers that we are able to train. So, we will be moving in the first part of 2015 into further training for Switch, and we will certainly by mid-2015 have reached the 525 target that was originally set, but we anticipate by the end of 2015 to be somewhere closer to 700 out of that funding.

Hon SUE ELLERY: And so with that 700 you will have expended the total 22.4?

Mr Gillam: We anticipate that by the end of 2016 we will have expended the 22.4, because the training will continue, given that we will absorb essentially all the, if you like, capacity that there is in secondary teaching in 2015. There will be in 2015 resignations and retirements, so there will be again pressure in that area of the market. So, the funding is actually provided for us to the end of 2016, and the intent is that when we get there we will have trained 700, potentially, secondary teachers and we will have expended the \$22.4 million.

[10.15 am]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you for that. So what does that mean for secondary schools at the beginning of 2015 when—I will ask it in a different way. Basically, what I am trying to find out is: will secondary schools have all of the staff trained to the degree they need to be trained at the start of 2015, given that you are still in the process of training that last 57, but ultimately plus another 150?

Mr Gillam: We will in fact have, we believe, sufficient general supply. That is because apart from the training we are doing for Switch, there are some 600 teachers who are secondary trained who we do not currently employ, who are now external to the pool. There will be some 260 graduates who emerge from the various training institutions at the end of this calendar year. We anticipate that we will have, therefore, the secondary trained teachers needed to fill, in gross terms, the number of demand. Our issue will be whether we are able to ensure that we can get a maths teacher to a secondary school, and we are working with the schools that are potentially at risk in rural areas day by day, really, to ensure that we can supply them with the secondary specialist subject teachers that they will need.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is it just maths or is it the kind of STEM—the science, technology and physics area as well?

Mr Gillam: Maths and science are key areas. Interestingly, we have found a lot of take-up for the design and technology speciality through the Switch program, so that will relieve pressure in that discipline area. What I think people will be somewhat surprised to learn is that the largest demand is in fact for English teachers.

Hon SUE ELLERY: You could go back to the classroom! He was my English teacher at university.

The CHAIR: He must have been very young!

Mr Dodson: And very good!

Hon SUE ELLERY: Clearly!

Mr Gillam: But, yes, English teachers, because it is a core subject area and there are lots and lots more children in secondary schools from 2015.

Hon SUE ELLERY: If I try to break down where the pressure points might be in respect to maths and the sciences, I think you mentioned maybe some rural schools where there might be some pressure points, and you say you are managing that on a daily basis. What are the steps can you take to address that so that at the start of 2015, wherever they are, secondary students who are doing the maths and sciences have got appropriately trained teachers in front of them?

Mr Gillam: We are working in close collaboration with the principals of schools to ascertain firstly what their needs are, particularly in rural schools, and we direct those principals to the modes of recruitment available to them. If, for example, those principles are going to go to a full merit selection process—advertising and so forth—the time taken will prejudice the likelihood of acquiring someone. We direct those principals to explore the fixed-term teacher pool, the graduate teacher pool, the redeployee teacher pool and the transfer pool to identify individuals early who will meet their needs in that subject area. Really, it is a question between now and the commencement of 2015, of maintaining very close contact with secondary schools. We are travelling, we think, well at this point in time. We have some 500 appointments that have been made—concluded—and approximately, from memory, around 1 000 processes that are running. So, around 70 per cent of our recruitment expectation for secondary schooling in 2015 is met at this point in time, with some six weeks of this term to go.

Ms O’Neill: We do, on day one, always have available to us what we call the flying squad—people here in Perth who we will send to some regional locations where we have recruited someone but they perhaps cannot start for a week. We have done this particularly well over the past years where we have had some tight staffing years. We make sure, really from day one on until it changes, that all of those classrooms are staffed appropriately.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Are you able to provide me with a list of the schools where you are kind of actively engaged in trying to fill the maths and science positions now? Maybe you do not have it listed review right now, but are you able to provide me with that list?

Ms O’Neill: We certainly do not have it in front of us right now. It really depends what you are seeking. We are actively engaged in any school that seeks our service, remembering that schools by and large are more responsible for staffing themselves, but we are in close contact with them. What we do know is that some places may be pressure points because they are historically pressure points, so we could provide that. If you are after a list of who we are engaging with, it will change minute by minute as recruitment is continuously active, and that would be a long list. Apart from a list of schools, I am not sure what information that would provide for you.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Maybe if you could provide me with a list of schools as at—what week are we now?

Ms O’Neill: This is week 4.

Hon SUE ELLERY: We are getting to the very pointy end. So as at week 4—bear in mind that I will acknowledge that that could change tomorrow—as at today’s date, what are the schools where you are still actively seeking to fill science and maths positions?

Ms O’Neill: Okay, broadly science and maths?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes.

Mr Gillam: We should be able to provide information, yes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I might ask, given the point Cliff made about English, is that metropolitan areas as well where you would be struggling to find English teachers?

Mr Gillam: Not struggling to find them; the point I was making was that where everyone had expectation because there is a general dearth of maths and science trained secondary teachers across the nation, let alone Western Australia, we will have difficulties in securing the numbers. We are not struggling to find English teachers because there are more secondary people trained for English, it is just that the largest number by subject discipline for placement in the new environment, with around 1 300 more secondary positions to be filled, is in English.

Ms O'Neill: It is an important point. We are not struggling to find anyone at this stage; it is too early to be characterising that. We are where we normally are in terms of the staffing round. The demand and general supply is looking well matched, so we are not struggling at this point. We are going through our normal process and schools are going through their normal recruitment process. But, we would anticipate, as we would every year, some hotspots and some subject areas that would be more problematic.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

Hon RICK MAZZA: I have a couple of questions, if I can. It is in relation to page 45 of the report in the last column there. You have stated that in 2013–14 an expert review group conducted comprehensive reviews. Who was the review group? Was it an internal review group or was it outsourced to a private organisation?

Ms O'Neill: It is an internal review group.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What were the 13 schools where a concern was identified?

Ms O'Neill: We will see whether we can find a list for this year. I am not sure I have the names of the schools. It is a process that we go through where we have a close look at the schools' data and performance and other information that might become available to us. Where we have a concern, an internal group goes in and does a very comprehensive review of that school and then the report is made public. We could provide to you the list of schools; we did not bring a list of schools, and we have follow-ups as well.

Hon RICK MAZZA: All right, if we could have that list.

[*Supplementary Information No A7.*]

Hon RICK MAZZA: You also mentioned that there is an average of 10 prescribed customised strategies to improve each school's performance. What is the nature of those particular strategies?

