

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2011–12 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 16 JUNE 2011**

**SESSION ONE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Members

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

Hearing commenced at 9.00 am

HON PETER COLLIER, MLC

Minister for Energy representing the Minister for Education, examined:

MS SHARYN O'NEILL

Director General, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MR DAVID AXWORTHY

Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MR JOHN LEAF

Deputy Director General, Finance and Administration, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MR JOHN FISCHER

Acting Executive Director, Infrastructure, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MR MAL PARR

Director, Strategic Asset Planning, sworn and examined:

MR BRETT ROACH

Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MR CLIFF GILLAM

Executive Director, Workforce, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

MS JUANITA HEALY

Acting Executive Director, Statewide Services, Department of Education, sworn and examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning. On behalf of Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations I welcome you to the hearing this morning. Before we begin, I am required to ask the public servants to either take an oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIR: You will have all signed a document titled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood this document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Hearings this morning are being held in public, although there is discretion to move into closed session, either on the committee's own motion or a witness's request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement, please indicate 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 scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and we value your assistance.

These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the budget statement volumes or the consolidate account estimates members give the page number, item, program and amount in preface

to their question. If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask for your cooperation in ensuring that is delivered to the committee clerk within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this deadline, please advise the committee clerk immediately. An example of the required *Hansard* style for documents has been provided to your advisers. The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. For the benefit of members and Hansard, I ask that the minister introduce his advisers to the committee, and if each adviser could state their full name, contact address and the capacity in which they appear before the committee.

[The witnesses were introduced.]

The CHAIR: Minister, would you like to make an opening statement or move straight into questions?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will allow all the time we possibly can for questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Clearly, it is not your portfolio.

Hon PETER COLLIER: If I started, we would be here all day.

In retrospect, Education is in very capable hands in Western Australia; it really is. We have made significant inroads with where we are going, particularly with the advent of independent public schools. I like to think I will have the opportunity to expand on that reform in the duration of the hearing.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Is the minister expecting a cabinet reshuffle soon?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Not at all; I just like the policy.

The CHAIR: I am glad to see everybody is wide awake and ready to go. That is excellent. This session is scheduled to go until midday. I am proposing to break for 10 minutes at half past 10. The first call will go to members of the committee, who are sitting in the front row, and if other members indicate they are the speaker on behalf of their party, I will go to those next. The first question goes to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am not going to ask my first question on independent public schools. I will ask about Indigenous education and pathways. Both of those items are on page 401 of the *Budget Statements*. I specifically refer to school-based traineeships. Could the minister advise the total number of school-based traineeships? Can I also have some clarification of who is responsible? There is some lack of clarity, because I understand that when they are at school they are the responsibility of the Minister for Education, but when they go out on site they are the responsibility of the Minister for Training. I want to know what happens if somebody has an accident between the two.

Hon PETER COLLIER: With regard to training, if they are enrolled by the schools they are the responsibility of the schools; if they are enrolled with a state training provider that responsibility is with me. The Aboriginal school-based training system is funded by my department, so they are under my jurisdiction.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What is the total number?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will have to take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: There seems to be some uncertainty about the future of Aboriginal school-based traineeships. I would like clarity on that.

Hon PETER COLLIER: What do you mean “uncertainty”?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The uncertainty is about their future and whether they will continue to exist.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am disappointed that the member has heard that, and I do not know where the member heard that. From my perspective, the Aboriginal school-based training system is working well. There has been some push back. I understand that some schools have shown some reluctance and are concerned whether they can deliver that program. From my perspective, it is working well and I will be very keen to expand the program, not reduce it.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What if the Minister for Education has a contrary view to the minister's?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will have a discussion about that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Does the minister know whether the Minister for Education holds a different view to his?

Hon PETER COLLIER: If she does, she has not expressed that view to me.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Are you talking?

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: What has that got to do with the budget?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am asking whether they talk.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Liz and I talk regularly; in fact, we had a good chat yesterday.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: About her leaving?

The CHAIR: Order!

[9:10 am]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We can ascertain, minister, that as far as you are concerned you are supportive of Aboriginal school-based traineeships. You cannot speak for the Minister for Education; she may well have a contrary view, but we do not know.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just clarify that? Contrary to popular opinion, I get on very well with Liz. Liz is very conscious of how significant Aboriginal training is to me. What we are doing with Aboriginal training is very good indeed. As I said, Liz has not expressed any concerns with regards to the Aboriginal school-based traineeship with me at all.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister has not expressed any concern?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I want to refer to page 399, item 134, which deals with capital appropriations. Specifically, I want to ask a question in relation to school maintenance. What is the procedure for determining spending in schools? Is there a statewide determination or is each district given a budget and then they have to go out and determine priorities and which school gets within that particular district?

Mr Leaf: I can begin to answer that and perhaps Mr Fischer on my right can expand a bit. Maintenance for schools is based on a very detailed building condition assessment report that the Building Management and Works authority in partnership with ourselves plan future maintenance against. In that report there are several categories of priority, and what we actually plan to do in schools is to deal with the highest priority cases first and then move down into the lower categories of priority if there is sufficient funds available to do that. There is no allocation to a particular region and no intent to try to divide funds up equitably according to region. Our maintenance program is on a needs basis according to the condition that independent assessment comes up with.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What are those categories of priority?

Mr Fischer: There are three types of maintenance works that are undertaken in our maintenance program. There are those related to breakdowns and faults—that urgent work that needs to be undertaken. That is funded from our recurrent budget. There are those works that are planned, and some of those works are shown in our capital budget. I will refer to those in a minute. Then there is the routine maintenance, the firebreaks, the gutter repairs, et cetera—those periodic works that are undertaken in schools. That is all managed centrally. Those funds are managed centrally but facilitated through BMW, and schools have access for emergency works by contacting an office in BMW. You referred in your earlier question to whether there are priority works and I think you may be referring to the budget papers on page 404 where there is an allocation of \$40 million.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can you speak up? I cannot hear you.

Mr Fischer: In the budget papers there is reference to \$40 million, which has been allocated to planned maintenance to priority schools. As Mr Leaf mentioned, we use the building condition assessment report to determine those priorities and we are still going through that process at the moment so we have not identified the schools, but that is focused on that \$40 million of preventive maintenance works that is shown in the budget.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: In terms of the \$40 million and the planned maintenance and priority schools, have they already been identified?

Mr Fischer: No, that was the point I just made. We have using the building condition assessment report to identify those priority schools.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: When will they be identified?

Mr Fischer: It is an ongoing process. Part of that \$40 million is related to roof replacements and that is split over two years—\$7.5 million in 2011–12 and \$12.5 million the following year. We are using the building condition assessment report to identify those schools which have high needs for roof replacements and of the top 106 works, in terms of dollars, 39 of those projects relate to roof replacements. Those will be the ones we focus on first.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Have you identified the emergency works?

Mr Fischer: The emergency work is—whether it is school breakages or breakdowns—on an as-needs or as-it-happens-type approach. That also includes the wilful damage that occurs at our schools, and we have had a program to address the break-ins, the fire damage, the arsons, the burglaries, the vandalism, the graffiti. We have a program that monitors that and responds to that and so where there is significant activity in a particular area, we then target preventive measures like fencing or security cameras, those sort of things that will address that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I understand that in the schools listed in the 2010 building assessment schedule, 147 of them have not yet been listed to have asbestos work done. Is that correct?

Mr Fischer: There are two reports that the Department of Education and BMW use to monitor risks. We have a separate asbestos register. As far as I am aware, there are no outstanding or exposed asbestos risks in our schools. There is asbestos in schools, but there is no exposure risk to our students. I could perhaps ask Mr Parr to elaborate.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Do you know whether in fact those 147 schools listed on the 2010 building assessment have yet had listed asbestos work done? Has any work been done on any of those 140 schools that were listed in 2010 on the building assessment?

Mr Fischer: I am not aware today of any specific works on those—the reference you make today is 140 schools.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: You are not aware of any asbestos work done on those 147 schools? The acoustics are very bad I know.

Mr Fischer: I am not specifically aware of work that has been undertaken recently.

Mr Parr: I would comment that of the 146 or so references to asbestos cement products in schools, that scan has probably just picked up the wording of asbestos cement products. Typically it would be wall cladding or the enclosure of eaves. You would be aware that some years ago all asbestos cement roofs on schools were replaced and on the building condition assessment report the project description is very brief and typically it would show asbestos cladding needs repainting, for example. As Mr Fisher said, we are not aware of any hazardous situations relating to asbestos at the moment.

The CHAIR: Before we proceed, with the microphones, if you can talk directly into them. The reason I will call a name is so that they can switch on the right microphones. If you will wait till the light is on and try to speak directly into them. We had a little trouble with this yesterday.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Do I have to speak louder?

The CHAIR: You are doing all right. I think you have had years of practice.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You will tell me to speak up if I need to.

The CHAIR: Of course.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mr Fischer, how many schools contain material made with asbestos?

Mr Fischer: I do not have that information with me today. I need to know exactly what information is being sought from the questions.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The information being sought is how many schools contain materials made with asbestos?

Mr Fischer: That information is probably available in our asbestos register and we could make that available if the member wanted to see that.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister has made public statements that asbestos in schools poses no danger and that this material is only removed when it loses its functionality or has the potential to present a health risk. Did the asbestos that was replaced at Harvey Senior High School pose a health risk?

[9.20 am]

Mr Parr: The situation that you refer to at Harvey Senior High School related to the underside of a long run of verandah. A number of sheets, which enclosed the underside of the verandah, had suffered water damage and were sagging and had indications of lichen growth. So a decision was taken to replace some 116 sheets from the underside of that verandah.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mr Parr, did it pose a health risk and, if so, why is it not listed on that schools building condition assessment report for 2008?

Mr Parr: It did not pose a health risk.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It did or did not?

Mr Parr: It did not.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It did not.

Mr Parr: And I cannot be certain, but it might not have been in its 2010 condition—when the assessment was undertaken in 2008. So the water damage and the added lichen growth may well have occurred in 2009 or 2010.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If it did not pose a health risk, why was it replaced?

Mr Parr: It had decreased functionality. The asbestos sheeting was sagging as a result of the water damage.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: But surely lots of other schools must have had decreased functionality and they have not had their asbestos replaced. What is special about Harvey Senior High School in this instance?

Mr Parr: It is a question of priority and the general condition of that element of the building.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I move to: why was asbestos sheeting replaced at Harvey but not at similar schools—I think you have answered that in part—for which the maintenance issues were listed in the 2010 building condition assessment? It seems that, for whatever reason, Harvey Senior High School has been given special treatment when compared to other schools with very similar problems. I would have to say that we have not heard a satisfactory explanation as to why this was so at Harvey and was not so at other schools with asbestos that had lost functionality but have not had their asbestos replaced.

Mr Parr: Each case is treated on its merits and where it is reported by a school administration or BMW program manager, the condition of the element is considered and a decision is taken on a case-by-case basis. In the case of Harvey Senior High School, it would have been considered to be worthy of replacement at that time.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mr Parr, would you agree that there are many schools in at least the same, possibly worse, condition as Harvey Senior High School?

Mr Parr: I am not aware of that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Sorry?

Mr Parr: I am not aware of that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: You are not aware of that.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Do you have some specific instances?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What about the director general? Would you be aware of that?

Ms O'Neill: I am not aware. Certainly, there are schools, of course, out of 770 schools, that need work. In relation to the answers that have been given, I think the answer is that a judgement was made that that work needed to be undertaken at that time and the process has been followed. Certainly, there is no preferential treatment for schools, but with such a large maintenance portfolio and such a large school portfolio, day by day we have to make judgements and in this case a judgement was made that that work needed to be done.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can I just ask: was there any comparative analysis done between the work that was required to be done at Harvey as opposed to other schools? Did you get a number of schools with reduced functionality, line them up and do some sort of comparative analysis? Or was there some directive, perhaps from somewhere, that this should in fact be the priority? It seems to me, from what you are saying, that you have just made a decision that this was the worst, but that you cannot actually justify that this is an exceptional case when you compare it to other similar schools with the same situation.

Ms O'Neill: Member, the process under this government is the same as the process under previous governments; that is, that the building condition assessment reports are undertaken and, from time to time, you need to make judgements across the whole portfolio about work that needs to be undertaken. There is a process. It is followed. We cannot possibly sit down every time a piece of maintenance requirement comes up and compare across 770 schools. That is why the building condition assessment report is in place. That is why we monitor schools. And we do need to respond. The process is the same process that has always been in place, and we make judgements against the same criteria as we always have done.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: My final question is: can you provide to the committee the actual building condition assessment report for Harvey Senior High School?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Ms O'Neill: I am told that it has already been provided.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It has been provided—okay. If it has been provided you do not have to provide it again.

