

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2003–04 budget estimates

Melbourne–16 May 2003

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Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Education Services

Mr G. Hehir, Secretary; and

Ms J. Samms, Director, Office of Portfolio Integration, Department of Education and Training.

The CHAIR — I would like to welcome back from this morning Mr Grant Hehir, Secretary of the Department of Education and Training, who we have just been told has been in the job about for two weeks. I also welcome back from this morning Ms Jenny Samms, Director of Portfolio Integration.

I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the education services portfolio.

Overheads shown.

Ms ALLAN — I appreciate that there was an extensive discussion with my colleague the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky, this morning on the government's approach in education.

As you can see from the overhead, the government's approach to education is to raise education standards, provide resources to meet educational needs, invest in the teaching profession, provide better facilities in schools, build stronger school communities, develop the curriculum as well as meet the needs of the future, develop a range of options for lifelong learning and also provide innovation and excellence throughout the education system.

I understand that this morning the Minister for Education and Training outlined our responsibilities, so in this afternoon's presentation I will confine my remarks to my portfolio responsibilities and the 2003-04 budget initiatives. They include teacher work force supply and demand; the implementation of agreed capital programs; school councils except in relation to school educational policy and funding issues; asset maintenance and security, including emergency management; health and safety issues, including asbestos; and student welfare services, including disabilities and impairments, a transport program and drug initiatives in education. As I said, many of these issues were discussed this morning.

The CHAIR — If we ask about the wrong area of responsibility, I am sure you will put us right.

Ms ALLAN — In the 2003-04 budget the initiatives within my portfolio of responsibilities in particular are around improving student welfare. As you can see, \$49.5 million over the next four years will provide for 256 student welfare officers in primary schools, \$96 million over the next four years will provide for services in the disabilities and impairments program, and \$137 million will upgrade learning environments, which is the capital works program.

Looking at upgrading the learning environments across Victoria, the funding in the 2003-04 budget provides for \$38.1 million for new primary and secondary school facilities at eight locations around the state. These include primary schools at Roxburgh Park North, Lynbrook and Strathaird; stage 1 of the Caroline Springs town centre, which is a prep-8 facility; stage 1 of the Somerville campus of Mount Erin Secondary College; stage 3 of Roxburgh College; stage 2 of the Ocean Grove campus of the Bellarine Secondary College; and stage 2 of Carrum Downs Secondary College. In addition to these funds an additional \$5.1 million has been provided to replace the Traralgon Secondary College east campus, Carronbank school and Rockbank Primary School. These are all schools that have outgrown their available facilities or facilities that are in inappropriate locations.

Also the 2003-04 budget will provide \$51.8 million to upgrade facilities at 28 primary schools, 9 secondary schools and one special school across the state.

Under 'Upgrading learning environments' we have the Facilities for Excellence program which will establish specialist facilities in secondary schools. This program will enable the delivery of innovative programs in specialist areas, in particular in science and technology, the arts and design and music. Ten million dollars has been provided for this program in the 2003-04 budget. Further, a \$500 000 commitment has been made to the Community Facilities Fund. This is an innovative program whereby the department will undertake joint developments with local government and other education sectors to contract new facilities to be used not just by the school but also by community groups and individuals. Two million dollars is available for project planning and over \$12 million is available for fire reinstatement funding, which a couple of your committee members know a lot about.

To finish up on the upgrading of learning environments, a further \$5.5 million has been provided for the Maryborough and Gippsland education precinct developments. This will enable the continued development of the Maryborough site and the completion and construction of the Gippsland site. These are exciting precincts that will enhance educational outcomes in those communities by co-locating facilities and providing students with a greater choice in their subjects and pathway options.

Finally, I note the provision for capital works in technical and further education institutes. Twelve million dollars will be provided for the replacement and upgrade of obsolete equipment in our TAFE institutions and specialist training equipment will be modernised in priority areas, also ensuring that our TAFE students have access to the most modern facilities as well.