Ms O'Neill: It is different from school to school depending on the issues, so in some schools we find, for example, that there might be a lack of whole-of-school curriculum planning, and so the prescribed improvement strategy might be that they develop a whole-of-school curriculum plan utilising the support made available through an area in our department. Or, if communication with parents is deemed to be a weakness, we might require them to run some parent meetings. They are very different from school to school and they are pretty concrete. Then, we have a process where we follow up after six months and if we are satisfied that those strategies have been implemented, the school goes off and continues. If we are not happy, we have another look at the 12-month period, the 18-month period and the 24-month period.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is there a common thread amongst those schools of areas of concern or is every single school quite different?

Ms O'Neill: No, there are some common themes that emerge. One would be whole-of-school planning and one would be clarity around expectation, for example. One that comes up from time to time is knowledge of contemporary curriculum, perhaps—that is one that we would see. So, across them all—and I get to see them all—you do get some common themes. As an executive we examine those common themes and as a result we develop support for schools on that basis, so that we can then put back into the system what we have learnt and have improvement into the system.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Are you still on ERGs?

Hon RICK MAZZA: A little further down the column there is another question I was going to ask in regards to performance inquiries that were undertaken—apparently there are eight schools.

Ms O’Neill: The performance inquiries are of a slightly different nature. The reviews are a total school review; it is very specific and comprehensive. They are in there for a week. They talk to all staff, they talk to the community and anyone really who wants to have a say. They do extensive analysis of the performance and all the data holdings of the department. That would be the review. The performance inquiry is where we have a concern about an aspect of a school’s performance. Let us say, for example, that we are unhappy or we are uncertain that their performance in year 3 writing is satisfactory, so we might go and have a specific look at that area. It is a much narrower line of inquiry.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Can we have a list of those eight schools?

Ms O’Neill: Sure, so the 13 plus the eight—if we make that one question, we can give you those.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Are you right with that, Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, so will make that all part of supplementary information A7.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Schools that do go through ERGs, where their performance is of concern, what resources are made available to those schools to assist them to adapt their performance?

Ms O’Neill: We have a range of things. First of all, we have an area in the department called statewide services, which is our curriculum and student services expertise, and those people are available to go to schools and provide assistance. Sometimes it involves our psych team. The experts there are able to go and provide support and assistance. We require them to use their own resources as well. The regional office, including the executive director there, would go to those schools and work through some of those issues from time to time. Every time we have one of these, there is a case conference that is held and, in fact, chaired by the deputy director general, with the relevant people from central office. If there is something specific that those schools need, we will deploy the resources of the department. Usually, what is required is expertise and assistance, and we make that available, for example, through our professional learning institute. Mr Axworthy, you might want to make some comment on that.

Mr Axworthy: Yes, thank you, director general. As you said, there is a case conference for each of these and there is a case management of the school. The prime source of support is the regional executive director, who works one on one with the school principal in the first instance to come up with a plan to address the findings of the report, and they have six months in order to do that. In looking at that report, clearly, it depends on the findings. As the director general said, if there is something about a particular area of weakness in curriculum or in managing student behaviour, we would then focus on that and provide the support that is required.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I am comfortable with the process that is undertaken. My question really goes to in addition to the existing resources that are available from within the department to any school, what additional resources are available to schools that are undergoing an ERG that are not available to all schools?

[10.30 am]

Mr Axworthy: In a sense, all of our resources are available to all schools, but in this case it is about targeting those resources and, generally speaking, prioritising them. Generally speaking, this is in the form of expertise. We have a principal advisory group who are available to buddy up with particular principals, if it is a primary school, a district high school, a secondary school or an ed support school, to work alongside for a period of time. We look at aspects to do with their HR processes. In some cases, we work with our HR team to say, “In this particular case the school is

suffering because it has had a number of transitions and movements and we want a bit more stability.” So, we look at moving things along and prioritising that school in the list to get their staffing sorted and nailed down. It may be that they have had a registrar that has not been around and their financial management is not as strong as it could be, so we will put in place for a period of time support from the financial services people to work with the schools to get their budget under control and sorted. It is very much a case management arrangement of what is needed.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: With the list of 13 schools that underwent reviews, is it possible to get an idea of the kinds of resources that were put in place to assist those schools as well—additional resources?

Mr Axworthy: That is not a problem. I should say —

Ms O’Neill: It would be narrative in style, as we have just described. This team provides assistance of that nature. The school is required to develop a plan, and that is the case management. Bringing together resources—because, of course, people are resources—to assist, I think, gets described in some form.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But in general it is accessing those resources that are available across the board.

Ms O’Neill: In a priority sense. There has been from time to time a need to do something a little different, but that does not usually constitute an additional funding line, but there have been a couple of rare occasions when we have had to put in an additional staff member for a period. I do not think that has happened in the last financial year; that would be more rare, but has happened on occasion.

The CHAIR: There was some follow-up information, so we will make that A8.

[Supplementary Information No A8.]

Ms O’Neill: Can I just clarify? Is that a description for each of the 13 schools of the support that has been provided?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: The support provided is A8.

Hon SUE ELLERY: One of the questions that I asked prior was in respect to child and parent centres. I hope that you got an email that I think was sent by the committee on Friday. In respect to the answer that you provided there, I was looking for three bits of additional information. It was in respect to parts (c), (d) and (e) of the question that I asked about the kinds of services that are provided at each of the child and parent centres; I wonder if you have got that additional information.

Ms O’Neill: We were asked to put it together in response; that is being done. In broad form, just so that you are aware of how that information will come to you, I think what we have tried to do—I saw a draft of the answer yesterday—is give you a bit of a matrix of services and places. We will put a description there in the front because it is important to note that they will be very different. Some of those places had begun to build services before the CPC, so they have started from different places. Some will have a full range; some are just starting and they will have more of a limited range. I guess there is a caveat in interpreting that data, but how we have tried to construct it is a description of services for each place as a starting point.

Hon SUE ELLERY: One of the questions I asked was about—I think on page 30 of the annual report it refers to a list of schools that are likely to come under significant pressure in respect of their enrolment numbers. It includes Churchlands Senior High, Highgate Primary, Inglewood Primary, Lathlain Primary, Maylands Primary, Mount Hawthorn Primary, Mount Lawley Senior High, Shenton College, Subiaco Primary School, Victoria Park Primary School, Wembley Primary

School and West Leederville Primary School. I wonder what accommodation options are being used at these schools now and what are the ways that you are going to manage these pressures into the future.