Mr Fischer: Through the minister, the building condition assessment reports for every school have already been tabled in Parliament so that is available, but if you want specific information —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, no. If it has been tabled, that is fine.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I want to talk about education. I am referring to page 400 of the budget papers and “Independent Public Schools”. We have a bit of a snapshot there as to what is happening, but I am particularly interested in—I know the budget papers were put in some time ago—if there is a further update on the expansion of that program as to what is going to be happening in the future. Take into consideration, if you would, I would like to know what measurements are being taken into consideration to determine the success of this program. It is all very well that we have moved independent public schools, and I am a huge fan of them as you well know, but I just want to know where the program is going and how we are going to measure its success. And I am not going to say—or otherwise.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sure. I will get Ms O'Neill to make some comments of her own but I wish to make a few comments with regards to this and the genesis of the policy because we actually took that into the last election; that is, the Liberal Party took independent public schools into the last election and I was shadow minister at the time. I think that it was a very, very good policy to take in. I think that if there is one reform in education nationally that has reformed education across the board, it is independent public schools in Western Australia. And the eyes of the rest of the nation are on the success or otherwise of this policy. The motivation behind the independent public schools was that I felt—while still in opposition at that stage—that the decision-making powers in public schools was being taken from them. That school decision-makers were actually disempowered in terms of meeting the needs of their particular cohort in the community; that decisions with regard to staffing, with regard to behaviour management and with regard to a whole raft of areas with curriculum development et cetera needed to be put in the hands of those at the coalface. That is why, as a government, we went down that path to ensure that schools were in fact empowered and that local communities felt empowered. I am sure that you, Hon Liz Behjat, are aware that there has been a significant drift to the private sector and the very real attributes it provides in terms of empowering the local community. Although our public education system is a very robust, healthy vibrant dynamic education system, we wanted to ensure that we empowered the local community. That is the genesis of independent public schools.

After the election, we moved to rolling out that policy. It has been overwhelmingly received by schools and each time we have called for expressions of interest a significant number of schools have shown interest. In terms of the success or otherwise, the proof will be in the pudding and I will ask the director general to make some comments. But the feedback that I have had, certainly from the education fraternity, is that they have been very successful and I would like to think that we can continue to roll them out so that one day we get to the point where all our public schools really have a significant role in terms of making decisions for their particular community's education and school.

[9.30 am]

Ms O'Neill: With regard to the 98 that we currently have, there is a very good mix and diversity of the schools involved. Just over 60 per cent of those are primary; 24.5 per cent, secondary; 11.2 per cent, district high; and 4.08 per cent, education support. It is a pretty standard mix, I guess, between

country and city with 38 per cent from country schools and 62 per cent from metro schools. That is a reasonable reflection of where our schools are at. We had very recent and very strong interest expressed from schools for this third intake of independent public schools with 195 applications, again demonstrating a very strong breakdown—38 per cent of those from country and 62 per cent from metropolitan schools. They come from as far north as Port Hedland and as far south as Esperance, so again, there is a very strong indication of interest. The independent panel will make a determination that will be finalised around the beginning of July. They recommend schools to me and then I will make a final decision about the schools that will be involved.

On your question around the ongoing monitoring in terms of making decisions, there are three levels of evaluation and monitoring with IPS. The first is general monitoring that the department undertakes of those schools. Secondly, there is the evaluation of IPS itself and we are commissioning that; it is going to procurement as we speak. The purpose of that evaluation across the initiative, not the schools individually—I will come to that in a moment—is to examine the impact of the initiative on the effectiveness and efficiency not only of the participating schools but more broadly all of the public schools in the system. It will also consider how well the initiative is being implemented and whether there are opportunities to improve and strengthen the initiative. So the planned evaluation will explore a range of areas; how the schools demonstrate greater flexibility, what choices do they have, how have they used it, is the system more responsive to them, matters of efficiency, effectiveness, the impact of the school boards, selection processes, staffing and so on. The evaluation will be carried out independently of the department following a tender process. That will run for two years to 2012–13 inclusive with a built-in option for extension to the contract. So it will be quite a comprehensive evaluation of the initiative. The third component, the Department of Education Services, will undertake with the first 34 schools next year, independent reviews of their performance. So there are three components to the ongoing monitoring. Alongside that, we have a regular working meeting; I meet with those principals involved. In addition to that, we have working party meetings with unions, professional associations, parents associations et cetera.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Also, on page 401 the “Pathways” dot point about halfway down states —

Building flexible pathways between schools, Vocational Education and Training ... providers, universities and employers ...

Is that program something that is sort of built in line with the independent public schools and that is why this sort of thing is happening now or has that happened outside the independent public schools? I am interested to know about that, but also more on the actual way this works. My understanding is that students now in years 11 and 12, even those who are not necessarily on a VET pathway but those that are on a TEE pathway, may also be studying for some of those VET qualifications at the same time. For instance—I just want to confirm whether it is happening or not—a TEE student will do their TEE subjects, whether or not they pass that and go on to university is a separate thing, but if they have also been studying similar subjects to those on the VET pathway, they will end up with a cert II in business or whatever it is. Is there enough flexibility in the system for that to happen?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will get the director general to make a comment and then I might have a few things to say.

Ms O'Neill: I will start first with a few general comments about year 12 and the pathways in particular. Certainly, it was a very good year in public schools in terms of year 12 performance, regardless of pathway, I guess. We had more than 500 additional students get an ATAR that would get them into university and we had many more VET certificates—over 4 901—for full-time public school students. So the inclusion of VET as a real pathway now is very strong in the public school system. In terms of our performance, in addition to that, we have won two years in a row the Beazley Medal for the academic pathway but also for the VET pathway. Certainly, there are very

strong opportunities in the public school system in terms of pathways, not just the historic university–tertiary-bound but the VET pathway.

I think your question goes to the flexibility of students moving between and doing combinations of pathways. Certainly since the raised leaving age, there has been more focus on the expansion of pathways. It is not particularly linked to IPS, although independent public schools are taking some creative ways and means of broadening curriculum options even further, including that in VET. While the opportunity to consider not only schooling, VET, apprenticeships, employment and training, and combinations of those was in place prior to the raised leaving age—there was some opportunity for that—that policy initiative certainly gave rise to it and since then it has been much more greatly refined, I guess, and opportunities expanded with government providers, private providers et cetera.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will just add to that. Certainly, from my perspective as training minister, it was really important to me to ensure that we did provide as many avenues into training as we possibly could and ensure that that flexibility with regard to those training pathways were provided—not only provided, but in fact that they were promoted. There has been a cultural attitude in our schools for generations, quite frankly, that you did the TEE subjects, you did a pathway to university, whereas most kids, a significant proportion of our students, do not go to university. So a lot of what they do in year 11 and 12, quite frankly, is irrelevant to them in terms of their career pathway. It does not do an enormous amount for their resiliency skills or their self-esteem because they fail a lot of the time. It is really important.

Our education system has evolved to the point where more and more students are choosing VET now than ever before, which is music to my ears. The message I have got to give out as training minister—this goes hand-in-hand with education—is to ensure that we assist in that cultural attitude shift, so that students when they are making their subject choices up to year 10 do not feel that they are diminished or somehow subservient to students that choose an academic pathway. If they want to choose the VET option, that provides a plethora of different options for them in terms of training and provides for them a qualification that will open doors for them throughout the state, nationally and internationally. We are looking down the barrel of a significant skills shortage. If we are going to draw more and more people into the training area, that is something that we need to do as a community. We can do that as a government by providing more options and more pathways; we are doing that, but it has to be a cultural attitude. It has to be through parents, career counsellors and industry as a whole to make sure that we can get the message through to students and the community as a whole that VET options really are a viable option; they provide a training pathway which is a treasured possession. Just to reinforce that and to show that there has been a shift, in 2010 there was a 49 per cent increase from 2009 in the number of year 12 students in public schools achieving VET certificates and a 40 per cent increase in the number of certificates obtained. So we are starting to make inroads, but we have got a long, long way to go; there are still a lot of students there that probably would be better placed choosing those VET options. That does not for a moment diminish those that want to choose an academic pathway, but those that choose the alternative should not feel subservient. So we will continue pounding on about this to make sure that we do provide those options. At the moment, the director general of my department is working with the Director General of Education, Sharyn O'Neill, to work towards making sure we do have a bit more flexibility. I think there is a lot we can do in that space in terms of providing more opportunities and VET options and more flexibility. I look forward to working with Liz and the education department to ensure that we do provide positive outcomes in that space.

[9.40 am]

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: It is heartening to hear that. But I must say also that it is vitally important that that flexibility is maintained. As the mother of an almost 14-year-old, I know that kids change their minds every day as to what they would like to do when they leave school. I would hate to see kids

stuck in one pathway and not able to move across the pathways; if that is a word of caution, I do not know. Following on from that, I refer to page 402, “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”, and the line “Apparent retention rate (proportion of Year 8 cohort studying in Year 12)”. If these great pathways are now in place, and we have all these wonderful plans for children to stay at school until a certain age, it seems to me that the apparent retention rate is fairly low. Are we pitching that a bit too low in the hope that the actuals will be a lot better than that?

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is a valid point. I ask the director general to make some comments.

Ms O'Neill: We need to be a bit careful about the apparent retention rate, because that is not a demonstration of participation, which I think is what the member is talking about. The apparent retention rate is actually a calculation of the number of full-time students in year 12 in a given calendar year as a percentage of the number of kids who enrolled in year 8 four years earlier. They are not the same children. So, it measures something different. The actual participation rate, as also shown on page 402, is above 90 per cent. That is a measure of the number of students who are in school. The current participation rate for persons aged 15 to 17 years—that is, for semester 2, year 10 and beyond—is 95.2 per cent. Therefore, there is a large number, as there ought to be, of students who are involved in education in terms of school training, approved employment or a combination of activities at any given point in time, which I think is the flexibility issue the member was referring to before. If we are looking at a measure of students' participation in the approved pathways, then it is the participation rate that we need to take into account. The apparent retention rate is a different measure.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Can the director general explain that again? I am at a bit of a loss to understand the apparent retention rate.

Ms O'Neill: Apparent retention is the number of full-time students in year 12 in a given calendar year. It is a percentage of the number of full-time students who enrolled in year 8 four years earlier. They are not necessarily the same children, because children come in and out of the school. It is a percentage for that school, at that particular point in time, of those students who are still in year 12, as a group, and who enrolled in year 8 four years earlier.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Should they not all still be in year 12, though?

Ms O'Neill: No, because some will go into the pathways that we talked about earlier. This is apparent retention in schools.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: This is one of the mysteries of the budget papers! I never know what these outcomes and key effectiveness indicators actually measure.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Should it not be the number of students who are in year 12 and in education and training?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Does the member mean the current year 12s?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: How many of the year 12 population are actually in education and training?

Ms O'Neill: We have broken it down into years 11 and 12, remembering that they are all in different pathways. According to the figures from the February census, for years 11 and 12, there were 1 870 in district high schools; there were 24 792 in secondary schools; there were 4 230 in senior campuses and senior colleges; there were just over 600 in education support centres in schools; there were just over 400 in agricultural colleges; and there were about 125 at SIDE.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Do we know how many students who should be in years 11 or 12 are missing from the education and training system? We should be able to get from the Bureau of Statistics the number of people who are of an age that should put them into years 11 and 12. We should then be able to work out how many of those people are being captured by the system and how many are missing from the system. That is what I am interested to know.

Ms O'Neill: The number from the most recent census was that there are 3 147 students who are not participating in any particular program. That may include some year 10s, but I will need to check that.

The CHAIR: While we are waiting for that, I will give members the speaking list, so that members will know how we are going. I have an indication that Hon Ken Travers has questions, so, as a committee member, he will go next. He will be followed by Hon Alison Xamon, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, Hon Linda Savage, Hon Mia Davies, Hon Brian Ellis, Hon Alyssa Hayden and Hon Adele Farina. That is order that I have.

Ms O'Neill: The most specific number that I can give the member today is for years 11 and 12. There are 3 147 students who are not participating in any form of schooling, training or employment. Of those students, 2 961 are working with our participation coordinators to get them into a pathway; a small number of students have left the state; a small number of students have exemptions for medical purposes; and there is a small number of students whose whereabouts are unknown, and we are continuing to look for them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Do we know what the total population is across the state for that age cohort for years 11 and 12?

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is 58 794, with 4.8 per cent who are not engaged.