The CHAIR — I refer you to budget paper 3, page 35, 'Services to students with disabilities'. Can you explain how much funding has been allocated and the way it will be used specifically to help students with a disability? What are the initiatives that will be taken up?

Ms ALLAN — As I indicated in the presentation, an extra \$96 million has been allocated over the next four years to increase the support to students with disabilities. If you look at the last three years, funding in this area has grown to more than \$200 million per annum. This is up from around \$165 per annum in 1999. Also, the government has a strong commitment to support students with disabilities in all Victorian schools and ensure they have access to education in Victoria. At the moment around 18 500 students are supported through the disability program. We have seen a net growth in this program in 2001–02 of around 1400 students. To May 2003 we have seen a further 500 students come into the disability and impairment program. If I could note that there is strong eligibility criteria around the disability and impairment program which is administered by the department, and these are based on World Health Organisation standards. There are strong standards in this area to ensure that we are meeting our World Health Organisation obligations.

The further commitment of \$96 million over four years is to ensure that all eligible students have their needs met. One of the key changes of the program for this year has been the introduction of regular reviews of students to ensure that students on the program are receiving appropriate levels of support. It is important to note that regular reviews of the students provides the schools and parents with the opportunity to review the progress of students on the disability and impairment program, whereas previously students were left on the program or remained at a certain level of the program for much longer periods.

The government has a commitment to further improve the effectiveness of the disability and impairment program. Many members of the committee will be aware of the review of educational services for students with special needs in Victorian government schools. This review has been conducted and further consultations with stakeholders are taking place regarding the outcome of this review in order to shape the program for the future. At the moment the program is structured to provide six levels of funding support to students, ranging from level 1, which attracts \$4001, through to level 6, which attracts more than \$30 500. That clearly reflects the level of needs of those students. A student with a mild intellectual disability who is experiencing some learning disabilities but has the capacity to learn daily independent living skills would be assessed at level 1 or 2 funding. Students at levels 3 and 4 would, through the criteria, have a severe intellectual disability and also experience some behavioural or medical disabilities. Students on levels 5 and 6 would have profound intellectual disabilities and no self-care skills. Clearly there is a range of disabilities within each category that needs to be met through this program.

Mr FORWOOD — Can you provide the committee with the number per level?

Ms ALLAN — Yes. As I said, there are 18 600 students and the vast majority of that number are in the level 1 and 2 categories. That is where the regular review has been most beneficial. As I said, previously a student came in at whatever level and they were not reviewed regularly, so they potentially stayed on level 2 funding whether they needed it or not. Their disability may have worsened or improved. That is where there have been some benefits from the regular reviewing.

The CHAIR — Taking up that point and given these regular reviews, a comment often made by a person with a disability or by their carer is that if somebody is permanently or totally visually impaired, that will not change in 99.9 per cent of cases for their entire life. If someone is on level 6 and has severe and profound disabilities, both intellectual and physical, it is highly unlikely in the vast majority of cases that that will change. Are these reviews done annually, and if they are done regularly do you ever make allowances and factor in that there are some people whose level of disability is highly unlikely to ever change?

Ms ALLAN — I might ask Jenny or Grant to make a comment on the regularity of the reviews.

The CHAIR — You may take that on notice. It is a constant complaint. People say, 'I am blind and I have been blind for the last 10 years, and I am likely to be blind for the rest of my life'. That information would be useful for the committee.

Ms ALLAN — We can provide that information to you along with the information on the breakdown of categories.

Mr CLARK — I raise the subject of school maintenance. Has the department formed any assessment of the total amount that ought to be spent in each year on school maintenance in order to meet good practice, be it good government practice or good private sector practice? If so, what does the department estimate ought to be spent each year in accordance with good practice? Secondly, with respect to the forthcoming year, 2003–04, how much is it expected will be spent on maintenance in government schools across the state and what are the various sources of the money that is expected to be spent?