Ms O'Neill: That is a reflection of the enormous not only general enrolment growth that we have had over the years, particularly in the early years, but in the inner city areas where there is a lot of infill and other development going on, so it is a particular challenge to us. In those locations, obviously, first of all, we maximise the current accommodation that is available. Schools over many years, and sometimes old schools, use empty classroom space. They kind of grow into whatever space they have and it becomes a drama room or something. That would not be the case now. They would have grown back into classroom space in these schools. You know we use transportables, for example, in those places. A number of those places, I think including Highgate, have an off-site alleviation. Usually and historically we have had —

Hon SUE ELLERY: What is an “off-site alleviation”?

Ms O'Neill: A building off site to alleviate the pressure.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is probably a simpler way to describe it.

The CHAIR: Sounds painful whatever it is!

Ms O'Neill: It is not a medical term.

At Highgate they have kindergarten off site—Leederville as well. We look at reducing the pressure by perhaps expanding the footprint into another place, finding other buildings where we can and, of course, we will have to give consideration over time if we are able to add buildings in any of those locations, knowing that a lot of those sites are constrained size-wise to be able to build on. So, that is the subject of a fair amount of discussion, obviously, in the department, because those places are coming under particular pressure.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I have been to a number of them and I am thinking of Churchlands in particular. But I have been to a number of those schools and it seems to me that decisions are going to have to be made very soon about what to do, because they have used all of those other options. They have got transportables, they are using off site—their ovals and play space is shrinking. So I think we are if not already at crunch point with some of them, we are going to be very soon, so what are the plans in place to tackle where all those options have been tried and enrolments are still growing?

Ms O'Neill: We are in discussion right now with the minister about some possible options to give reprieve to schools that are under pressure. So, those discussions are happening now and I am not in a position to talk about those, but, obviously, we need immediate mid-term and longer term plans because in some of those places, like Churchlands, that growth is forecasted to continue at a pretty strong rate—in fact, most of those places. We are in discussions with the minister right now about what the options are. But the options get limited to in—I mean, not just in this place, but in any place. Pressure can be alleviated or reduced by adding transportables, although we have done that in most of those places; finding an off-campus arrangement, which we have done with some others—they are some of the options that we will talk to the minister about—building on those sites where we can. We built more recently at Wembley, did we not?

Mr Fischer: West Leederville.

Ms O'Neill: Okay, North Cottesloe, West Leederville—so some of those schools already. It is not a new problem. It is not a problem that we have just realised is here. We have been working on it for some time, which is why we have in those high-demand areas some building going on. You are absolutely right; the point is well made. It is one that we have been working on for some years and I think will continue to be a priority for us. As I said, we are in discussions with the minister, as we speak, about some of those options.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It seems to me that one of the constraints you have is land in that coastal strip in particular, but also in some of the other more eastern suburbs, so that limits your options.

Ms O'Neill: Indeed.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is there any land that you could be looking at?

Ms O'Neill: There is some land, not much, in that sort of western suburbs—northern strip. I might just ask Mr Fischer if he wants to add anything, but there is not a lot.

Mr Fischer: We are looking at a number of land options around the state. So, we have been talking with people like the MRA, the planning authority and LandCorp about land that they have identified that may be suitable. It brings into discussion, I guess, a different style of schooling; we previously considered large, open schools with playing space. Generally, the land that is available would have to be multi-use and so it is a slightly different school. They are some of the options that we are thinking of.

In terms of the comments in the annual report, there are two issues. One is our immediate demands for dealing with enrolment pressures, but it is also the longer term plan of having a denser Perth and how we respond to that. So, that is what the comment in the annual report is mostly about, which is working with the Department of Planning about where that future density will occur. They have obviously got it targeted at particular areas that can accommodate higher density. So, we are trying to identify how we can respond to that pressure. It is a bit more than the current pressures, but, say, a longer term strategy to —

Ms O'Neill: For example, two-storey components in a primary school, which historically we have not had a lot of—we have got some of it, but not a lot—is something that could be contemplated in schools where land is a real issue, but new land is difficult for us.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I have visited a number of schools—I am thinking; they are all over the place, really—where there is common usage of the oval with the local government authority and increasingly some common usage of the school building facilities after hours. So, it would seem to me that it would be sensible in terms of the new suburbs, which grow really rapidly—I am not talking about the inner-city ones; the newer suburbs—that you have conversations with the developers as well. Are you able to do that yourselves as an agency?

Ms O'Neill: The developers have to set aside school land. That is already well established.

The CHAIR: Primary school.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, but where you think you, in fact, might need common usage of ovals and stuff like that.

Mr Fischer: We do that as part of our planning now. Generally, right at the structure planning stage, we have a discussion with local authorities and so they co-locate their public open space adjacent to a school site. That is pretty common. In a number of places we have actually got an agreement—understanding is probably the better word to say—with local authorities about how we might work so that we maximise the opportunity of having shared open space. So, for places like Wanneroo, we will have identified our schools adjacent to public open space and we will have agreement about how that might be structured in terms of where our land is placed to make sure it is in proximity to theirs—same with Mandurah.

Hon SUE ELLERY: If I use Mandurah as an example, Meadow Springs and a bunch of new schools around there are relatively new, but at capacity already and bursting at the seams. One of them, I cannot remember if it was Meadow Springs or one close by, has got more transportables than brick classrooms. It seems to me that we just need to get a bit smarter in either the design—I do not know that we can keep, or maybe we can, increasing the footprint of the schools, because clearly the footprint down around there for those new schools was inadequate.

Mr Fischer: The footprint of a typical primary school is about four hectares. If we share the public open space, we might reduce that or we often reduce that. Meadow Springs is probably a bit unique in that it does have a significant number of transportables and some of those are located on adjacent City of Mandurah land. Often when we see those pressures occur, they are short term in the sense that there is generally another primary school planned. So, you have got Lakelands Primary School, which will open next year, which will provide some relief to Meadow Springs and same with others under significant accommodation pressure.

[10.45 am]

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am glad you raised Lakelands because I wanted to go to that one next. One of the questions I asked, question 18, was about the seven new schools that opened at the start of 2014, and I asked, “What was the opening enrolment for each of those schools?”, and I have that. Based on questions I asked in Parliament about what your projections were for 2015—I will ask you to trust me; I have the document in front of me—off the answer that was provided there, and these projections were made in May, so they might have increased a little bit since then, but Lakelands, for example, opened this year with 142, with a projected 416 at the start of 2015. That 416 gets pretty close to the 450 that the kind of standard primary school is built to. I reckon Lakelands is going to be under pressure pretty soon. Equally, Yanchep Beach Primary School opened this year at 319; it will be at 382 at the start of 2015. I would welcome your comments about that. One of the other ones on that list is John Butler Primary College. I do not know if that is called a college because it has extra years. That was at 357 at the start of this year, and next year it will be at 570, on a 450 school. I appreciate peaks and troughs, and I appreciate that suburbs age; I appreciate all of that. But within a year of a school opening to be in excess of the kind of standard build in areas that we know are growing, it seems to me something is not working properly here.