The CHAIR: I give the call to Hon Liz Behjat.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So, those 3 147 students are all engaged with participation coordinators. Is the director general confident that there are not any students outside that number who are not engaged?

Ms O'Neill: Of that number, there are 186 whose whereabouts are unknown, and they are on our tracking system—they may have left the state and not advised; there are 16 who are, unfortunately, deceased; there are 264 who have left the state; and there are 31 with medical exemptions.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: My final question is more an electorate-specific question for me, and there is some self-interest here. It is about Ashdale Secondary College, where my son goes to school. There was a recent fire at that school, in absolutely tragic circumstances, where brand-new classrooms were gutted, and some of the teachers lost 20 years of work when the staffroom went up in flames. Is the construction of stage 2 still on track or will this fire slow down the process? Before the minister answers that question, I would like to put on the record—I did this in the house—that as the parent of a student at that school, my congratulations to the education department on the alert service that it had with regard to the fire. We got our first alert at seven o'clock in the morning that there had been a fire, and do not send the children to school; and I understand from the principal that only six out of 530 kids turned up that day. We were given email alerts all the way through that. So, well done to the department for that.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Mr Fischer will answer that question

[9.50 am]

Mr Fischer: Stage 2 of the Ashdale work is on schedule to be completed. It has not been delayed by the other works related to the fire.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I refer to pages 401 and 403 and the FTEs for, I assume, mostly secondary education. What is the current number of FTEs and the headcount for school psychs employed by the department?

Hon PETER COLLIER: One of the Liberal Party's policies going into the last election was to increase the number of school psychologists by 50 across the state to assist schools and school communities to deal with a number of social issues in schools. Behavioural issues in schools are much broader now than they have been for a number of years. There are also special challenges as a

result of raising the school leaving age. We have almost met that commitment. We have an additional 45 school psychologists in our schools. I will ask the director general to comment.

Ms O'Neill: As at the pay date of 28 May, there were 266.74 FTEs for a headcount of 332. I will ask Mr Axworthy to confirm where we are at with the additional school psychologists.

Mr Axworthy: That represents an additional 45 FTEs of the 50 that we are working towards employing. Because staff come and go, pay dates can move, and so in answering questions on this we try to use comparable dates from year to year. While the director general has given you the very latest figures of what is on the books now, I have the figures from the beginning of May over the last few years. We had 204 FTEs in 2008, 207 in 2009, 215 in 2010, leading up to the number we have just referred to today, 244.6.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: How many school-based police officers are there?

Hon PETER COLLIER: There is one seconded police person in the department.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Where are we up to in getting school-based police officers reinstated to schools?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will make a comment after the director general.

Ms O'Neill: In relation to the police presence in schools, we have been working with the Commissioner of Police to see what initiatives we can put in place to support schools with a police presence. We are very fortunate to be working closely with the police around their PCYC people, who can assist us to build some pretty strong relationships with students. As has been mentioned, there was the secondment of the police sergeant in the role of police schools' safety liaison officer. That police officer liaises with schools and regions to support them with violence in schools in particular. We have also been working with WA Police on a number of initiatives, such as the Keeping our Workplace Safe strategy, the Crime Stoppers in Schools pilot, and an internet safety program for which we have been working with the WA Police major crime division, particularly at Kinross and Southern River. In regard to the work on school-based police themselves, we are working with WA Police, as I said, on the PCYC schools partnership. We are planning that now. That is being developed to address the needs of disaffected young people in particular who are at risk of offending.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is great, but what I am interested in is whether we are looking at reinstating school-based police officers. It is a simple question—yes or no? I did not expect it to be so hard.

Hon PETER COLLIER: On behalf of the Minister for Education, I understand that the minister has said she is not progressing that at this stage. It is a police matter but, as I understand it, it is not being progressed.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: To be clear, from the education point of view, are you not currently seeking any school-based police officers?

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is the advice I have received.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Can you also tell me how much money has been allocated directly to schools to fund behaviour management programs, and where is it in the budget?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will ask the director general to respond.

Ms O'Neill: Implementing student behaviour obviously continues to be a priority for the department. We have not only maintained the existing level of funding, which is \$16.445 million annually for the behaviour management and discipline strategy, but also committed, through the government's commitment, an additional \$47.7 million over five years for the implementation of the Better Behaviour and Stronger Pastoral Care strategy that the minister announced. Included in that are various initiatives, including the Positive Parenting Program, Mental Health First Aid, and

the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies—PATHS. In addition, new behaviour centres have opened in Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Port Hedland and are fully operational. Also, under an agreement with the independent care schools, we have enrolled 19 students in care schools up to about April. A fair degree of work obviously continues to be done in the area of behaviour.

Where it sits in the budget, it is built into our supplementary funding that we provide to schools—the school support supplementation.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: How much have you actually allocated directly to schools for behaviour management?

Ms O'Neill: Out of that total?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just pick up on that? I think the care schools that the director general mentioned are really important. I am not sure if you are familiar with them, but Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich will be. They are the curriculum and reengagement in education schools. They are actually private schools, which means that they are fundamentally funded from the feds, but we significantly increased their funding. They deal with the so-called disengaged kids, or the kids who are not attuned to mainstream schooling. They do a terrific job but they basically operate on the smell of an oily rag. Corridors Secondary College in Midland deals with a lot of Indigenous kids. As I said, they are the type of kids who have been engaged with juvenile justice et cetera.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: We have one in our own electorate that we can promote.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am well aware of all the care schools. I was at another one just recently. They provide opportunities for these kids whose are labelled as “disengaged”, which is a term that I find offensive, quite frankly, because they are not. They all have energy levels; it is just a matter of where they direct them. It was important to me, having had a fair amount to do with care schools, to increase their funding even though it was incumbent on us to do so. We did that by providing an additional \$3 million in direct funding to assist those care schools to assist students who are perhaps not so attuned to authoritarian schooling. I will ask the director general to comment on the other funding.

Ms O'Neill: In the calendar year, \$11.7 million went directly to those schools.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy for this to be taken on notice. I think the total figure you mentioned earlier was \$50 million —

Hon PETER COLLIER: It was \$47 million.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy for you to take as a question on notice the breakdown of that \$47 million and how much is allocated to each of the programs you have outlined. Equally, of the \$11 million you have talked about going directly to care schools, can you indicate which public schools have received that money and also what specific programs have been funded out of that money at those public schools?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am sure we can do that, but I will ask the director general to respond.

Ms O'Neill: We are able to answer the first part of the question, but the second part of the question would require us to go to each and every school and get a description from them on the way in which they have used that funding. Those decisions are made at the schools. It is used for school support in the area of behaviour, but we certainly would not be able to answer that question in the week or so that we have to respond; we would have to go to each of those schools and ask them how they spend that behaviour management funding.

[10.00 am]

Hon PETER COLLIER: You are asking for the schools that it is going to, are you not?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Is it just going to the schools —

Hon PETER COLLIER: But for behaviour management?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, for behaviour management.

Hon PETER COLLIER: You do not want to know the actual programs from the schools, do you?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am interested to know what it is actually getting used for. I guess the danger with this money is that it gets to the school on the basis of behaviour management but is diverted into other programs in the school.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I hope not.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I guess this raises a general concern I have: how does the department make sure the money it provides for specific programs are used for that? The minister would well remember the Balga Works inquiry that he initiated where money was being used in all sorts of ways other than what was originally intended. I am interested in how do we actually know that it is then being used for behaviour management. Can you provide some other way of demonstrating to me that that is what is happening? I am intrigued in terms of how the central office of the department corresponds with their schools. I found it fascinating the other day that the department was asking individual bus contractors if they could tell them who has contracts with schools as part of aggregating up your bus contracts! I would have thought the department could go to their schools and ask for that information; they would not have to go out to the provider of the service. I am interested in how you manage those interrelationships between schools and the department.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Fair cop; I understand that. As far as I am concerned, and from advice I have since received, yes, all that money goes directly towards behaviour management or pastoral care. Pastoral care is a component of behaviour management.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If you cannot give me the individual figures, what I would like to know is how does the department assure itself that that money has gone to behaviour management programs?

Hon PETER COLLIER: The department has done an evaluation of the behaviour management spending. You can certainly have a copy of that. Does that satisfy you?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Maybe. I will see what it says when I get it! If the department can give me any other information as to how they assure themselves —

Hon PETER COLLIER: I would be interested. I would like to know to make sure that the money is being spent where it should be. One of the biggest issues we have is behaviour management. If we have given them a bucket of money and they are not putting it into behaviour management, I would be pretty aggro.

[Supplementary Information No A3.]

Ms O'Neill: If we could clarify exactly what that supplementation is. We offered to give the behaviour management evaluation, but I am not sure if there is something else required.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I want the amount of money that has been received by each school and then how you, as a department, assure yourself that that money has been used for the purposes for which it was provided. Provide me whatever you use to assure yourselves that it has been used for the purpose, and I will make an assessment as to whether I think that is sufficient.

Hon PETER COLLIER: But you do not want the breakdown of every school's program? Do you want a sample of a couple of schools or something like that? The review is fine. Eleven million dollars covers a lot of programs; it will take a long time.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: You are right; there are a lot of programs, but the danger is where the money ends up. The schools know they are never going to be monitored for it, so they reallocate it wherever they think they want to use it.

Hon PETER COLLIER: We want to work out the schools it has gone to and how we are ascertaining whether or not that is being used appropriately. That is fine.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Have an additional 10 behaviour management specialists now been appointed at the schools; or, if not, when will they be appointed? Sorry, not at the schools, but just been appointed; and, if not, when will they be appointed?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Which officers are you referring to?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The behaviour management specialists that I think you promised, minister, if I remember correctly.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I know which ones you are referring to.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am glad you do!

Ms O'Neill: There are a range of these officers. We are trying to clarify which ones you are interested in. There are 25 classroom management instructional behaviour specialists who go out and work in schools. In the other area we have four specialist behaviour psychologists. We were trying to work out which group you were referring to. Then we have our behaviour centres, both primary and secondary. Inside of those, we have specialist people working there as well. We have the full complement.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: In the then shadow Minister for Education's policy, he indicated there would be money provided to appoint an additional 10 behaviour management specialists attached to district offices. It becomes a bit difficult in understanding because you do not have district offices any more, so I am looking for the figures from the department that can demonstrate to me that you have appointed 10 additional behaviour management specialists over and above what existed in 2008.

Ms O'Neill: We can confirm that we have in place—probably more than 10 in fact—specialist behaviour officers. It may not be exactly the 10 in the form that you are referring to, because since that time there have been some changes, particularly districts to regions, but in the spirit and intent of the election commitment about having at least 10 behaviour specialists, yes, we do have those.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Ten additional? These are additional to what existed in 2008?

Ms O'Neill: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy for that to be taken on notice. Can you provide me with the figures that you believe will demonstrate what was there in 2008 has been added to and where those additional 10 are located?

Ms O'Neill: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: I want to follow on from Hon Ken Travers' line of questioning. In relation to the programs to deal with behavioural issues that you were referring to and the bucket of money that goes to the schools, what sort of guidelines are there on the appropriateness of particular programs? It is one thing to ensure that the money is actually being spent as it is intended—I understand that information will be forthcoming; the other one is actually the guidance given to individual schools.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I would like to have a say on this in a minute, but I will ask Mr Axworthy to say something first.

Mr Axworthy: Guidelines come in a variety of ways. The majority of the money that the schools have, they use to do two sets of things. One is to provide additional staff and support to deal with difficult children —

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I just interrupt. By that, do you mean qualified additional staff such as clinical psychologists, counsellors or the like, or are you referring to additional FTE with teaching?

Mr Axworthy: Both. Schools will increase their allocation of psychologist time by buying in additional staff. That is why I said earlier that the numbers of school psychologists go up and down because schools will be contracting in staff for periods of time.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Purchasing the services; okay.

Mr Axworthy: Yes. And other services, like group workers.

[10.10 am]

Hon ALISON XAMON: Does that also include school chaplains?

Mr Axworthy: That is part of the mix, but it is a separate funding arrangement for school chaplains.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Of course; but I am interested to know whether that is actually considered to be part of the guidelines in terms of dealing with behavioural management.

Mr Axworthy: It certainly is. As the minister said, it is behavioural management. It is the disciplinary end, but it is also the pastoral care end. When we look at trying to deal with discipline matters, the best way of trying to deal with them is to try to prevent them from occurring in the first place, and the better the care that exists around the students and that their needs are being met and identified early, the less chance there is of behavioural problems falling through.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just pick up on that, because this is why we went into the election with that, ensuring that money did go into the actual individual schools. Behaviour management issues in some schools are completely different from behaviour management issues in other schools, as I am sure you are well aware.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Of course.