Ms ALLAN — Again if I can start with your last question first, the annual budget for maintenance for schools is \$34 million. That money is allocated to maintenance items that have been identified through the PRMS, the physical resources management system audit. If I can break down the \$34 million: \$27 million is provided directly to schools through their global budget; and half of the \$27 million is to be spent on those items that are identified in the maintenance audit, while the remaining is available for unplanned works, such as vandalism, a broken window and the like. Supplementary funding, particularly where there is an occupational health and safety issue at the school, is provided where possible and where available, and when those issues arise schools particularly work with their regional offices.

The PRMS audit is undertaken every three years and the last PRMS audit was undertaken in July 2000. Members of the committee may be familiar with the way the audit is undertaken. There are priority zeros through to priority 5s, priority zeros being the ones that are the most urgent, through to priority 5s, which may be a wall that was painted a couple of days ago and in five years it may need to be painted again. So it certainly covers the spectrum of maintenance needs in schools. To date all priority zeros have been funded, with funding starting to be allocated for the priority ones, which were identified through that audit.

Mr CLARK — So the \$7 million that is the difference between the \$34 million and the \$27 million, is that the supplementary funding pool?

Ms ALLAN — Yes, and \$2 million is used for regions to provide this supplementary funding. So the \$2 million is to the regions across the state and \$5 million is used by the facilities division for further supplementation. The \$2 million is used for urgent works that come up, such as vandalism, and the \$5 million is for the larger ones such as the occupational health and safety issues.

Mr CLARK — I take it the department thinks that \$34 million is a proper amount to set side for school maintenance?

Ms ALLAN — When you also consider the large investment we have made in capital works over the last three years, we have allocated \$822 million over the last three years to capital works in schools and TAFES, a further \$137 million in this year's budget, and over the next four years through our Labor financial statement we have indicated we will spend at least \$350 million over the coming term. It is estimated that for every million dollars that is spent on capital works, the cost of your future maintenance needs is reduced by \$150 000. Clearly this government has established a priority in funding capital works. As I have indicated it was \$822 million in our first term and more in our second term. We have made a strong commitment to improving the capital infrastructure of our schools, which reduces overall maintenance cost needs; but that is not to deny that there are ongoing maintenance needs in schools.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I have a supplementary question on the issue of the supplementary pool. There was an example in my electorate which you maybe aware of, Minister, where around 300 windows were broken over a weekend.

Ms ALLAN — You will have to give me the name of the school.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I will not put it on the record, but it was around \$80 000 in vandalism over one weekend. I know that school had some difficulty accessing funding from the region, certainly in the short term, to repair that damage. Should that be available through the supplementary pool you spoke of? Admittedly this was an unusual case.

Ms ALLAN — I am happy to take that up externally to this committee. Obviously you are wanting to look after the interests of the school as well. Certainly without wanting to comment on individual cases in detail

that I do not have, that sort of example that you give should be dealt with through the regions; and if there has been an issue there I am happy to take it up externally.

Mr MERLINO — I refer you to page 30 of budget paper 3, and specifically the output measure titled ‘Centres of excellence in languages established by February 2004’ and ‘Additional Victorian school of language centres in regional Victoria by February 2004’ and I ask if you could elaborate for the committee on these proposals.

Ms ALLAN — Yes, certainly. We have made a commitment to centres of excellence in languages, and the government is recognising that our cultural and linguistic diversity in Victoria is one of our great assets. It also goes to the question of improving and strengthening our social cohesion and harmony here in Victoria. Also if you look at the opportunities that centres for excellence in languages provide, they include great diversity in our curriculum as well, and that is a key pillar of a quality education system.

The excellence in languages initiatives will provide \$6 million over the next four years. Through this initiative the government will establish three centres of excellence in languages in secondary schools; establish five additional Victorian school of language centres in regional Victoria; develop online teaching materials for middle years language students; increase per capita grants to after-hours ethnic schools to \$100 per student from January 2004; explore ways for after-hours ethnic schools to use government school premises; and also provide opportunities for rural and regional teachers to retrain as language teachers, through the Rural Teacher Retrain program.