Mr Fischer: John Butler College has increased capacity above the normal 450. That also includes ed support. We have also two new schools —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Where is that one?

Mr Fischer: It is located in Butler, or just north of Butler. That has provided relief to —

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I can take you on a visit if you like. It is a good school.

Mr Fischer: It is a beautiful school.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I would love to visit. I have visited other schools in Butler but I would love to visit —

Mr Fischer: Butler College has provided relief to Butler and north Butler, which people would know has been quite full. But we have got two new schools opening in Alkimos, which will also provide relief. There is one at Trinity and also one in south west Alkimos opening in the next two years. So there are schools planned to provide relief for those areas.

Ms O’Neill: The experience and the planning that we have, it is true that they get maximised really quickly in these high-growth areas and we have plans to provide assistance with transportables and the like. But in almost every place—not every place—you see within a number of years, because we then build elsewhere, that alleviation happens fairly quickly. They are fine planning decisions. You do not want to overcapitalise and build way beyond what you know it is going to come back to. But it is quite right—there is a tricky period in between, while other new schools are being built around, before that alleviation is provided.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Can I just ask about pressures around schools and density and the like that Hon Sue Ellery was asking about. I apologise for being late. I have actually come from North Cott, where the new double storey facility is looking really great. What is it that has prevented the department in the past from building two storey primary school buildings or even

higher storeys—three or four storey—high school buildings in these constrained sites? Is there any sort of policy rationale or other issue that has prevented it from happening?

Ms O'Neill: I am not sure that there has been a policy rationale. We can give you some detail in a moment. Culturally, it has not been the way in Western Australia, and we are embarking more on that now. We do have double storey builds in primary, particularly when you go into the north west, for cyclone proofing—if you go to Dampier, for example. It is not that we have not done it; we have not needed to do it in a lot of places. There is good research historically that has been used in all states about the community of primary schools and being able to move from one to the other. Obviously you have got issues for students with disabilities. But I am not sure if there has been any particular reason, John, it is just not —

Mr Fischer: In terms of new schools, a second storey adds about seven per cent to the square metre building cost. That has a cost implication. If land space is not an issue, then you try to avoid it. Where land sites are tight, we certainly have put in two storeys, as you saw at North Cott, and the same at Wembley and at West Leederville. When we had the BER program, we built double storey. Highgate has a double storey. There are several double storeys. We are probably using it a lot more now than previously. The Mount Lawley rebuild is a double storey. We are utilising it on the small sites. Given the desire to “densify” the city, it is really a no-brainer that we consider it. We have only gone to two storey, but it does have a cost implication.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Sure. I am not sure if I have the call, but I have some other areas I want to ask about.

The CHAIR: No. We are going to stay on schools, and Hon Rick Mazza had something on schools.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: It is on schools, obviously.

The CHAIR: On these issues. Are you moving off these issues about the capacity constraints on schools?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Actually I was not going to ask about capacity constraints. I was going to move to the year 7 transition.

The CHAIR: If that is the case, I am going to ask about the constraints on schools, because the three primary schools that you mentioned—West Leederville, Mt Hawthorn and Highgate—that are under pressure also coincide with being the three smaller schools in terms of land size in the state; if not the three, they are in the smallest five, I would be confident of saying. How do you build a double-storey building on those? Where do you put the students when you do that double storey building, because it is such an overcrowded, constrained site? Even if you wanted to, you have got heritage issues on a number of those old schools, and you have also got an incredibly constrained site, so you would need to relocate those students, would you not?

Ms O'Neill: This is part of the problem. We would have to relocate the students. Did we have to move them at North Cott?

Mr Fischer: We have not done that. We put an extra transportable on at North Cott.

The CHAIR: North Cott is a slightly bigger site, though.

Mr Fischer: It is, yes. We have about 20 sites of less than two hectares. That is the Wembleys and the West Leedervilles. One of the issues is you start to lose a bit of playing space, and I think we lost a tree at West Leederville or one of those places. You start getting into some sensitive issues about where people play and what they want to preserve on a site when you put on a second storey. I guess when we made the decision about Wembley and West Leederville in particular we knew what was happening in the growth, and instead of putting in extra transportables two years later, we

anticipated that growth and put the two storeys there just prior to being needed, if that makes sense. But you cannot always do that.

Ms O'Neill: We have to find another interim location for students. We have had to do that before if there has been a fire. We try to avoid having people off site —

The CHAIR: You might need to keep the temporary primary school at Mount Lawley Senior High School whilst you redevelop some of these other sites. I am serious. Are you about to pull that apart, the temporary primary school, or are you looking at keeping it so that you can redevelop some of these other sites to maintain the numbers?

Mr Fischer: We have not considered for that purpose. We are certainly going to keep a portion of that primary school site for a little while.

The CHAIR: When will that be pulled down?

Mr Fischer: We will remove some of the transportables at the Christmas break, but a significant portion of the school will be retained next year.

The CHAIR: For the high school or for what purpose?

Mr Fischer: It is not planned for the high school yet, but it could easily be, given the pressures.

The CHAIR: What is your reason for keeping it, then?

Mr Fischer: The reason is that we do not need all the transportables immediately elsewhere. So rather than pick them up and move them twice, we will retain them in that location.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Can I just clarify the question you asked. I was not aware that there was a permanent school building that requires pulling down at Mount Lawley to accommodate the primary school students at Mount Lawley high. I was only aware that transportable buildings were there, which usually get moved. Are you intending to pull down any of these transportables or are they simply going to be moved?

Mr Fischer: Just moved.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I just wanted to clarify that.

The CHAIR: I do not think anyone talked about permanent; we were talking about —

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: You suggested pulling down. I was concerned that that might happen.

Ms O'Neill: Moving them.

The CHAIR: Moving them; but there is a cost involved in putting them in, and the landscaping. The total cost of creating the Mount Lawley temporary primary school was in the order of a couple of million dollars, was it not, with the footpaths and the plumbing?

Ms O'Neill: Every time we move transportables, there is a cost.

The CHAIR: To set it up was a reasonably expensive cost. That is the primary schools. If you are going to do it, we need to get on with it, because the window of opportunity will close for those three primary schools. In terms of the high school, it strikes me that there is a need for another site, or you are going to have to go up a lot more than two storeys on one of the existing sites to accommodate the student numbers. If you look across virtually that western corridor, from Shenton in the south through to Carine in the north, they are all going to be at or well above capacity. What are we doing to find an alternate site or are we going to have a high-rise school site?