Hon PETER COLLIER: In some schools, a significant proportion of the kids rock up without brekkie. They will not have seen dad, or dad will have bashed up mum, or a whole raft of social issues that do not exist in other schools. That is why having a generic behaviour management policy across the board is just unpalatable, and it does not work. That is why we want to, as I say, empower more and more schools to make decisions on what happens within their schools and not have those decisions imposed upon them from above. So what you have actually got then is a situation where we are giving that autonomy, we are giving that authority and we are giving that responsibility to individual schools. There are a raft of different behaviour management initiatives that you can use within each individual school, and that is why we want to do that. And, yes, the chaplaincy program, which I was very supportive of and which I think works wonderfully well, was a key component of that. I understand that some people take objection to the fact that they feel that the chaplaincy is an imposition of perhaps the Christian faith on our education system, which is not the case. The chaplaincy program fundamentally deals with pastoral care—support mechanisms to support those kids who need it—and in some schools it is much more prevalent than in others. So we do not have a generic, across-the-board, imposed behaviour management system on all of our schools, but we give schools the autonomy to make that determination themselves, and they can draw from a raft of different programs currently in existence.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Okay, minister, I understand that, and I am trying to get an idea of how broad those guidelines are. We may just have to agree to disagree on how broad the scope should be

in terms of being able to access money for delivery of those programs. For example, I am the first one to support the fact that we cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach in relation to behaviour management. Clearly, across the board we have got a number of factors that affect schools dramatically differently. But, for example, if we did have maybe a principal who was of a particular religious bent, I just want to confirm whether they would be able to, in theory, use all of the money allocated to their school to basically put it towards the school chaplain. I think that would be of concern to a large number of people in the community who expect our public schools to effectively be secular in their approach. So I want to have an idea of the extent to which that could occur.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Okay. I will ask the director general.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I will also add that I have met with many school chaplains, and I have actually met with school chaplains who have actually said to me that they believe their role is to proselytise, and I was —

Hon PETER COLLIER: To what, sorry?

Hon ALISON XAMON: To proselytise—to basically promote the Christian faith.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I know what it is.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I was very concerned to hear that, although I am fully aware that that is not the view of the larger organisation.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is certainly not.

Hon ALISON XAMON: But individuals do hold that view.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is not, and it would disappoint me if that were the case —

Hon ALISON XAMON: It disappointed me too.

Hon PETER COLLIER: — and I can assure you that it is not the role of the chaplaincy program.

Ms O'Neill: Two issues are raised there. The second that you were just referring to is in terms of the conduct of chaplains. Certainly, in our service level agreement with YouthCARE, which employs the chaplains, because we do not employ the chaplains, our expectations are very clear. We have strengthened the chaplaincy services just recently by ensuring and demanding comprehensive induction programs on appointment to schools and network meetings. Seventy-four per cent of them are now studying cert II or higher, so it is a much stronger, I think, contractual arrangement with YouthCARE to make sure that the things that you are talking about are made abundantly clear, notwithstanding you might have individuals who go outside of that, and we would want to deal with YouthCARE on those particular individuals.

Your original question was about the capacity to which our principals could make unilateral decisions about where funding could go. It is a requirement under the Financial Management Act—or certainly the policy for schools is that there is a finance committee in place in every school, and that is an auditable arrangement. So the finance committees are certainly involved in the decision making of where the finances go in a school, so it would be highly unlikely and irregular for a principal to make a unilateral decision. In fact, it would be inappropriate practice, and if we were aware of cases where principals were determining where all of the budget of the school would go, then we would want to have a discussion directly with that principal. We in fact have a section of the department that works directly with schools in terms of finances. The registrars, by and large, are highly experienced people. Many of them would not let the principal do that; they would probably like to do it themselves. But, nonetheless, there are quite strong processes through our financial practices to ensure that the decision making is appropriate. In independent public schools, where they have one-line budgets, their delivery and performance agreement is with me and with the school board, so the school board has an involvement in ensuring that the decision making policy-wise and financial-wise, while it is the province of the school, is participative and reflective

of the school's priorities, and that is incredibly important. It would be inappropriate and we would not support the practice of a principal making unilateral decisions about the disbursement of funding.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I just move on to the fourth dot point on page 401, "Services to Students". I note that the Minister for Education put out a press release on 19 May.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I am sorry; I cannot hear you.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I note that the Minister for Education put out a press release on 19 May announcing \$361.6 million to meet costs associated with increased enrolment of students, particularly in relation to special needs, and delivery of the IPS reform and to assist schools with increased cost pressures. I am particularly interested in the special needs component, and I am trying to figure out how that fits in with the moneys that were mentioned before. I would like, please—I am happy to take this on notice—a breakdown of the special needs component and exactly what programs are involved in that. I had some questions about specific programs, and I want to know whether they are incorporated within the special needs programs as well.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Hon ALISON XAMON: If it is a long list, I am happy to take it on notice.

Hon PETER COLLIER: You are talking about additional funding, are you?

Hon ALISON XAMON: This is the additional funding to meet costs over and above what already exists, and a breakdown of that additional funding and what programs —

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will just see if we can get that for you now.

Hon ALISON XAMON: And only for the special needs component—not for the rest.

Hon PETER COLLIER: In 2011–12, students with special needs got an additional \$3.076 million.

Hon ALISON XAMON: And that is out of the \$361.6 million, is it?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Where is the \$360 million from?

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am just trying to break it down. The announcement said \$361.6 million to meet costs associated with increased enrolments of students with special needs, the delivery of IPS reform and to assist schools with increased cost pressures. That amount could have incorporated the additional plus the existing; I am not quite sure on that. So that is the first question. I am assuming that it is both.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is part of the \$360 million.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Okay. And of that component, \$3.076 million —

Hon PETER COLLIER: Is for special needs.

Hon ALISON XAMON: — is over and above existing components for students with special needs.

[10.20 am]

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is for 2011–12.

Ms O'Neill: For 2011–12, \$3.076 million is given to the department in recognition of the growth in numbers of students with special needs, so it is additional funding.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to take on notice a breakdown of the various programs that have been allocated, or is the director general saying schools determine how that is used?

Ms O'Neill: The lion's share of that funding and possibly the entirety of it—I will check—will be disbursed through the eight categories under the Schools Plus program. This money goes directly to students who are in need of additional support.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Schools Plus is one portion. What is the remainder for?

Ms O'Neill: There is also an additional and separate allocation in 2011–12 of \$5.070 million for children of 457 visa holders.

Hon ALISON XAMON: That was one of my next questions. I wanted to specifically ask for some bits and pieces, including how much funding has been provided to continue the ESL support for children of 457 visa holders. How does that compare with the previous year's allocation?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Mr Axworthy can respond to that.

Mr Axworthy: The state budget of two years ago provided additional funding for ESL for the children of 457 visa holders for the first time. At that time we received \$6.86 million and then last year \$7.032 million. As a result of receiving that money we have now been able to ensure that children of 457 visa holders are treated the same as any other new arrivals with an ESL need. Two years ago we were receiving no additional funding for these children and when we got the additional funding we had to spend that on these children; now we are able to treat all children, regardless of their visa category, on the basis of their ESL needs. The additional \$5 million that we have this year will be part of the total spending on ESL.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Has any money been put aside specifically to run support programs or to deal with support—over and above the individual counselling that is made available—to tackle homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools and support for same-sex attracted youth and questioning youth? Is there anything that specifically deals with children who are affected by homophobia?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, there is no additional funding; it is part of the general funding pool.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Is funding or are specified programs available?

Hon PETER COLLIER: There is no specific funding.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So there are no Pride or Prejudice programs or similar programs that will be rolled out?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I ask the director general to comment.

Ms O'Neill: There is no specific funding line for the matter that the member has referred to. As the minister has pointed out, there are programs that schools use, and certainly it is seen and is part of our anti-bullying and sexual harassment approaches, and we have done some work with the health department that I think is called Healthy Relationships. However, we do not have a specific budget item set aside for it.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Is it up to individual schools to determine whether they will run any specific anti-homophobic bullying campaigns?

Ms O'Neill: They will make a judgement about what is required, depending on the students in their care. Decisions are made school by school all of the time about curriculum offerings, pastoral care and help, and positive engagement that is needed. We do not direct, necessarily, a large number of those programs from the central office.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am sure the director general will appreciate that on a school-by-school basis we could be talking about only a few students, but on a statewide basis, it is many students. On the same issue of specialist funding, the Commissioner for Children and Young People has recommended that state funding be allocated for the delivery of mental health programs like KidsMatter and MindMatters. The director general mentioned Mental Health First Aid program. That is a good program, and I am not criticising, but is that the only program being promoted or will other programs be promoted as well?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I understand that those programs are funded, but I ask the director general to respond.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Is the minister talking about KidsMatter and MindMatters?

Ms O'Neill: We have people involved in KidsMatter and MindMatters.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am happy to take on notice the breakdown of how much has been allocated to the delivery of those individual programs, where they are being delivered and how many FTE are attached to that.

Ms O'Neill: As I recall—we will take that on notice—there is central office involvement from a policy perspective, or contribution at that level, and then once again various schools will make decisions to be engaged. Some of our specialist school psychologists may be involved in the delivery of some of those programs. We could provide the member with our level of involvement in those programs. As schools decide that on a school-by-school basis, it will be hard to ascertain in a short space of time.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Like Hon Ken Travers, I am happy to take what information I can get. It is interesting to get an idea of the individual schools that are hoping to taking up these programs.

Ms O'Neill: We will be happy to provide that.

[Supplementary Information No A5.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: The other specific program I want to focus on in this line item, which I raised last year, concerns the ongoing issues surrounding foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I recognise that it is a very difficult issue to address because of diagnostic issues and the range of disabilities attached to that. Having said that and having just come back from the Kimberley, I know there is a dire need for additional assistance in our schools, specifically to deal with FASD. I know that teachers up there have been saying they need assistance with early diagnoses or possible diagnoses in order to ensure early referral of these students, and they also need the capacity to access and to extend the Schools Plus program for many of the school students that fall into this category. Is there any progress on this over and above what we had last year, which was not much?

Ms O'Neill: We may well be in the position that we described last year. We have been involved and continue to be involved in the development of resources with the Department of Health and its website for “Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Model of Care”. We are involved in national and local forums and obviously we continue to support schools. We know that up to 25 per cent of children with this disorder have an intellectual disability. As I said last year, those students diagnosed with an intellectual disability are eligible for Schools Plus funding and we provide visiting teacher services for these services. We know that on most occasions students who are diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome disorder have manifestations that fit into the eight categories, so our anecdotal evidence to date is that many, and probably most of those students, are funded under Schools Plus. That is not to say that all of them are. We also have a range of services and supports that we provide to assist teachers who have students suffering from this diagnosis and we also give our schools supplementation and the flexibility to use that supplementary funding outside of the Schools Plus range of diagnoses to assist with students who have particular needs. We are also involved in a study on the impact of foetal alcohol syndrome disorder on Indigenous children in the Fitzroy Valley in particular.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I met with the man who is coordinating that study. There is a question mark there on how much funding the state government has put into that, because I understand the federal government is largely funding that. What input does the education department have into that?

[10.30 am]

Ms O'Neill: I guess, in summary, I do not think that I am adding anything more than I would have added in my comments last year. It is not one of the categories of Schools Plus. Many of the students are nonetheless funded as they manifest across the eight Schools Plus categories.

Hon ALISON XAMON: One of the issues I also raised is the ongoing issue for teachers who are going up there—as you are aware, they are often very new teachers—who are saying one of the issues they have is wanting to at least be able to pick up on the early warning signs. I mean, they are not qualified to diagnose, obviously, but they are often at the front line to be able to look at referral of these children in order to be diagnosed. Is there anything planned in relation to PD over and above what exists to actually assist those teachers with that?

Ms O'Neill: Our teachers are not—I think you made this point—skilled and nor do we expect them to be the people who would diagnose. I think what you are asking is whether they are in a position to at least provide useful information —

Hon ALISON XAMON: Or early referral.

Ms O'Neill: — or have a warning capacity such that they could get the child into some sense of referral. Certainly our schools that are in remote communities—as they come together and have professional learning, there have been discussions around foetal alcohol syndrome. I cannot point today to a particular occasion when that has happened, because I do not know specifically, but it is an issue that confronts schools and the broader communities. Many of those remote and particularly Indigenous communities are working very closely across health, education, DCP and a range of other agencies that are represented there. Stage 2 of the study that we referred to and the Telethon Institute research—they invited us to be involved in this. Stage 2 of the study into the impact of FASD on Indigenous children will include screening of the health, behaviour and developmental status of seven and eight-year-olds, the upskilling of the health and education workforce and some commentary and assistance around home management. We are involved in that program now, but no results that I can concretely refer to today.