The school of languages centres are a fantastic initiative, and I know from the Victorian School of Languages site located in my own electorate, in Bendigo, that it really provides a fantastic service to country people from across a really wide region of country Victoria. If you draw a line anywhere north in the state, students and young people with a commitment to learning a language will travel to Bendigo for that opportunity. The expansion of the schools of languages program in regional Victoria is an excellent addition to the curriculum in country areas. They are in areas where opportunities to learn a different language, perhaps outside those taught by a lot of schools in country Victoria — whether it is French or Indonesian. There will also be two centres of excellence in languages in metropolitan Melbourne as well.

We are looking at encouraging clusters of schools to submit expressions of interest in becoming one of these three centres of excellence, and there will be a selection criteria and process for the establishment of these sites. It will be quite an exciting initiative right across Victoria.

Mr MERLINO — Is there a time line in terms of the process for the expressions of interest?

Ms ALLAN — Not at this stage. It is being worked through inside the department.

Mr FORWOOD — The Victorian Institute of Teaching — is that your responsibility?

Ms ALLAN — No, it is Minister Kosky’s responsibility.

Mr FORWOOD — It was Ms Gould’s responsibility last year.

Ms ALLAN — With the changing portfolios after the election, there was a change in portfolio responsibilities as well, but if it would benefit the committee, I am not sure what detail Minister Kosky went into this morning, but — —

Mr FORWOOD — We did not touch on it at all

Ms ALLAN — I briefly outlined in my presentation the portfolio responsibilities, but I am happy to provide some information on that.

The CHAIR — We will follow it up with Minister Kosky’s office through the committee.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about specialist teachers in secondary schools. I raised this with Minister Kosky this morning and it was suggested it was more appropriately a matter for you. I understand there are 450 specialist teachers for secondary schools to be hired over the next four years. I am wondering whether you have an idea of what disciplines they will be deployed in, and more particularly what the needs are in terms of specialist disciplines. Does the department have an audit of needs in the specialist disciplines? Can we have an idea of the gaps?

Ms ALLAN — I might refer that one to the department, but in terms of the 450 teachers there has been a fair degree of comment around specialist teachers in schools, and we know already the areas where there may be some requirement for further specialisation. It is well known that languages other than English is an area where we would be looking at increasing teacher numbers. Maths and information technology are other areas, and if you want to extend it out to geographical areas, there are parts of metropolitan Melbourne and country Victoria where particularly specialist teachers are difficult to attract. But in terms of your question on departmental audits I might refer that one to Mr Hehir.

Mr HEHIR — What was the question again, please?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Does the department undertake an audit of specialist teachers needs? Does it know what particular disciplines there are shortages in so it can address them in terms of recruitment. Is there an audit undertaken by the department that gives a picture of that? Where are the gaps? Can you provide that audit to the committee?

Mr HEHIR — My understanding is that there is not such an audit undertaken and that the recruitment process is at the school level not at a central level. The specific — —

Mr FORWOOD — My understanding was that there was a report in August each year which showed this information.

Mr HEHIR — I can come back to you on that. With respect to the specific programs and talking about the 450 teachers, I think the minister this morning went through quite a bit of detail about what the concept was behind that and the type of areas that schools might wish to specialise in in hiring those teachers. The minister mentioned those earlier.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — If you could see whether there is that information in the department that would be appreciated.

Ms GREEN — Minister, on the issue of fire reinstatement, as you know it is one with Hurstbridge Primary School that I have cried tears of both sadness and joy, as has my colleague next to me Mr Merlino on Boronia Primary School. In budget paper 2 at page 70 it discusses the total funding that has been allocated to schools damaged or destroyed by fire. Can you outline the details of all the schools that were damaged and the cost of reinstatement of school facilities in each case?