Ms O'Neill: You are quite right—those schools, including Carine and Duncraig, are pretty much at maximum. We have pressure right across that area. As I said before, we are in discussions with the minister about some options for alleviation at Shenton; Mount Lawley is pretty full; and Churchlands obviously is under pressure; and going further north. I am not in a position to talk

about the specifics of those options but, as we have said, land is difficult to find. It does not mean it is not going to happen. There might be some options there, or building on the current sites to give them some assistance. All of those options are under discussion with the minister.

The CHAIR: But we effectively need another high school for at least 2 000 students, when you add up the projected numbers of those existing high schools.

Ms O'Neill: That would be a good option, if we are able to deliver on them.

The CHAIR: Was the department offered any of the sites that are now being put up for sale by the government in the inner city areas? By that I mean the former Princess Margaret hospital site, when that becomes available, the former Perth Girls' School, which is now used by the police, on Plain Street—a quaint term! There is also Shenton Park, any of the land at the rehabilitation hospital —

Ms O'Neill: We are in discussion with the other arms of government. We have talked to them about some of those landholdings.

The CHAIR: Were you offered any of those other sites? The Princess Margaret hospital site is four hectares—a perfect site for a primary school. Was the department offered that prior to being put up for sale?

Ms O'Neill: I am not sure we get “offered” land. We have been in discussions about some of those possibilities.

The CHAIR: Including the Princess Margaret hospital site?

Mr Fischer: We are still talking to them about that site.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Are you talking to them about Shenton Park, because Shenton College wants access to some of that?

Ms O'Neill: Yes, we are in discussions about landholdings in that area as well.

The CHAIR: The other question I had on this area is: in terms of your projections, particularly for closing schools, how far out into the future do you now project before you close a school and dispose of the land?

Ms O'Neill: In terms of school closures, we monitor, continuously, enrolments. Just recently, there have been a number of small schools that will close for 2016. I think some of those schools had six or eight—very few students in them. We project out and talk to the local community about whether the economy is going to strengthen. So you do not want to make a quick decision.

The CHAIR: The reason I ask is I have looked at the cabinet submissions that went through when the Scarborough High School site was closed. If you think about the problems we have discussed, the perfect solution—or close to it—would be a high school on Newborough Street; I think a site well known to you and to some of my friends. One of the things that amazed me when looking at the cabinet submission was that it only projected out four years in terms of student numbers, and everyone in the local community said, “Look at this area, it’s going through re-gentrification, it’s going through redevelopment.” Those subdivisions, even back at the turn of the century, as we can call it now, were already starting.

Ms O'Neill: We have discussed out to 2030, or 2025, as a time frame. Beyond that, projections become very insecure, I guess, and lots of things can change. You cannot go out too far otherwise it does not make sense. In our projections we are looking at all schools, and we are looking out to 2025 at this stage.

[11.00 am]

The CHAIR: So we are doing that now? At the time, I could never understand why, and then when I finally saw a cabinet submission that only went out four years, it left me dumbfounded that any minister would have allowed that to have gone through.

Ms O'Neill: It is a long time ago, Chairman!

The CHAIR: It is not that long ago.

Ms O'Neill: It feels like it!

The CHAIR: Yes, it does some days! But I am glad to know that we are now doing it better than we did in those days, though.

The final issue is: how many of the new school sites are you looking at to be shared—so, the 3.5 hectares as opposed to going for the full four hectares? I am sure you are aware of the work that the DSR is doing and the issues around lack of public open space. While it might seem like a good idea in the short term, constraining our school sites to 3.5 hectares because of a shared oval is just going to put more pressure on some of those—for me, it is the northern suburbs that I care about—new development areas. How many of the new schools are going to be 3.5 hectares as opposed to four-hectare sites?

Ms O'Neill: We start out with the optimum in mind, and it is a case-by-case analysis that is done about what exists around it. I am not sure if we have a number about how many schools are going to have shared sites. We get the sites pretty early —

Mr Fischer: When they do the subdivision plan, you might get that extra detail of the site. But the local structure plan generally shows where the public open space is, and that allows that conversation to occur with the local authority.

The CHAIR: But in terms of the schools that you have currently got planned, are they going to be 3.5 or four hectares?

Mr Fischer: It is a mixture. We will only bring it down to 3.5 if there is a shared-use arrangement. We will not be reducing the size of the school site unless there is a shared-use arrangement.

The CHAIR: But who is making that decision about whether it is a shared use or a stand-alone?

Mr Fischer: We do that. The local structure plan is prepared by the developer, and also local government. So that is when we discuss with the local government if that is the plan for that particular area. We do not give away half a hectare until we are certain that we have a shared-use arrangement available.

Ms O'Neill: Yes, that will benefit the school. We have to do that analysis, too, about what benefit gets accrued to the school.

The CHAIR: But ultimately if the local government says we do not want to do a shared arrangement, because we want more public open space in this area, you would not agree and it would not happen?

Mr Fischer: We find the local governments are mostly coming to us. They are very keen to have that shared-use arrangement, and it presents an advantage to us in having a slightly bigger oval. We have got primary schools that have got access to AFL ovals because they are next to a public open area.

Ms O'Neill: I do not think we are compelled to have a shared-use arrangement. At the end of the day, we have got to be in agreement.

Mr Fischer: That is true.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I must say I share this concern. I think from your perspective as a department, and for schools, you are trying to get the best for the school. What concerns me is that where you could have open space that is the school's open space and the local government's open space, what we are getting, really, is a school's plus open space. So the entirety of open space available to the local area is actually reduced, and in existing suburbs, if you like, or established suburbs, the pressures are that the existing public space provided by local government is not

enough, and the pressure is: can we utilise the school ovals better? That same pressure will start happening in the northern parts of Wanneroo and other areas. It is not really something that you can solve as a department, but if you could work together with other departments to increase rather than shrink the total size of public open space available, that would be good.

The CHAIR: I do not have a problem with the sharing of those facilities. I think that is great, because it is a sharing of the cost and the use —

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I think it is fantastic.

The CHAIR: —but what it is actually doing is leading to a reduction in public open space. I think there is plenty of work being done by the Department of Sport and Recreation. As someone who did their junior footy training on the school oval, they have been used as shared facilities, and they should be used as shared facilities, but equally we should not be seeing a reduction in size. But we will move on.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I am not sure if this has been covered, so stop me if it has, because I came in late, but I want to look at the NAPLAN results, and specifically from page 143 onwards in the annual report. Girls tend to do a little bit better than boys right across the board. It varies. It is about four or five percentage points better. But in the year 9 rating, there is a significant variation between females and males, where 85.7 per cent of females attained the national minimum, but only 69.3 per cent of males. Is there something related to the teaching there, or is there an anomaly with the test?