The CHAIR: I am just going to now go to the promise that I said we would have a break, assuming that you have completed on that particular point.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I have completed on that particular point, but I still have many more questions.

The CHAIR: I am sure you do. Given that we said we would have a 10-minute break, I might adjourn the hearing and suggest that we come back at quarter to 11, just to be fair.

Hearing suspended from 10.32 to 10.47 am

The CHAIR: We are ready to go. Thank you very much. I give the call to Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Minister, I would like to start by drawing your attention to some information contained in the budget papers on page 402 in respect of NAPLAN test results. To give it some sort of context, I particularly want to note on page 401 a statement made there under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” in relation to “Indigenous Education” and the concluding comment on the need to address the difference between the performance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and also the point made about improving Indigenous students’ attendance rates. What I am basically seeking today—the minister will probably need to take this on notice—is that getting back to the table on page 402 “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” I want to know if it is possible to provide a breakdown of those particular tables and figures into non-Indigenous and Indigenous students for the various categories listed; is that possible?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will ask the director general to make some comments on it, but I agree. I understand where you are coming from. Certainly, in my capacity as Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I think this is without a doubt one of the most significant issues we face in terms of removing barriers for Aboriginal people in improving literacy and numeracy rates for Indigenous students, particularly those in rural and remote areas. We have special problems in Western Australia because of the diversity of the state, of course, and the lack of comprehensive facilities in

some areas of the state and until we do address that issue more comprehensively as a community—not just necessarily as a department, but as a community—we are going to continue to have social issues for Aboriginal people later in life. I will ask the director general to make some comments in terms of if we can get that breakdown and what is actually occurring in that space.

Ms O'Neill: Around the connection that you are talking about between NAPLAN initially and Aboriginal students, we would want to say that on a number of measures in national testing, there is some modest improvement in terms of Aboriginal students' outcomes. Between 2008 and 2010 there have certainly been increases in mean scores for Aboriginal students in year 3 reading, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and year 7, in particular, reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and smaller improvements evident on other NAPLAN assessments. There are substantial improvements in the percentages of Aboriginal students working at or above the national minimum standard across years 3, 7 and 9. But while improvements are being made, I do not think we would want to pretend that that is sufficient. The challenge that remains is enormous. Targeted assistance is provided to Aboriginal students specifically through a range of programs. In terms of the data available for Aboriginal students, I think it has been published recently, the breakdown of Indigenous/non-Indigenous performance. For example, in 2010—the most recent testing analysis available, because they have just done 2011—in year 3 we know that in terms of percentages at or above national minimum standard, Indigenous students continue to be behind their counterparts. Year 3, for example, 75 per cent of Aboriginal kids, year 3, numeracy, at or above the minimum standard against an all figure of 92.4. So we know that there is a way to go. My understanding is that that information is publicly available against each of the NAPLAN assessments and we would be happy to provide it to you, the breakdown.

This needs to be read alongside of the strategy or the plan that the minister released recently for the department on Aboriginal education. In that plan itself there are targets for Aboriginal student achievement in literacy and numeracy and they are reflective of the COAG targets. So we are working to COAG targets around literacy and numeracy, obviously, which is around halving the gap. The other one I think you mentioned was attendance as well and our new plan has targets for attendance as we have been working on that in quite a compelling way. If you cannot access the publicly available information for the 2010 NAPLAN breakdown between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we would be happy to provide that; it is publicly available, as we said.

[10.50 am]

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I would appreciate that.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I take your point about the figures and the improvements, but I would always suggest that they are coming—as I think the minister would acknowledge—from a fairly low base. I am also vitally concerned particularly about issues associated with year 9. I think there are more complex issues once Indigenous students get into higher years, and that may well be forthcoming in some of the other questions that I have. I will move on to my next question, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I suggest to you that it has been reported in the media that the states and territories have agreed to work towards halving the gap between the number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous at or above the national minimum reading, writing and numeracy standards by 2018. I want to know: is that statement correct; and, if so—you might be able to point me in the right direction—what budget initiatives, minister, might there be in place to necessarily achieve those particular outcomes? Are there any specific budgetary expenditure items that might assist in that particular regard?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will just pick up on that. Yes, you are right; that is the target. I will get the director general to comment in a moment, but I will pick up on the point that you made, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, with regard particularly to year 9 students. You are right; that is a particularly vulnerable area. In a lot of instances, the foundation skills, in terms of the basic literacy and numeracy skills I talked about, are very often lost at an early age. To reinforce the fact that it is not just education but training as well, we have significantly increased the funding and the profile in terms of where we are going with Aboriginal training to try to draw as much of that cohort of years 9 and 10 into training as we possibly can. For example, we gave another \$1.9 million for about another 460 foundation skills places last year. It is really, really successful. What it does is help deliver training, cert I training, to those Aboriginal students in year 10. That does an enormous amount to improve the self-esteem and, once again, the resiliency skills of those students—the fact that they can actually achieve something. I went out to the Smile Graduation at the end of last year, and you have 130 year 10 Aboriginal kids come up to get their certificate. If you do not think that has a positive impact in terms of not only what they have achieved, but where they can go beyond that, you need your head read, because it does work. So my role as training minister is to ensure that we maintain the blowtorch in terms of providing training opportunities. But, of course, we can never ever underestimate the role of extension programs with literacy and numeracy. With regard to that COAG target, I will ask the director general to comment.

Ms O'Neill: The COAG target—that is what I was referring to before—is now reflected in our own state department plan for Aboriginal education. So to halve the gap by, I think you said, 2018 is in the plan, and that was agreed by state and territory first ministers as part of the COAG suite of commitments. You also referred to, apart from NAPLAN, year 9 and beyond and the issues that raised. Certainly, there would be no argument about the fact—and that is why I used the particular words—that there has been “modest improvement”. It is starting from a low base. There is a long way to go. We know that there is certain disengagement that is heightened around year 9, and we would want to have a closer look at some of the results around year 9 to make sure that we are focused pretty clearly on that. But we do have some improvement, again from a low base, as you said. The number of students who undertook a year 12 program increased by 30 per cent last year—so there are some positive signs—from 347 students to 452. It is not an enormous number of kids—we want many, many more—but it is a start. And there has been a 26 per cent increase in the number of students who have achieved a WACE. So there are students, also through some targeted assistance, who are doing well. In 2010, there was a 79 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal students who participated in an ATAR pathway—so more than double the increase in Aboriginal students who achieved the minimum ATAR for a university entrance. So some of those signs are encouraging.

You asked specifically about the kinds of expenditure that go into a range of programs, and there are many programs. One of those that you would be familiar with is Aboriginal and islander education officers. We spend in excess of \$5 million on that sort of program. The Aboriginal component of the attendance strategy is in excess of \$4.5 million. So there is a range of programs that are put in place to support Indigenous students. A large and important part of assisting those students, in terms of closing the gap, is in the early years. So we are embarking on quite an interesting initiative, building five children and family centres. As the minister talked about previously, a number of these kids—very many of them—require a much stronger integrated support to enable their success when they come to schools. So those kinds of centres will provide child care, playgroup, early learning programs, maternal and child health and a range of other parent support programs. They have been identified in Halls Creek, Fitzroy, Kununurra, Roebourne and in the Swan region in Perth. In 2011–12, we will spend more than \$8.5 million building those arrangements. So there are a range of activities and initiatives in play around supporting Indigenous students. Of course, there is always more that can be done, and we certainly have an eye to not only

the COAG targets, but our own targets and making sure that every Aboriginal student has the best possible opportunities for the future.

[11.00 am]

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I have a question in respect of the change to administration emphasis in the department from districts to regions. I just want some sort of assurance from the minister that there will be no significant changes in terms of service delivery or budgetary outcomes to Aboriginal education, particularly in the regions now as opposed to the districts, from this particular point on.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will have a comment, but I ask the director general to comment first.

Ms O'Neill: In the move from districts to regions there will be no diminishing service to Aboriginal students. Over time we may provide some of those services in different ways, more effective ways. The whole point of the change is to move services closer to schools or groups of schools; that was the policy intent, but there is certainly no reduction in the financial spend on supporting Aboriginal students.

Hon PETER COLLIER: As the director general said, that was our intent going into the last election; that was our policy framework. As we were giving the schools more and more autonomy and more and more authority in terms of making decisions at the local level, there was necessity for direction at the district level, and that is exactly what has occurred.

The CHAIR: Sorry, member, I have a long list. I am roughly limiting members to 10 minutes, so I am afraid you have had your 10 minutes.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: It may not feel like it, but I am afraid you have! My apologies.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I refer first to the early childhood education dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 400. I note that the Premier said in December that this budget would include money for capital works to begin turning schools into parenting hubs. Given the very limited time we have got, I would just like to make two comments. I am well aware of Challis and Roseworth and how they developed over a number of years, and I think everyone would agree the credit for those should go to the principals. I am looking forward; I am not looking at those two. My particular interest in the comments made by the Premier about money to begin turning schools into parenting hubs is: what is the state contribution? So I want to exclude from where you point me to in the budget federal funds that have come from national partnership agreements such as the Indigenous early childhood development agreement Closing the Gap, which you have just referred to when you talked about Halls Creek, Fitzroy, Kununurra, Roebourne and Swan. I also want to exclude from that the early childhood education universal access money, which is the money which has come from the federal government for Jellybeans, Tambrey and will go to Ashdale, Warriapendi, and I think it is called Baler at Port Hedland, and any other money for the early learning and care centres and Building the Education Revolution. So I am specifically looking for new money from the state in this budget for the capital works to turn the schools into parenting hubs.

Hon PETER COLLIER: The director general will respond to that.

Ms O'Neill: As you have rightly pointed out, there is a range of activities being undertaken in the integrated children's services space. There is certainly strong interest in co-locating and integrating those services onto school sites, which is something of course that we are very supportive of. We do not have in this budget additional funding separate to all of the ones that you have specified there, and in our view it would be a bit early for that to be the case. We are in discussion and planning with other agencies around the integrated services. We are doing some mapping, as we speak, about where we can identify places that are well-positioned to move into the integrated services space,

and you have named a couple of those—Roseworth, Challis et cetera. We are wanting to learn on the various models that are existing now and what is going to be needed in order to make that transition.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: My next question, I think, would come under the asset investment program on page 403. The Premier also said in December last year that there would be funding in this state budget for more schools like the new \$11.9 million Roseworth Primary School. Is there funding in this budget to build schools like Roseworth, which of course grew because of the capacity to sell one school site and put that money to a single school site and significant input from private organisations and NGOs, so specifically schools like Roseworth? Is that in this budget as the Premier promised?

Ms O'Neill: If I could just make initial comment and then ask my officers to respond. Every time we build a new school consideration is given to the kind of school that needs to be in that particular context. Roseworth rose out of a particular set of circumstances and I am certainly not going to pretend that it would be our intention to replicate that everywhere else. That is a response to that particular and immediate school community and the circumstances it found itself in. We do have funding allocated for the building of new schools. What those schools look like, what the functions are, what the services are and the nature of those schools will be determined by those school communities, so we have no intention to template one school over another. That being said, we know that there are fantastic characteristics of Roseworth that we would actually want to give consideration to in other new school builds if that meant that it met the particular and unique needs of a particular community.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Just to clarify: is there not a line item or something I can find in this budget where additional funds have been put aside, which of course Roseworth used and went outside the building brief to build that school, to build schools like Roseworth in this financial year?

Ms O'Neill: To be clear, Roseworth was built in conduct with our normal processes of building schools. That being said, they have strong partnerships with non-government and not-for-profit agencies that many of our schools have, but the building, the design and build of Roseworth, and the flexibility that was enabled inside of that process is in keeping with our normal processes. We work with BMW, so the funding in the budget this year for new schools does provide each school and each school community the flexibility to have involvement in the kind of school that needs to be built there. But there is not a line item that says, “We’re going to have four more Roseworths”; we will need to determine whether four more Roseworths are needed.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I turn to page 406 and the heading “Additions and Improvements to Primary Schools”. I am referring now to Challis, to the parenting and early learning centre which is located at the school. As you will know, the work there is wonderful but the parenting and early learning centre is a very small cramped building that is in desperate need of an upgrade. I know that Challis has been referred to by the government at times as a flagship, so is there any line item in this budget to upgrade or replace the building—that is, the Challis parenting and early learning centre?