Ms ALLAN — As you and James have indicated, unfortunately you know too well the effect of the damages of fire in schools. We did unfortunately have four schools that were affected by fire. They have been funded in the budget this year for a total of \$12.07 million from the fire reinstatement program. Just for the committee's benefit, that funding is broken across two financial years with \$8.8 million in the 2003–04 budget and the balance will be allocated in the 2004–05 budget, obviously as the length of time for the building works to be completed, and particularly when we have across those four schools some quite large fires that have led to a large amount of capital works that need to be undertaken.

If we look at Danielle's electorate to start with, Hurstbridge Primary School was affected by fire on 1 January. An electrical fault caused a fire that pretty much devastated the entire school at Hurstbridge. Through the budget we have allocated \$4.5 million to Hurstbridge Primary School for it to commence operations by the start of the next school year. Along with the member I had the opportunity to visit the primary school and see the temporary facilities that they are in. The principal, Marg Uren, has shown exceptional leadership at that school. There have been reports of the way the school community has come together to support the school, the teachers and the parents through what has been a difficult time there.

It has also been a difficult time at Mount Waverley Secondary College, which is a school I also had the opportunity to visit with the local member, Maxine Morand. The comments I made about Marg would also be echoed with the principal there, Glenn Proctor. He has also shown exceptional leadership after a really large fire in late January. It was the day before school went back, I think, on 27 or 28 January. The reinstatement cost is \$5 million. The fire destroyed an entire wing of the school and surrounding rooms. It is quite a sight to go to Mount Waverley Secondary College and see the banks of portable relocatable buildings that have been put in place to accommodate the needs of the school during this time.

At Boronia Primary School in the electorate of Mr Merlino in late October 2002 fire destroyed one stage of the building works that were in progress. The reinstatement will cost \$1.77 million which will be for rebuilding classrooms, staff and administration areas. Certainly that was also welcomed, as I understand, by the school.

Finally there is Wodonga High School. I am sorry the local member could not join us today. I think that is in Mr Baxter's electorate. Again, in February we had three fires in the space of a bit **over** a month. The acrobatic arts centre of the school is where the Flying Fruit Fly Circus is housed. Reinstatement there is at a cost of \$800 000. I again will comment on commending the school community, if I can just briefly put that on record. Each school community has had a difficult experience and they have certainly pulled together during this difficult time. I would like to commend those communities for the work they have undertaken in ensuring that the educational needs of the students are met.

Mr FORWOOD — I refer you to page 135 of budget paper 2, which is table 7.4 of Labor's financial statement. It shows that in the Department of Education and Training the classroom replacement program of \$50 million has been deferred. In your election commitment you said that Labor will provide \$50 million for the urgent upgrade of school facilities. You talked about replacing older portable classrooms. I guess the question is: if these were urgent, how can there be no funding out of the \$50 million made available in the first year?

Ms ALLAN — We have a commitment to complete that project over the next four years of office and we will be providing that funding in future years.

Mr FORWOOD — But the word 'urgent' was sort of loosely used?

Ms ALLAN — No, the word 'urgent' was not loosely used. I am sure that the classroom replacement program, when you consider that the aim of that program is to replace ageing portable stock, to upgrade them to the 'mod 5s', or as some people call them '5 mods' — —

They are quite excellent school classroom facilities. That program will come in line over the next four years.

Mr FORWOOD — So we have redefined 'urgent' as 'more than one year'?

Ms ALLAN — You may have defined that.

Ms ROMANES — On page 24 of budget paper 3 there is a reference to a commitment of the government that excellence will be supported in the development of new specialist facilities in secondary schools in the subject areas of science and technology, arts, design, music, languages and sport. Can you advise the committee what these new specialist facilities are and where they will be? And can you also tell the committee whether the government's commitments in terms of greater energy efficiency in schools in future will be incorporated into all future facilities?

Ms ALLAN — On that energy efficiency, I will ask the department to make some additional comments. On the facilities for excellence that we have provided funding for in the budget, it flows from what I indicated in the introductory remarks and also on the comments on the fire reinstatement program. We have quite a large capital works program that we have allocated funding for in this budget. It goes to our commitment to providing the best facilities for our students. There are evidence and reports around that demonstrate that facilities are at the highest standard possible. That improves the education outcomes for students, which is why we have continued to invest in capital works. As I said, over the next four years, through Labor's financial statement, we have committed at least \$350 million to capital works.