Ms O'Neill: No. This is not a surprise to us, and I might get Alan Dodson to make a point in a moment. Historically, teachers will tell you that overall—of course every child is different—a generalised comment would be that boys are less engaged in writing than girls, and historically I think their results have not been close to girls on NAPLAN and NAPLAN's predecessor. So, while it is of concern, it is not a surprise, because that is a pattern that we would have seen over a long period of time.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: So what has been done to engage boys more? I hear terms bandied around that the way teaching has turned is that it has been feminised to disengage boys, and we do not want to see that happening. What is being done to engage boys more in things like writing in particular, but also the other subjects?

Ms O'Neill: Overall, we would look at it on a school-by-school basis, because they would have programs or their own approaches to this. The difficulty with the long debate and discussion about boys' education versus girls' education is that no group of boys is the same. So there is no silver bullet—if there was, we would have given it to all boys by now, or all girls, in fact. I mean that in the nicest possible way!

The CHAIR: I thought we had a headline there!

Ms O'Neill: The difficulty is that boys' education as an entity, and girls' education as an entity, is problematic. So, there is no one approach. Schools spend quite a bit of time—primary schools in particular, and secondaries—focusing on those things that would engage boys and girls more generally, so finding content area that is of interest to them, looking at all different learning styles for boys, and girls, because, really, it is an issue of anyone that is under-achieving in writing. But the test has changed, and I might get Alan to talk about this, to a persuasive writing test, whereas before it was called narrative, so more storytelling. Now, it is persuasive writing. So, there has been some test change. I am not sure whether people believe that that has assisted or not in the overall results.

Mr Dodson: I think the results are very consistent right around Australia, too. We are not looking at something that is unique to Western Australia. There are a lot of programs going on. Basically, good teaching will be good for boys and girls. That is the reality. There are a numbers of theories about the way you can teach certain boys, shall I say—not all boys—and certain girls. Certainly in

Western Australia I think our understanding is that our girls in mathematics do slightly better. There is a general feeling that girls do not do so well in maths and boys do not do so well in literature, and the data seems to support that general view. The reality is from entry onwards, the girls are ahead of the boys in both literacy and numeracy from the start, and then as you get to year 9, the boys tend to do a bit better on the mathematics side of the things. But in terms of proportions, maybe the benchmarks are very similar in maths. But in literacy, traditionally it has been very much the case that the girls outdo the boys.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: But it is a savage drop from year 7 to year 9, is it not? Boys have gone from 82 to 69, and girls have only gone from 92 to 85. Is there something that is happening in those early years of high school?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Adolescence, hormones!

The CHAIR: You don't remember?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I am so old that I do not remember!

The CHAIR: And you have got teenage boys!

Ms O'Neill: It does mirror that general feel that people would talk about in schools—not for everyone, but for a bunch of boys—of a more general disengagement. It seems to be, though, over-represented in that particular area of testing.

Mr Dodson: It is also that the year 9 writing, when you look at the actual benchmarks for the assessment, appears to be hardest of all of them. It is substantially lower than all the rest. I do not believe it is because all the kids do worse in writing than anything else, because they are very unique and separate tests. The reality of the scale for writing is that where the benchmark is set, it appears to be harder to achieve that benchmark than any of the others. But the discrepancy between the boys and girls is of concern.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Sure. I am particularly focused on year 9 because of its link to OLNA, and I will get to that in a minute. Before I get to OLNA, I want to raise another issue. I think you know what I am going to come to, because since this committee was formed, I have had a particular interest in Aboriginal education. In the figures on pages 145 and 146, it shows a comparison with people of non-Aboriginal versus Aboriginal descent meeting standards across all the year levels in NAPLAN according to whether they are metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote. How you classify each of those is not really my concern. It is just what is happening in each of those classifications. When you look at the performance of non-Aboriginal students, the variation between metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote is statistically insignificant; it is almost flat across the board. But when you look at the performance of Aboriginal students in metropolitan and provincial areas, the performance is almost identical—it is lower than for non-Aboriginal students, but almost identical. But when we get to remote and very remote—I apologise for using this term, but it is the only way I can describe it—the graph falls off the cliff.

Ms O'Neill: It is stark, yes.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: What drives that outcome? Is it the facilities provided? Is it the quality of the teaching?

Ms O'Neill: When you are looking at the categorisations, which are agreed nationally for the purposes of reporting, and the last two categories—remote and very remote—we are talking about the very remote places of Western Australia in that case. So you only need to think about the generalised issues that many of those remote communities have to start seeing the beginning of the problem. There are so many entry points. One would be that it lines up with some of the very poor attendance in those places. There are also health issues and family support issues. It is that same picture, Peter, really. For some of those students, by the time they get to high school—year 9 and over—in some remote locations, there are pretty serious society issues. I think it is kind of

complicated by all those generalised community issues. But in the schools, we have got attendance issues and we have got some health issues as well. So the closing the gap debate about assisting Aboriginal students to perform better continues to be an issue for us. In terms of Aboriginal students, we had more graduate this year, and our results overall are better. But when you go down to the fine detail of the students in these remote communities, another example, which has been a long-term issue, is having highly qualified secondary teachers who want to be in remote locations where there are only three secondary students. So it is all the normal complexities that we have, plus all the community complexities with those children. There is no one issue.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: So education can be part of the solution, but the solution has to be broader than education, obviously, and we could probably talk about that for a long, long time, but today is not the day for it.

Ms O'Neill: But in saying so, we have great individual stories about some kids that have done well. I know it is not the purpose of this hearing today, but with our Broome Residential College—I am also CEO of that—we have got lots of kids now coming in there. Some of those students are finding that a more appropriate place to study—there is a place to study and there is some security of room and place. Some kids do not like it. So there are some things that are coming together for those communities. But I am the same as you. I was talking to the CEO of the Northern Territory the other day—it is exemplified in Queensland, the Northern Territory and other states as well. We do not accept it and it is a very difficult state of affairs, but it is certainly not one that is easy to shift without contemplation of the total community issue.

[11.15 am]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I am conscious of the time. With the OLNA—the online literacy and numeracy assessment—that took place for the first time this year in year 10, what percentage of year 10 students were exempted based on their performance in the year 9 NAPLAN?

Ms O'Neill: Is that for public schools?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Yes, for public schools—or whatever figures you have; it might just be across the board.

Ms O'Neill: SCSA would have the total number, and we could provide you with our overall breakdown.

Mr Axworthy: Students are exempted by virtue of their performance on their NAPLAN results.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Year 9 NAPLAN. Yes, that is right. If you could provide that information for me, perhaps there might be some other information you also need to provide me.