Hon PETER COLLIER: The answer is no, and that is confirmed.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I have one more. I just refer now to page 400, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” and the reference to the kindergarten program. I understand that there has been a review of community kindergartens undertaken on behalf of the education department by Dr Anna Alderson and Marie Martin. Is that correct?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes it is, but it is not finalised.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: What was the cost of the review? I am happy to have that as supplementary information.

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will take that on notice.

[*Supplementary Information No A7.*]

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Is it available? Is the review completed?

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is not completed at this stage.

Ms O'Neill: The review was done in collaboration with the community kindergarten association. It is due for completion around now—in fact, initially for early June 2011. It will make recommendations regarding options for community kindergartens in the future. The management committees of community kindergartens and school communities have been involved in the process, but I have not yet received the report.

[11.10 am]

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I understand from what I have been told that the review was in part to investigate and report on the comparative costs of the provision of the four-year-old kindergarten program in community kindergartens and in public schools. Is it correct that comparative cost was one of the issues that was looked at in the review?

Ms O'Neill: The review was across a broad scope. It was not specifically about that. But it may well have included a reflection on the cost of delivering a community kindergarten program in this way. There are 30 community kindergartens in Western Australia, 23 in the metropolitan region, and seven in country regions. From my recollection of the terms of reference of that review, it was to look at the way in which those kindergartens operate and are governed et cetera across the full spectrum.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: Is it possible to provide me with the cost for the department of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program in a public school setting? Is there a costing for that?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Could the member please clarify the question?

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I understand that one of the terms of reference of the review was to report on the comparative cost of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program in a community kindergarten as opposed to a kindergarten in the public school system. Does the department have a costing for that?

Ms O'Neill: If the member is asking about the cost to the department to deliver a place—because there are offsets, and community kindergartens request voluntary contributions equal to those that are requested by schools—I do not have that information with me today. What we do know is that to deliver those 30 community kindergartens, it costs around \$755 000 per annum. It is a very complicated calculation, because our four-year-olds are embedded across the whole K–7 provision, whereas the community kindergartens obviously stand alone. I do not have the unit cost with me today, and we will do our best to provide an indication, but it may be difficult in the short space of time that is allocated for supplementary information.

The CHAIR: I will ask you to take that on notice, but I acknowledge that it may take longer than the allocated time, so we will make allowances for that.

[*Supplementary Information No A8.*]

Hon MIA DAVIES: We talked earlier about English as a second language. I refer to the fourth dot point on page 401, which states in part —

As a result of regionalisation, services have been moved closer to schools or groups of schools.

The minister would be aware that Katanning, in the Agricultural Region, has a high proportion of students who require ESL support. This question might be too specific for today, but what is the percentage of students in Katanning who require ESL; is the department confident that these students are receiving appropriate support; and is there any plan to increase the support services and the number of teachers available in the town of Katanning?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Is the member talking about the roll-out of ESL in regional schools?

Hon MIA DAVIES: Yes, but specifically with reference to Katanning.

Ms Healy: In relation to ESL students, we have been providing grants directly to schools that have significant numbers of ESL students who require specialist support. We have also expanded the number of intensive English centres. We have 14 intensive English centres across primary and secondary schools, and they cater for specialist intensive English students who need specific support. We have provided extensive professional learning for our teachers throughout 2010 and 2011, from early childhood students who have ESL needs through to primary and secondary students.

Hon MIA DAVIES: Is that specifically for regional areas or is that statewide?

Ms Healy: It is statewide. Depending on the number of students in each region—those numbers vary—teachers and students have access to the type of support that I have outlined. We can provide a breakdown of the amount of money that has gone to each of the regions.

Hon MIA DAVIES: That would be appreciated.

[Supplementary Information No A9.]

Hon MIA DAVIES: I refer to the eighth dot point on page 401, which deals with the supply of teachers. It states that strategies are being developed to attract more school leavers and career changers into teaching. I assume that in regional Western Australia, the provision of appropriate housing is part of that strategy. Some funding has been made available through royalties for regions to Government Regional Officers' Housing for this purpose. This may not be the correct portfolio under which to ask this question, but can the minister advise how many houses have been rolled out into the regions as part of this strategy?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I understand where the member is coming from. I am very conscious of this issue. I am not sure whether we can access that information, but I will ask the director general to comment.

Ms O'Neill: GROH manages that housing, so this is probably the wrong portfolio under which to ask that question. Housing in country areas continues to challenge us all. I think the member made a point about royalties for regions funding. But we are not in a position to answer those questions.

Hon MIA DAVIES: On refer page 403, under "Asset Investment Program", there is a reference to funding from royalties for regions for priority projects at regional schools. Can the minister expand on that statement?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will ask Mr Fischer to respond.

Mr Fischer: Thirteen projects have been identified under this royalties for regions program. These are spread across the state, from Esperance to Derby. Works are taking place in Broome, Carnarvon, Collie, Denmark, Derby and Esperance, and also in Hedland—those funds are being used in conjunction with other projects, including contributions from BHP—and in Karratha and Katanning. Funding of \$6 million has been allocated for the amalgamation of the schools in Merredin. So, that is complementing other state moneys. Works are also taking place in Narrogin, Northam and Pinjarra. That is the location of the schools. I can certainly give the member details of the individual projects if she requires that.

Hon MIA DAVIES: Is it just district high schools, or is it a mixture of senior and district high schools?

Mr Fischer: They are mostly senior high schools.

The CHAIR: I give the call to Hon Brian Ellis.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to follow on from the question asked by Hon Mia Davies. I imagine that there has been an ongoing problem with the supply of teachers, particularly in regional areas. Can the minister expand on the strategies that are being developed to address the difficulties in placing teachers in schools, particularly regional schools?

Hon PETER COLLIER: This is a great initiative. We provided an additional \$120 million after the last election for teachers' wages. We were suffering a real shortage of teachers, and there was potential for that situation to accelerate. Getting teachers to move to the regions has traditionally always been a very difficult issue. From my perspective and understanding, the difficulty is not just getting teachers to the regions; it is retaining them in the towns for a period of time, rather than for only one or two years, during which time they come back to Perth every weekend.

[11.20 am]

It is a matter of actually getting them to engage in the local community, particularly in the more remote areas of the state. A number of different incentives are provided for teachers, but whether they are sufficient for a state as large as Western Australia is questionable. I will ask the director general to comment on the current status of teachers, suffice to say that at this stage—I have spoken to the Minister for Education about this—there are potentially some further incentives to retain teachers in the country, not just get them to the country, but to retain them for longer than 12 months or two years.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: To be part of the community.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Ms O'Neill: To put it into context, in 2007 we had 264 vacancies on day one, which we all remember clearly; in 2008 there were 110 vacancies on day one when we had some significant programs in place—the minister has referred to the previous wages outcome; in 2009 we had eight vacancies on day one; in 2010 there were two; and in 2011 there were 1.5 vacancies at the start of the school year. A huge amount of effort went into ensuring that schools were staffed. Most people do not realise that before the shortage it was usual for us to have between 20 and 30 vacancies on day one, remembering that some of these are fractional. It has been quite a remarkable outcome in ensuring the staffing arrangement. We are considering the issue of supply and shortage. In large part, the bigger issue is the distribution and where people are prepared to go. Two years ago when we were here we talked about the fact that in that year just one student was prepared to go anywhere in the state, whereas those of us here who are teachers, ticked all boxes and went wherever we had to go. We are confronting a different generation of graduates and where they are prepared to go. Many more graduates are older and have families and family responsibilities.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: And they do not get permanency anymore.

Ms O'Neill: Distribution is an issue. The idea of shortage is not generic, we have specific areas—physical sciences, maths and design and technology—on which a lot of work has been done. This year, as at 24 May, we have placed 712 graduates. Ordinarily, by the end of the year we will have placed up to 1 000 people.

A range of strategies has been put in place for the attraction and retention of teachers generally. The final-year teaching scholarships that tie people to go to the country have worked pretty well. The rural teaching practicum program that we introduced offers funding to support pre-service teachers and school psychs to do their prac teaching experience for up to 10 weeks in a rural and remote school. We know that when people get a feel for what it is like to live in the country, if they have not done so before, they are much more inclined to reapply for the position. The anecdotal evidence shows that some of those people put up their hand to go back to those places. Of the 444 program participants between 2008 and 2010, 81 per cent went back into a rural location. That outcome is a good efficacy. We are involved in GESB seminars that we promote. We have an ageing population. The average age of teachers is above 45 or 46 years. We are working with people in their transition

to retirement strategies. People are often seeking to be part-time rather than full-time teachers if their superannuation will not be impacted. We have teacher advocates in place. They are qualified teachers who promote teaching. We are trying to get into schools and universities much earlier than we have previously to encourage students to consider teaching. We have introduced a very interesting scheme at Kingston Primary School. I am not sure whether the member is familiar with that. It is a teacher residency program in which the teachers do the final year at a school and learn on the job in conjunction with the university and are tied to go to a rural location. We still have a few final overseas scholarships. A lot of work is being done in the attraction and retention area. We cannot take our foot off the pedal, given that all the issues of supply are still there for us. We have a growing number of students coming into the system, an ageing workforce and, as the economy strengthens, teachers have strong generic skills and often get invited to go to other industries.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I will pick up on something the director general said. She is quite right that today a lot of graduating teachers are much more selective about where they want to go. When you tell them to go to the country, they say, “Get stuffed; forget it”. I remember when I went through in 1981, I was desperate to go back to Kalgoorlie but they appointed me to John Curtin. I would have gone to the country but they said no. To cut a long story short, I was coaching a lot of tennis and had a lot of good kids. They said that I had to go to the country. I said I would go in two years and they said that I had to go in the next year. Basically, I said, “No, get stuffed”, and I went to a private school. That was the only reason that I went and taught at a private school. I am telling you this because we now have flexibility. However, at the same time, it is a double-edged sword. By having that flexibility and not having the compulsion to go to the country, it creates huge voids in the number of teachers in our country schools. The director general has been very effective in articulating some of the incentives that exist, but to be perfectly honest, as the market tightens up over the next couple of years, we will have to do a lot more to get people to go to the more remote areas—not Bunbury and Geraldton, but the outer regional areas—and to retain them. We have a few ideas and I would like to think that we will be able to introduce them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Are you offering to go back to Kalgoorlie?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I could not believe it. They said John Curtin. I wanted to go back to Kalgoorlie.

The CHAIR: I am mindful of the time. I realise that each one of these topics could take a lot of time. I have seven more members who want to ask questions. If everyone had roughly five minutes each, we would get through seven speakers.

Hon ADELE FARINA: My time has been cut from 15 minutes to 10 and now to five!

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I have only two more questions, Madam Chair.

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will seriously restrict our responses.

The CHAIR: I have an impossible task to keep everyone happy. The next member who has the call is Hon Alyssa Hayden.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Does Hon Brian Ellis have two more questions?

The CHAIR: Would the member like to donate her questions to Hon Brian Ellis?

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: No.

The CHAIR: I remind members that they can leave their questions with the committee. Hon Brian Ellis can keep going if he likes.

Hon COL HOLT: I will go!

The CHAIR: Sorry, Hon Col Holt, you are last on the list!

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I have one quick question that I do not think will take long to answer. I refer to the asset investment program. Providing air conditioning in schools is a very welcome initiative.

I was just wondering whether the schools can have the option to upgrade to refrigerated air conditioning if they wish.

Mr Fischer: The policy is to have only evaporative air cooling and not refrigerated air conditioning. That is seen as the best long-term and cost-effective use and it would provide the best environment in the schools. We are not allowing schools to upgrade to refrigerated air conditioning.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Even if they pay the difference?

Mr Fischer: That is correct.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I have three questions, which may require a bit of detail, so I am happy for the minister to give us a brief summary and then maybe provide supplementary information. On page 403 under the “Asset Investment Program”, I am delighted to see two new primary schools listed for Ellenbrook, Aveley and Malvern Springs. Under “New High Schools” is a line item for funding the construction of the long overdue replacement of Governor Stirling Senior High School. Can I get some detail on what work will be done on those schools and what the time lines will be? As I said, I appreciate that the answer might require some detail.

[11.30 am]

Hon PETER COLLIER: We might have a brief response.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Don’t ministers provide backbenchers with briefing issues like that anymore!

The CHAIR: Let us not use up any time.

Mr Parr: In respect of the two new schools in the Ellenbrook locality, it is a rather generic provision—12 classrooms, three early childhood classrooms, music and art–craft facilities, covered assembly area—administration, oval facilities. In the case of the redevelopment of Governor Stirling Senior High School, as the budget allocation would suggest, it is a very major redevelopment. It is virtually a total replacement.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Do you know when work will actually start on Governor Stirling?