You asked for a breakdown on the areas that have been funded in this budget. We have allocated \$10.087 million for new specialist classrooms in the following areas: Ballarat High School will receive \$1.788 million for art and craft, fabrics, home economics and technology studies facilities; Vermont Secondary College will receive \$3.152 million for art, graphics, home economics, technology studies, refurbishment of the music room and canteen; Lilydale High School will receive \$3.815 million for science and technology and also facilities for the staff; and Rochester Secondary College, which I think is also in Mr Baxter's electorate, will receive \$1.332 million for technology and student facilities. So you can really see that those four schools are receiving funding. In some particular areas it will be able to provide some excellent facilities in those specialist areas. Over the next four years \$80 million has been allocated for the provision of specialist learning facilities across those areas indicated — science and technology, and art and design.

We really are committed to improving educational facilities. You also asked about energy efficiency. The department participates in the government's energy reduction strategy and is working with the Sustainable Energy

Authority of Victoria to develop four lighthouse schools. These lighthouse schools are Sunbury Heights Primary School, Roxburgh Park North Primary School, Mount Erin Secondary College and Williamstown High School. These schools are construction projects which incorporate a range of best practice, environmentally sustainable design features around energy use, and I think it is going to be a really exciting program. When you consider the lessons we can learn from providing energy efficient schools, and with the targets that we have set around reducing greenhouse emissions and improving our use right across the government, that fits in with those aims.

Mr CLARK — I have a question about languages other than English (LOTE) at both primary and secondary school levels. Are you able to tell the committee how many schools have had to withdraw LOTE courses because they have been unable to obtain teachers to provide those language offerings, and what actions are you taking to deal with that issue?

Ms ALLAN — The data on what schools have withdrawn those subject areas is not collected by the department, which I think is what Grant indicated earlier. But if you refer back to the earlier question around improving access to excellence in languages, we certainly are expanding opportunities for students across Victoria to have access to languages other than English with the three centres for excellence and the five regional Victorian schools of languages. I will see if Jenny or Grant have anything. No.

Mr CLARK — Particularly within your responsibilities in terms of ensuring adequate supply of teachers, if there are these supply difficulties and schools are having trouble finding suitably qualified LOTE teachers, which I think anecdotally a number of us will have come across, that ought to be something that is on your radar screen —

Ms GREEN — It should be on John Howard's.

Mr CLARK — So that the department is identifying those shortages and making plans to overcome them.

Ms ALLAN — I did indicate earlier that we have identified LOTE as one of the areas that we recognise that there is a potential issue around shortages in that area, and there were some other areas as well. It really goes to, I guess, an issue across the board with teachers, and the potential for teacher shortages going forward, and if I can pick up on Danielle Green's comments, we really do have to look. It not just an issue for us here in Victoria. All state and territory education systems are grappling with this issue. There is a nationwide shortage of teachers, and it is also incumbent upon the federal government to join with us, particularly through forums such as the Ministerial Council for Education, Training and Youth Affairs to really look at the issue of teacher shortages. When you consider, I think, if my memory serves me correctly, it was around 60 per cent of eligible year 12 graduates who this year missed out on their first round offer of teaching at a Victorian university institution, that is really something that we need the federal government to look at as well to ensure that in the forward years we have graduates leaving universities ready to teach in Victorian schools.

Some of the other work that is being done both within the Victorian Department of Education and Training and around other states and territories, and indeed internationally, is that we know there is an ageing profile of teachers in our schools; we know that we lost a large cohort of teachers in the 1990s with over 9000 teachers stripped out of the education system in Victoria. That has led to some real issues, and unless we have a federal government that commits to providing university places in this area, and that we in Victoria also look at strategies that we can do to address this issue, which we are, and we have things such as the teacher scholarship program, we had a recruitment campaign, which you may recall, last year looking at what we can do here in Victoria in this area —

Mr HEHIR — Can I follow on for a second. Just on the question whether we do a survey to collect the data, I have had some further advice on that which confirms that we do not undertake such a survey. There is annual data collection, but it does not actually pick up the information that you are referring to.