[*Supplementary Information No A9.*]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: From the cohort that was not exempted, do we know what percentage actually sat the OLNA?

Ms O'Neill: I think SCSA would have—they hold the data for all of this. We would need to find our part of that and provide that to you.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: But you would not know from a public school perspective?

Ms O'Neill: No, we do not have it here. We do not have the final data here.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Anecdotally, it has been suggested to me that certain schools may have held back students from sitting the OLNA. Of course, that greatly concerns me, because the whole point of it is to identify gaps in the previous 10 years and try to fix those gaps in years 11 and 12. Have you picked up any of that anecdotal information?

Ms O'Neill: It has not been raised with me directly. I will just check.

Mr Hale: It has not been raised, as far as I am aware, that people have been deliberately held back from doing the assessment, but I think from my discussions with officers in SCSA we share a concern that perhaps greater effort needs to be made to ensure that more students actually sit the test. If we go to the previous question in relation to NAPLAN, one of the issues that is quite clear is where schools have the most difficulty with having students sit is where they have severe attendance issues, which is not surprising but it is an issue of concern to us that if students have not prequalified in year 9 through NAPLAN that they ought to be sitting the test for two reasons—one, ideally, we would hope that in year 10 they would demonstrate that they are of the standard but the other reason is that that is not their last chance; this opportunity is right through until the end of year 12 to demonstrate. So, in a sense, it is not as though these kids are lost to that opportunity, but it would be much better for schools to be able to identify how the child is progressing so you could continue on that journey of supporting them to make sure that for some of them who need the most assistance that by year 12 they have met that minimum standard.

Ms O'Neill: We are working with schools. It is the first time that the test was run in that form. Our expectation is that they have as many students available to sit who then actually sit. We want them to get onto it pretty early. Even though they do have those other opportunities, we want them to be sitting the OLNA; we want them to be there.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Just to close off on this area, if a student has not prequalified through year 9 NAPLAN and does not sit the OLNA, when they get to year 11, will they be expected to do the foundation courses in literacy and numeracy?

Mr Axworthy: No; quite the reverse. The foundation courses are for those students who have not got the literacy or numeracy skills to be able to cope with the other courses. So if they have not sat the test, then they cannot get into the foundation courses.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is the concern, and that is why I raised this.

Mr Axworthy: That would be a concern.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: So students who may really need and benefit from the foundation courses, may be going into courses that are completely unsuited for them simply by avoiding or dodging the NAPLAN and the OLNA.

Ms O'Neill: There is some misunderstanding early on that students thought that if they did not sit it, they would somehow get advantage later. It is quite the opposite. To get the help they need, to be in the foundation they need to have sat it, which is why we are working directly with schools. If people talk to us about individual schools where they believe this to be the case, we will be working directly with those schools. Our expectation is that all students sit it. In fact, we have talked to and I have been meeting with large groups of principals and our expectation is that they will identify students who they believe will struggle and they should be working with those students in advance. For us, we are not supporting putting it off, we want them to be doing the test and doing it as soon as possible.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I understand that and I support that fully, but is there any value at all in reconsidering how entry into the foundation courses happens to ensure that those people who have completely avoided the testing —

Ms O'Neill: It is not set by us, Peter. It is set by SCSA.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Okay, so it is SCSA that we need to take this up with.

Ms O'Neill: We do not have a role in that decision.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I want to ask a few questions on the year 7 transition, which is taking place next year, particularly about country and rural Western Australia. I see in the report that you have not included an extensive building program. I wonder how much of that building program is going to be invested in country hostels.

Ms O'Neill: That is not a subject of this annual report. That is a different group altogether. But I will see if we can give some assistance around that. Different people do the buildings for country high schools altogether.

Mr Hale: We probably cannot present details today. As the director general said, it is a separate authority. However, we have worked closely with that authority to monitor the requirements and that has been taken into account. I am sorry I cannot give you the details on what the changes have been, but I am aware, for instance, that at Broome there has been an expansion, and at Esperance recently a new space has been opened. That has been aligned to making sure that there is adequate provision —

Ms O'Neill: And Merredin, previously.

Mr Hale: In Merredin, I think the authority is a victim of its own success, because having done such a good job they have attracted further students, so it is an ongoing task.

Ms O'Neill: We would be happy to itemise any expansion of residential colleges for the purposes of year 7. It is not usually just for the purposes of year 7—it is one factor—but we could give you a breakdown, on the basis of growth, of any updating of those facilities. It would have to come through a different mechanism.

Hon RICK MAZZA: As I understand it, the transition is optional next year for year 7 students.

Ms O'Neill: No, not quite.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Not at all, in fact.

Ms O'Neill: It is for some people.

Mr Hale: There is a very small number of schools. In a moment I will just explain the situation, and then I can give you some numbers to clarify where that is up to. At the time that the government made the announcement of the transition of year 7s to secondary, the then minister also announced that consideration would be given for a transition period for children who would be in small country towns. By that, what was meant was, where there was no either immediate access to the secondary school or there was one within reasonable travelling time. As the Chair said, Beacon is an example. Most of the examples are in the wheatbelt. The then minister agreed, or rather suggested, that what would happen is that from the first year of transition, which is next year, there would be a three-year period in which parents by going to their local school principal and clarifying what the situation was, on request they could be approved. There were no bureaucratic hoops to jump through; just a conversation about, “Well, this does have implications. Let’s be clear about what we are doing. You might end up being the only year 7 child in this school. If you understand that and you’re happy with that situation, then for this three-year period that can be done.” It is only for three years and it is to allow people time to adjust. The reality is that in many of those communities, of course, a significant number of those students have already gone to either independent, Catholic or, in some cases, public boarding facilities. Many of them do already go. I can give you an indication of numbers if that is helpful to give you an idea of where we are up to. I will just make sure that I give you the most recent one. For 2015, we are expecting that there are likely to be 20 schools affected—because this could still change right up to day one next year—and we are expecting 45 students to remain in a primary setting. At this stage, for 2016, we are expecting that there may be 25, and for 2017, we are expecting there could be perhaps 19. At this stage, it will be 89 over the three years. Of course, the out years are lower, because people have still got plenty of time to make that decision. I think in some communities people are waiting to see what will happen. In the case of the current 45, we test this in the middle of each term, so we are just coming up to doing our final check for this year. There has been slight fluctuation up and down in individual schools, and slight ongoing growth as we get closer. It has tapered off as we get closer to the time.

Hon RICK MAZZA: We have noticed that a number of small schools will be closing. With the transition of year 7s to high school, how many more country schools will be affected? You said that

the year 7s have moved and there are now only a few students left. Are there many more schools that will close?