Mr Parr: I understand Governor Stirling has proceeded to tender. The expected completion date is early 2013.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: If I could get more detail later, that would be appreciated.

The CHAIR: Would you like that on notice?

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Yes, please—the time lines and the actual work for Malvern Springs and Aveley.

[*Supplementary Information No A10.*]

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I refer to the additions and improvements on page 404. This was in the budget last year, and I asked last year, but I would also like to know about Bullsbrook high school—where is that at; how far along are we? It should have started if not now, soon; when is it expected to be finished?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I would be interested in that one.

The CHAIR: Minister, are you taking that on notice or will somebody respond?

Hon PETER COLLIER: This will take a while. We will probably try and take these things on notice, if we can, to give everyone a chance. Mr Fischer will make a quick comment.

Mr Fischer: Talking about Bullsbrook, stage 1 of the work tender is currently being reviewed by Building Management and Works. Work is expected to be awarded in June this year. The next stage allows the eight-classroom block and the new administration student services. That work is programmed to be completed by 2014.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: You are saying the contract is to be awarded in June?

Mr Fischer: We expect to award that in July; my apologies.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: Once that is awarded, when are works expected to start?

Mr Fischer: There is usually a start-up period of a couple of months while they order materials and those sorts of things. There may be preliminary site works but there is always a delay from the award of the tender to work commencement.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is stage 1?

Mr Fischer: That is stage 1.

Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN: I refer to “Works in Progress” on page 405. Again I am happy to take it on notice. I see \$2.116 million for Ellenbrook Secondary College. I want to find out when that will be finished—the time line again—and what will the capacity of the college be by the time it is finished? Is that the final works to be conducted out of that school?

The CHAIR: Member, I am going to suggest, if it is okay with the minister, that that be taken on notice.

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will take that one on notice.

[Supplementary Information No A11.]

Hon ADELE FARINA: My question goes to a discrepancy between the Department of Education budget and the royalties for regions account in budget paper No 3. As I understand it, budget paper No 3 indicates that the total allocation for the regional schools plan is \$100.5 million, with \$44.8 million allocated in the 2011–12 year. However, in the education department budget, the figures are \$90.5 million over the four years and an allocation of \$39.9 million for 2011–12. I am wondering why there is a difference in those figures between the two budget papers.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I have no idea. I will check for you. We will have to take that one on notice.

[Supplementary Information No A12.]

Hon ADELE FARINA: I refer to “Royalties for Regions” on page 406 of the education budget. Under that heading, only two regional schools are actually listed, whereas about a dozen schools are actually being funded out of that program, as identified in budget paper No 3. I do not quite understand why only two of the schools are listed under royalties for regions in the education department budget, yet there are about 10 to 12 under the royalties for regions account in budget paper No 3. That is on pages 215 and 216.

Mr Fischer: In the budget papers on 406 are the two schools which you mentioned, Hedland and Merredin, which had been announced. That was that \$7.1 million and \$6.5 million. On page 408 of the budget papers is the remaining \$90.5 million, which is the \$39.9 million this year —

Hon ADELE FARINA: Sorry, where is it?

Mr Fischer: This is page 408, about the third line down, “Royalties for Regions – Regional Schools Plan”. That is \$90.5 million. That is the remainder of that 100. That is where those projects have been funded from.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Why are they listed separately?

Mr Fischer: The two projects at Hedland and Merredin had been announced earlier. At the time of the budget papers being prepared, those other schools had not been announced.

Hon ADELE FARINA: In relation to Hedland and Merredin, page 406 of the education department budget paper indicates \$7.1 million for Hedland and \$6.59 million for Merredin. However, budget paper No 3 indicates that the funding allocation for 2011–12 for those schools is

\$6 million for Hedland and \$1 million for Merredin. Is there a discrepancy in those figures or is the balance of the funding being made up somewhere else; and, if so, how is it being funded?

Mr Fischer: My understanding is the works for Hedland includes other funding besides royalties for regions.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Such as?

Mr Fischer: From state funds.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Consolidated revenue?

Mr Fischer: From CR, yes.

Hon ADELE FARINA: That is for Merredin, was it? Is it not BER funding that is incorporated in that?

Mr Fischer: Not in those two projects. The Hedland one, there was some contribution I think from BHP. I do not think it is shown in our funding. There was some capital funding. There was \$6 million from BER.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Is that \$6 million included in the \$12 million total cost allocation for that project, or is it \$12 million of state funding plus an extra \$6 million of federal government funding?

Mr Fischer: Are you talking about —

Hon ADELE FARINA: Merredin.

Mr Fischer: Merredin is only a portion of the total amalgamation funds.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Sorry?

Mr Fischer: The BER funds were only a portion of the total funds

Hon ADELE FARINA: What is the total cost of that project?

Mr Fischer: I do not have that straight in front of me.

Hon ADELE FARINA: Where it says on page 406 of the budget paper that the estimated total cost of the project is \$12 million, is that the total cost of the project or is it the total cost of the state contribution to the project?

Mr Fischer: I believe that is only part of the contribution for the Merredin amalgamation

Hon ADELE FARINA: Can we take that question on notice and get some clarification of that?

The CHAIR: There is a bit of uncertainty around this. I suggest additional information can be provided by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A13.]

Hon ADELE FARINA: Can I also get some clarification about who runs the regional schools plan? Who has carriage of it? Is it the Department of Regional Development and Lands or is it the education department?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I think it is the department.

Ms O'Neill: Royalties for regions, obviously, is a funding source, but at the end of the day the management of delivery of those buildings rests with the department. Obviously BMW has a large responsibility in this as well.

[11.40 am]

Hon ADELE FARINA: How are the projects determined that make up the regional schools plan? I am not aware of any process that has been gone through or what the criteria might be.

Ms O'Neill: We have a statewide delivery planning function in central office where we continually look across the whole of the state for the needs of schools in all communities, regional and

metropolitan. It includes demographic analysis of the sorts of things we were talking about earlier: the state, the condition of current schools, where the students move to and the curriculum access that is provided to all those schools. That is an ongoing process. On a continuous basis we have discussions with the minister about where we believe and recommend that activity needs to be undertaken.

Hon ADELE FARINA: I do not understand, because some country schools are being funded out of the education department budget and some out of royalties for regions. I would like to understand why they are not all funded out of the education department budget and how you make the distinction between which budget will fund a school project.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I imagine it is due to financial constraints from the department's perspective. The whole part of the royalties component is to ensure there is an extension of that.

Ms O'Neill: The department has various funding sources: its own funds, royalties for regions through the application of that process and the commonwealth, for example the BER extensive program, which was done this year. We make a broad range of recommendations to the minister. At that time, we consider the funding sources that are available. The minister obviously has negotiations through Minister Grylls and the Department of Regional Development et cetera about what might be the appropriate submission for that money. But at the end of the day, our advice to the minister is the recommendations around where the need is for capital development.

Hon ADELE FARINA: There has not been a decrease of funding for country schools out of the education department budget?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No.

The CHAIR: I want to indicate who else is on the speaking list in case there are any negotiations about who gets the time. I have Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich next, followed by Hon Nick Goiran, Hon Alison Xamon, Hon Ken Travers, and Hon Col Holt.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy for Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich and I to share the rest of the time!

The CHAIR: I thought you might be. If everyone wants a go at this, I will give the call to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you, Madam Chair. I go back to the issue at Harvey Senior High School and the comments made by the minister that, although some schools have been identified as having maintenance needs associated with material that contains asbestos, she has it on the department's authority that these works are listed as low priority because the materials, in their current condition, do not pose any danger or risk to staff or students. I understand out of the 147, some of the work that was required includes things such as fixing up cracked asbestos and asbestos sheeting that had holes in it. I am told that asbestos is even in some of the floor tiles and some of them are lifting. They potentially pose a risk in those schools. Can I get an assurance that any of those issues at any school, whether it is cracked asbestos sheeting, holes in asbestos or asbestos floor tiles lifting or curling et cetera, will be attended to because of the potential health risk?

Ms O'Neill: The assurance we can give is that we will not compromise the safety of students, staff or anyone else on the school sites. Where it is clear that these issues are raised —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, no. I have asked you a straight question.

Ms O'Neill: Sorry; I am just answering your question.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I want an assurance—a yes or a no. Can you give an assurance that where there is cracked asbestos with the possibility therefore of fibres entering the environment; that there are holes in asbestos sheeting, floor tiles have been lifted and are curling and kiddies are expected to sit on them where they may pose a potential risk, you will address this? Can you give a categorical yes or no that this will be fixed?

Ms O'Neill: Where there is exposure to fibres that are considered dangerous, the department has always responded in accordance with all the responsibilities and legislation that exist. We would attend where the analysis shows that the fibres there are dangerous.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Will you send them for sampling? Can you send cracked pieces of asbestos, holed asbestos and these carpet squares particularly, because kids sit on them, rub their shoes on them, flick on them and fight on them. I think they pose a risk. I bet you have not sent them to a laboratory for that analysis. Through the minister, director general, have you sent any of those tiles off for analysis?

Ms O'Neill: We have undertaken the same processes this year, last year —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That was not the question.

Ms O'Neill: — and in every other year. Where there is risk we undertake the process we are meant to ensure the safety of students.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Director general, I have asked a straight question. Have you sent these carpet squares to a laboratory to have them tested for potential risk, yes or no?

Ms O'Neill: We have undertaken testing where the testing is required.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is a no.

Ms O'Neill: No; I said we have undertaken the testing where the testing has been required, so the answer is yes.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: From which schools have these carpet squares been tested?

Ms O'Neill: Sorry, Chair; I did not answer the question about carpet squares specifically, I said where there is a risk, and —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I asked you about the carpet squares specifically.

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will have to take that on notice.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: With all due respect, minister, I have asked a straight question in respect of carpet squares. Have they been sent for laboratory testing, yes or no?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will have to take that on notice.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: You do not know?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The DG does not know.

The CHAIR: The minister's answer is that he will take it on notice. I am afraid that is the answer.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I think we may have a response, Madam Chair.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Excellent. I should not have to raise my voice.

Mr Parr: There is significant empirical evidence that exposure to asbestos cement products in the form of asbestos sheeting poses negligible risk to health. The fact that a sheet of asbestos has a crack or hole in it does not heighten the risk. The asbestos products are quite stable; unlike radioactive material, they do not emit fibres per se.

The CHAIR: I am tempted to answer the question myself, but I will refrain.

Mr Parr: The situation is that if material is worked on, drilled, cut or abraded, that is when the fibres are likely to be released. That is why that work is undertaken in schools when staff and children are not present and why tradespeople wear protective clothing and apparatus when they are undertaking that type of work.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Mr Parr, you are spot on the money, as you usually are. My point is exactly that. With these giant carpet squares that kiddies sit on and play on, particularly in primary schools, whether they are worked on or battered or kids rub their hands through them, the fact is it may well be negligible, but there is some risk. Good practice will ensure that we apply a precautionary principle to minimise that risk entirely. Good commonsense suggests that should be sent to a laboratory.

[11.50 am]

The CHAIR: I am going to cut the honourable member off.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The answer is they have not been sent for testing.

The CHAIR: The member has a question on notice and the minister will respond to that.

Hon PETER COLLIER: There are 770 schools. We cannot give a response. We will take it on notice.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It was the asbestos-backed floor tiles; they are carpet squares.

[*Supplementary Information No A14.*]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I refer to page 399 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, showing a total appropriation for division 35 of \$3.9 billion. I refer to the Carson Street conductive education facility in Victoria Park. I ask the question with some trepidation, because I have been in and out of the chamber this morning and I do not want to repeat a question another member may already have asked. What is appropriation for the Carson street conductive education facility for the forthcoming year?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I ask Mr Axworthy to respond.

Mr Axworthy: The amount that is appropriated this year is for the school. Carson Street was engaged in a trial program—an experiment to see whether conductive education delivered to children below kindergarten age, nought to four year olds, would benefit from a particular style of therapy called conductive education. Carson Street was conducting the trial to see whether we would wish to expand that to other places system wide. In the first instance, the funding for the school was for a three-year trial with an evaluation at the end. For various reasons to do with evaluations that were inconclusive, the three-year trial was expanded to be a six-year trial; this being the sixth year of that trial. We have now received an independent review of the program and the review indicates that there is insufficient and inconclusive evidence to warrant expanding the program to other schools. However, we believe that Carson Street has sufficient funding in its current model to be able to continue to provide conductive education for school-age children, and we will be meeting with the Carson Street staff and parents association to reassure them of that. The letter that was sent to Carson Street indicated that its conductive education program could continue for school-age children, but that we would not be expanding the program system wide.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Did you also —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I do not think the honourable member has the call; so he might just wait his turn. I have not finished.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is about the point that he has just made.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Madam Chair, I do not think you have given the call to Hon Ken Travers.