Mr DONNELLAN — In the budget there are provisions for new welfare officers for schools. Can you tell me what they are going to do and how they are going to do it subtly?

Ms ALLAN — What they are going to do and how they are going to do it?

The CHAIR — Basically the key performance indicators — the outcomes.

Mr DONNELLAN — It is Friday afternoon!

Ms ALLAN — The primary welfare officers again is an initiative that was announced last year as part of our Labor financial statement, and it will be progressively rolled out over the next four years with the \$49.5 million to employ 256 full-time equivalent primary welfare school officers. The role of these welfare officers, which I guess is your question around what they are going to do, will support primary school students at risk, address behavioural problems, implement learning and management strategies and establish effective partnerships between schools and other support services, again recognising that schools work closely with their local communities. The issue of having primary welfare officers in primary schools, again many members of the committee will know this has been an issue for primary schools for a little while now, and I think it is great to see that we as a government have listened and acted on this to ensure that we do provide extra supports in our primary schools.

There have been a few questions around the way these 256 primary welfare officers will be allocated across Victoria. We said this clearly in our Labor financial statement documents and emphasised again in this budget that the primary welfare officers will be allocated according to school population and need, because again we really want to focus this initiative and really target it in on the areas of most need and to support those school communities in greatest need. Also I think it will encourage schools to work together on these initiatives. I think we will see some benefits with the cluster initiative with our schools as well.

Obviously principals will have a key role in employing these people and supervising them and looking at the role they are doing, but I think this has been an initiative that certainly has been welcomed by primary schools.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about page 133 of BP2, which is the Labor's financial statement asset investment promises. The Department of Education and Training lists building better schools, new schools, with a promise of \$180 million. Now, the first point with respect to that, the funding that is listed as approved is \$89.8 million. However, on page 207 that \$89 million is not listed as for new schools and in fact is split between \$38 million for new schools and \$51.8 million for modernising existing schools. So firstly I am wondering should that \$89 million that is allocated against that promise actually be there, or should it only be \$38 million as shown on page 207 against the promise of \$180 million?

Ms ALLAN — I think what you have indicated there is we have a large capital works program, and I might ask either the secretary or Jenny Samms to make a comment on that budget detail.

Ms SAMMS — I believe it is just a presentation issue in the budget papers, and better schools is new schools, modernisation — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The commitment, building better schools, new schools — it is pretty clear that a new school is not capital works in an existing school; it is a new school. And the promise was for 15 new schools.

Mr DONNELLAN — No, it is not. You are nitpicking on words.

The CHAIR — Just a minute. Ms Samms is asking for where it was in LFS.

Mr FORWOOD — Page 133.

The CHAIR — Ms Samms was seeking clarification. On BP2 — —

Mr HEHIR — Sorry, I think I know part of the answer to this. Jenny Samms is right, but I might have to confirm it, but my understanding is it is about how things are classified by Treasury. I think this is about where there is a school being built and as part of its being built this an additional sort of phase 2 of a program. It is actually a new school being built. We have done phase 1, we have got phase 2, and I think the description is modernisation.

The CHAIR — Does that explanation make sense?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It does not to the extent the description is 'funding provided to modernise 38 schools', which would not suggest stage 2 of a new development.

The CHAIR — If you wish, items on which you require clarification can be put on notice and forwarded later.