Mr Hale: This has really had virtually no—in fact, I think I can say it has had no—bearing on school closures. Those schools that have been identified for closure—this is not my area, but it is an area I have worked in recently—as the director general said earlier in response to another question, they have been monitored over a long time and have incredibly small numbers and often may not even have year 7 students in them now. If they do, they may only have one or two. Really, the year 7 transition is not having any bearing on those closures.

Ms O’Neill: Those schools have been on our watch list for a long time. It is not a recent event.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The last question I have on that is: I see in this report there are a number of strategies to manage the behaviour of students and shared responsibilities—you are going to have basically 11 and 12-year-olds with 17-year-olds. What are some of those strategies, particularly in hostels and things like that? Hostels obviously are not in your area, but what management strategies are in place to manage those different age groups?

Mr Hale: In terms of school management, I think there are a few things we need to think about. First of all, my background is as a secondary principal and secondary teacher. We have actually tried very hard to allay peoples’ fears that in a year when we will have more 18-year-olds in year 12 and we will have younger students coming in at the beginning of high school, that I do not think that should be a core focus for concern. In fact, I think most experienced school leaders and teachers would tell you that the older students in a school are actually a moderating influence on the behaviour in school. It would be very unusual—I will not say it never happens—for one of those older students to be cause of grief to a younger student. In fact, one of the behaviour strategies is in many schools those kids will be buddied up, so that as they come in, for instance, it has been quite common in the past for year 8 and year 11 students to be buddied up so there is a big brother, big sister sense about how things run.

Ms O’Neill: I think we should also say that we have already got year 7s in high schools now. Some schools have had year 7s for a long time and the behaviour issues are no better or worse than in any other school. The experience and the evidence demonstrate that it is not an issue. But there is concern from parents and that is something that we have been conscious of and have been talking to parents about right from the start of this.

Mr Hale: If I could add to that also, one of the strategies that is already in place and often is used by some schools with year 8s already and often is used in some of our schools that have had year 7s—I think of places like Ballajura Community College, which has successfully had year 7s for many years since its opening. To provide comfort to those students and, to be honest, probably perhaps more to provide comfort to their parents, because it is usually mums and dads who are more concerned, understandably—having been one myself—often they will have designated areas that are year 7 only or year 8 only or years 7 and 8 only. The idea of that is to have somewhere in the grounds of the school where students who have anxiety can feel totally confident that that is their space, there is supervision there and there will not be older students there if that is a concern. But usually what happens, and most of the principals I have talked to in preparation for next year, is that they do not require students to remain in that area because typically what happens, even if they stay there for the first week or two, they are itching to get out amongst the wider school community anyway. It is kind of providing some safe space if someone wants it and somewhere to withdraw to if they want to, but also not denying them the opportunity to engage with the full school community.

[11.30 am]

Ms O’Neill: We have had quite a focus on the pastoral care element with schools of the 7s moving and their sense of inclusiveness or their sense of belonging to that school site and that school

community. We have provided, through Lindsay's area, packages of support for schools, and there have been vast discussions or deep discussions with schools. But it is not just building and building, and it is not just having the kids there learning in classrooms; it is the way in which they are integrated with the total school. In the early days when we spoke to students about this, they actually did not want to be separated, which they felt made them stand out even more. Our schools are really on notice in a positive way about monitoring, particularly in the first period, those students and how they feel. They will be, on average, six months older, and some of them are bigger than some of the other kids anyway, but it is that feeling of comfort and connectedness and belonging, and schools really are going to great efforts. The other really important thing is that with the transitions they are doing now, they are actually having the kids go up to the school—I am thinking of a couple of schools; Woodvale might be one—and they are spending quite a bit of time up there. They already have the school uniform, they go to the school, they wear the high school uniform on those days. So, transition. As I say, 2015 and arriving starts way back and has been going on—we have had dedicated work all year—so that it will not be unfamiliar.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Particularly for country Western Australia, where you have farmers sending their 11-year-old off to boarding school, are there any support services for counselling and extra costs and things like that for those families?

Ms O'Neill: Under Country High School Hostels, which again is separate, there is some financial assistance; there is the BAHA—the boarding away from home allowance, I think that the state provides. Kids in hostels are pretty much connected to the schools, and so in the hostels authority, we use psychologists et cetera to provide support to students where it is needed. There is a good communication between the school and the hostel, and good communication between the parents. Every effort is made and will continue to be made. We are conscious that for some children, it is a big change in their life.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thank you.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is there capacity for me to put these questions on notice?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will do it that way.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I will do the same.

The CHAIR: I just have one final thing I just wanted to clarify. When we were talking about the schools and the need for, effectively, additional capacity, it struck me that we have identified there is a need for at least the capacity for an additional high school in the western suburbs, and an additional primary school in the inner suburbs. Is that a fair —

Ms O'Neill: What we require —

The CHAIR: Where we put them is another matter.

Ms O'Neill: As to the capacity we need, it is possible in the western suburbs, with projections, that we need to find places—however we do it—for probably close to 2 400 or 2 500 by about 2025.

The CHAIR: That is a big high school, effectively. And primary schools —

Ms O'Neill: Or whatever arrangement.

The CHAIR: Yes, but the equivalent of.

Ms O'Neill: Yes, that is right.

The CHAIR: In terms of the inner suburbs—Highgate, Mt Hawthorn, West Leederville—do we know what the projection there is in terms of the additional capacity we need to find?

Mr Fischer: We have done individual school projections, but I have not summarised those in terms of equating that to another primary school at all.

Ms O'Neill: We are doing that analysis.

The CHAIR: Can you take on notice what work you have done on the projections for the whatever you have identified as schools that are needing extra capacity in that inner core?

[*Supplementary Information No A10.*]

The CHAIR: Is your preference to find, if you could, an alternate site, rather than trying to expand on the existing sites?

Ms O'Neill: It is one of the options, and, as I said, that will be something for the minister to assist us in the decision-making. Over time, because the need is so large—the number we just talked about—it would be an ideal option, because we are going to have to put pressure, or we are going to have to accommodate it in other ways. There are other ways, but it is one of the options and it is a strong option.

The CHAIR: You said it is the ideal. Sorry. What is the ideal? Is it a new school site, if we could find one?

Ms O'Neill: It would be a good option —

The CHAIR: Preferable?

Ms O'Neill: I do not want to have words put in my mouth.

The CHAIR: No, that is why I am trying to —

Ms O'Neill: Look, it is one of the options if we were able to find the space. That would give good alleviation, but so could other options that we will give thought to.

The CHAIR: The committee will forward any additional questions it has to you via the minister in writing in the next couple of days, together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the question. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to email them to the committee as soon as possible after the hearing. On behalf of the committee, I again thank you for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 11.35 am