The CHAIR: I have not; the member is correct.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So that I understand the answer that has been provided: is it the case that in the current financial year there has been an amount of funding to Carson Street, not just for conductive education for school-age children but in addition to conduct a trial for children four

years and under in the current financial year; but, in the new financial year, the funding will be limited to only school-age children?

Mr Axworthy: That is correct.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Therefore, there will be a decrease in funding to Carson Street in the forthcoming year.

Mr Axworthy: The funding for the trial will come to an end.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What is the difference in that level of funding?

Mr Axworthy: The funding for the trial was approximately \$200 000 a year.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Therefore, in the forthcoming year, 2011–12, that facility will have \$200 000 less revenue in order to meet its expenses.

Mr Axworthy: They will no longer be providing a trial of nought to four-year-old children because the appropriation here is not for that age group; it is for school-age children.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I understood from an uncorrected *Hansard* from yesterday or the day before that the Minister for Education indicated she had a recommendation from the department before her and that she was considering that recommendation. Is the discussion we are having at the moment contingent upon the minister's decision on that recommendation?

Hon PETER COLLIER: The director general will answer.

Ms O'Neill: For clarity, we have had discussions with the minister. We have indicated, as we have indicated to the member, that we will no longer continue to fund the trial beyond the commitment that has been made already. The minister's decision about this will be the minister's decision, if she seeks to raise that with us again. Certainly, that has been our position to date.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So that I and people involved are abundantly clear, the position of the department is that the trial will effectively cease on 30 June this year unless the minister intervenes.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is my understanding.

Mr Axworthy: It will not cease on 30 June. We operate on a calendar year in schools—the school year, rather than the financial year—although the budget papers have to show things in financial years. Quite clearly, as is the case with any operational issue, if a school has commenced on a program, of course, we would see it through the whole of the school year.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So the trial will continue until 31 December.

Mr Axworthy: The trial will not continue, but the program will continue.

Ms O'Neill: We will fund any commitment that school has made to people until the end of the year. The trial has come to a conclusion; it has been evaluated. Beyond that time period will be a decision of the school to make—like every other school—if it wants to invest in a specific program. For the purpose of the trial, it has come to an end.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The program for those under four years of age will continue until 31 December this year, notwithstanding that the trial will have concluded.

Mr Axworthy: That will be a decision that we make with the school. If the school is willing to continue to provide that service, we would not cut them off.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Let me rephrase the question: assuming that the school wants to continue the program until the end of this year, it will have the support of the department to do so, notwithstanding that the trial has concluded?

Mr Axworthy: Yes.

The CHAIR: We are due to finish at 12 o'clock, but I am mindful that a couple of members still have questions so I am proposing that we extend slightly into the lunch break.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to the service summary on page 400 of the budget papers, and the line item pertaining to secondary education. Why has the budget for secondary education dropped in the forward estimates? I was tossing up whether it was because of the effect of the half cohort policy, in which case I am trying to get my head around how that would reflect, or is it because there is a planned transition to year 7? I am just trying to understand why the appropriation has dropped.

Ms O'Neill: I will ask Mr Leaf to give the specifics of the changes. In order to be clear about this line item, this has been constructed for the purposes of the budget papers and is inclusive of an attribution of a whole lot of things that happen around secondary education. It is not only the amount spent on kids in secondary school, and there is attribution in part for central office, shared services et cetera, so the total figure is broader than how much we are spending on kids in secondary schools.

[12 noon]

Hon ALISON XAMON: So why is it dropping then? What are the changes that are anticipated that are going to lead to that?

Mr Leaf: The two services that we divide the budget into, which are primary and secondary education, are done for the purpose of the budget papers alone. We do not actually manage the department according to these particular calculations. If I just describe to you the formula that is used to allocate expenditure and FTEs to primary and secondary education, we begin by looking at the forecast enrolments that we anticipate and that is often 12 months in advance of actually knowing the precise census numbers, which are determined later. In the 2010–11 forecast enrolments we estimated that there would be 175 031 primary enrolments and 75 239 secondary enrolments, which is a total of 250 270 enrolments. What we have to do then is to actually look at how we provide our staff and our other expenditure to primary and secondary education and we provide a weighting to those enrolments to convert them into weighted student enrolments. In 2010–11 the weighting was one for primary, so every student was just worth one student, but in secondary, where the cost for educating students is somewhat higher because the classrooms are often smaller, for 2011–12 the weighting is 1.13. We had in the 2010–11 forecast enrolments that were 175 000 weighted in primary and 85 000 weighted in secondary. When the actual enrolments came in, the primary enrolments were 172 000, slightly less, but the secondary enrolments—we actually reflected a change in the weighting because of the half-cohort moving into secondary education where class sizes tended to become smaller so that the range of curriculum can be maintained in terms of the offering to the students, the actual weighting went from 1.1317 to 1.2218 and produced the number of 92 000 weighted enrolments.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I interrupt to clarify then, because what you are saying I think corresponds to another question I had, which was about page 403, “Secondary Education”. The other question I was going to ask is why the total cost of the service in 2010–11 is so much more than the budgeted amount. Is that what you are referring to now, or is that something different? I am trying to follow you. I must admit, I am going to rely on going back onto *Hansard* because I am having difficulty hearing you. That is okay. I am trying to follow you.

Mr Leaf: I am trying to provide the answer as best I can. It is not a particularly simple answer, but I am trying to describe the fact that it actually all gets down essentially to the enrolments that we predict, the enrolments that actually arise and our constant continuous improvement in the department to try to match our weightings to reflect the needs of primary versus secondary students.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Are you suggesting that, for example, you are anticipating a drop in enrolments because, perhaps, you are expecting an additional percentage of students to go to the private sector?

Mr Leaf: I was going to move on to 2011–12 and describe the forecast enrolments there. The primary enrolments in 2011–12 are 175 476 and the weighted secondary enrolments are 91 608, a small reduction from the 92 020 weighted enrolments in 2010–11. There is a slight reduction in the anticipated secondary enrolments for the 2011–12 budget.

Hon ALISON XAMON: On what basis?

Mr Leaf: On the basis that our student growth is strong in kindy, preprimary and primary years and our growth is tending to diminish in secondary schooling.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Because you are seeing an increased number of people going into the private sector; is that correct?

Mr Leaf: There are many elements, but I think the director general might want to answer that question.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Obviously, we are talking about millions of dollars that not being forecast going into the future, so I am going to want to know why.

Ms O'Neill: There are a range of factors. To be brief, the other one that shows some fluctuation in those costs is the Digital Education Revolution. We do have some commonwealth programs that show an overall growth and then finish and show a reduction. But in terms of the enrolment issue specifically, the reasons for that are not different to the reasons that have been in place for some time. There has been over many years a slow movement from particularly secondary schools to non-government schools in particular and a growth in home education of some sorts as well.

Hon ALISON XAMON: A growth in home education?

Ms O'Neill: There has been over some years a growth in home education. I do not have those figures at hand right now. For example, in secondary education between last year and this year there were around a thousand students fewer than in the year before. That is not a new trend. That trend has been in place for some time, but that is interestingly offset by growth in KP1 and 2 of nearly 4 000 students. Some of that is the baby bonus apparently. It is a continuing trend in secondary. I might add that some of our schools are arresting that movement and it is offset by the primary. We have strong growth in the primary and an ongoing reduction in the secondary area.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am intrigued that under “Significant Issues Facing the Agency” there is no mention of the whole issue of year 7s to high schools. That is a point, but what I am interested in is what work has the department done on estimating what the cost of additional infrastructure will be if the year 7s are moved to high schools and what would be the additional cost in terms of the additional teachers that would be required for that implementation. Equally, if you have not done that work, what is the estimated cost of providing the facilities for year 7s in primary schools to meet the Australian curriculum requirements?

Ms O'Neill: The analysis and advice has been provided to the minister and I understand is provided for cabinet consideration. I understand I am not in a position to divulge the detail.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I concur with that. I understand that it is with the minister and she will be bringing it to cabinet.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: As to what is the cost?

Hon PETER COLLIER: That will be part of the consideration I would imagine.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Why is it not listed as a significant issue affecting the agency?

Ms O'Neill: If I can just turn to the significant —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Can I say, when I go to primary schools—last year I went to a fantastic primary school in Currumbine with the principal and watched all of the year 7s and all of his best crop of year 6s were all going off to private schools because they have already introduced it and we

are not. He was losing his whole leadership group, basically, from that year 6 cohort going off to other schools in year 7. He was crying and I was not far behind him, I have got to say.

Ms O'Neill: If you look at the significant issues and trends —

The CHAIR: Which page is it on?

Ms O'Neill: They go across pages 400, 401. The department has noted with the minister a range of areas. For example, “Growth, Student Demographics” talks about the ups and downs in the population growth and the broadening student demographic —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: In light of the time I am happy for the minister to take it on notice. What I am interested in is whether the minister can tell us when a decision will be made.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I cannot answer that obviously, but I would imagine —

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Can you take it on notice?

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is not up to me. I can take it on notice to inquire from the minister.

[Supplementary Information No A15.]

[12.10 pm]

Hon KEN TRAVERS: My final question is regarding the Carson Street cognitive education issue. Can you advise when you first advised the minister that there would no longer be funding for a trial at that school—either that you were considering it or that you had actually taken the decision?

Ms O'Neill: There have been briefings to the minister so that the minister was aware of the issue and the fact that a review was being undertaken, but our final advice about the outcome of that was a matter of days ago.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Right; did those briefings indicate where the trial was up to and what the findings of the trial were likely to be, and that there was a likelihood that you would then no longer continue the funding?

Ms O'Neill: No; the briefings outlined the program, the review, what the review was seeking to do, and my understanding is that our briefings did not pre-empt the outcome of that work, and the briefing that went to the minister in the last few days outlined our final position.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Right. So is it normal to you to brief the minister after you have notified the schools of your decision on a matter like this?

Ms O'Neill: The minister is quite clear about this: it is an operational decision about where programs run in schools and how we fund the schools. We would not ordinarily on every single program across 770 schools, on an operational matter, go to the minister and talk to the minister about decisions that are, from an operational perspective, made by the department. We keep the minister informed and updated—of course we do. But it would be considered an operational matter if the department is going to continue to expand, run or fund a trial.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is fine. I understand the concept of an operational matter, but is it normal practice for you to advise the minister of your decision on operational matters after you have advised your school of that decision, or was there some other reason on this occasion for that? Is it that you normally would not bother to advise the minister of operational decisions and therefore on this occasion something else happened which caused you to provide that advice to the minister?

Ms O'Neill: It is not a matter of whether we bother to do one thing or another. On this occasion, and on many occasions, we undertake our operational responsibilities and we brief the minister. There is nothing peculiar, specific or different about the time line on this occasion.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Can I just ask have taken notice all of the briefing notes that the department has provided to the minister on that issue?

[Supplementary Information No A16.]

Hon COL HOLT: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity and for extending the session just slightly.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Hon COL HOLT: I have a couple of quick questions to do with page 401 and the fourth dot point “Services to Students”. Congratulations on finally getting the GATE program out into regional WA. How much does that cost? I think it is starting next year. How much is it expected to cost for that delivery of that GATE program into Bunbury? And following on from that, what are the plans for extension of the GATE programs in other streams and other locations, if you have some knowledge about that?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can we take that question on notice?

The CHAIR: The minister requests we take the question on notice.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes; I realise it is pretty specific about the budget; I cannot find anything in here.

[Supplementary Information No A17.]

Hon COL HOLT: What about a comment on the policy of expanding that GATE program—both the streams and the locations in regional WA?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Sure.

Ms O'Neill: At this point, we are in this budget not funded for further expansion. Certainly there are many, and the programs that we have are strong and people would like to see an expansion, but at this point we do not have a plan for specific expansion of the GATE program.

Hon COL HOLT: Even for the out years?

Ms O'Neill: We are not funded at this point for an expansion.

The CHAIR: Thank you, everybody. I will conclude this session by saying that 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 taken on notice. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit them to the committee clerk at the close of this session. A response to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should the agency 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.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you very much members, minister and advisers for your contribution to this hearing, and I am pleased that we had so much interest in this division. We might have to tack on an extra hour next time. We will adjourn until one o'clock when we will be hearing from the Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Hearing concluded at 12.14 pm