Mr HEHIR — I will take that on notice.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The other aspect other than clarifying that was that there was a \$180 million commitment presumably over the life of the government to construct new schools — —

Ms ALLAN — This is in LFS?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — In the LFS column on page 133. You will see ‘Building Better Schools — new schools’ and 180. If we take that \$89 million at this stage, subject to clarification, that is an allocation over two years and there is nothing allocated other than \$90 million for that promise and there is no mention of the other 11 schools which are not listed in the document — Caroline Springs, the cheese factory primary school at Berwick, Epping North, Mill Park, Somerville et cetera. None of those schools is mentioned in the budget and there is no funding provided in the up years.

Ms ALLAN — Maybe I will ask Mr Hehir to add to that. LFS is a four-year program. What we have in the LFS policy documents that were released last year and which are confirmed in the budget this year is that schools that were not named in the 2003–04 budget will be picked up in the next four years in future budgets. We have made that very clear in both our LFS commitments and in our budget statements. Capital works is an area of particular interest for schools and for local members. We have made a commitment that we will fund those new schools and we will do that over the next four years.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Given that that is the case, how come they are not shown in the line item for the 2005–06 and 2006–07 years?

Mr HEHIR — Until government approves funding, and that involves the business case being worked up and all the programming being done, we cannot actually include it in the estimates in a way that allows us to put in cash flows.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So they have not yet been through that approval process?

Mr HEHIR — Which is what the minister said. These are things that will be done, brought up in subsequent budgets for formal approval of the business case and then the cash flows can be specifically put into the estimates.

The CHAIR — That formal business process would be known to almost all members of Parliament.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes, it is.

Ms ALLAN — I assure members of the committee that all the schools indicated in the LFS document last year will be funded over the next four years.

The CHAIR — I am particularly interested in some of your initiatives with the community facilities fund. That is really innovative. In this current budget you have allocated \$500 000. That is to be provided on a matching basis with local government to construct new school facilities for use by community groups and individuals. I understand the program is aimed at enhancing community access to school facilities including libraries, computer laboratories and sporting facilities. What is the department aiming to achieve with that community facilities program? What feedback has this program received from the local government sector? Have you got any particular views in relation to forward projections for funding? I am particularly interested in this, given some initiatives in my area.

Ms ALLAN — We all are.

The CHAIR — I think most members’ eyes would be most interested in this section of the budget.

Mr FORWOOD — Is this the one where they said \$30 million, but they are not spending anything?

The CHAIR — That is TEI — you have been around long enough to know what TEI is, Mr Forwood.

Ms ALLAN — Thank you for that assistance, Chair.

The community facilities fund is another of these great capital works initiatives that we announced in our LFS last year. Mr Forwood is right — we have committed \$30 million over the next four years. You asked for a breakdown on the allocation of this funding.

We have allocated \$500 000 in 2003–04. This is really recognising that because the community facilities fund is a new program most projects that require funding will not be ready. To go back to the previous question, we need extensive planning and consultation with the local community because, as you identified, it involves local

government and local communities as well. Projects that will require funding will come on stream later in the next four years. It is giving school communities the opportunity to gear up for this initiative.

If you are talking about feedback, I also have had feedback from my local communities who are interested in this project. It also goes back to my earlier comments about the Department for Victorian Communities and about building stronger communities. It really is a recognition that many schools are the lifeblood of those communities and that it is a real waste of our facilities to have them sitting idle between 3.30 p.m. and 9.00 a.m. the next day, and to have the community benefit from that.

I have an example which, to its credit, the previous government did fund in my electorate where the Flora Hill Secondary College, in conjunction with the then departments of sport and recreation and local government, funded the construction of a three-court netball complex which is being managed by the YMCA. It is used out of hours by the YMCA for netball competitions and other sporting competitions, and during school hours it is used by the school. That is a great example of where this program will really benefit. As I said, local government is very interested in this and will aim to achieve those goals of linking in with the community. It is a great one.

Mr FORWOOD — First in, best dressed?

Ms ALLAN — The guidelines, as I understand it, are still being developed for an announcement some time in the early part of the next financial year. Because it involves school facilities being used by external groups there are some legal issues to work through, but I understand guidelines are being developed probably as we speak.

Witnesses withdrew.

