

TRANSCRIPTS

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2016–17 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne — 15 February 2018

Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Mr Tim Smith

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Vicki Ward

Ms Fiona Patten

Witnesses

Ms Gill Callister, Secretary,

Ms Jenny Atta, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group,

Ms Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and School Education Group,

Mr Chris Keating, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian School Building Authority,

Mr David Latina, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education and Skills Group,

Dr David Howes, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and

Mr Bruce Armstrong, Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group, Department of Education and Training.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2016–17 financial and performance outcomes. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome Ms Gill Callister, Secretary of the Department of Education and Training; Ms Jenny Atta, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group; Ms Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and School Education Group; Mr Chris Keating, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian School Building Authority; and Mr David Latina, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education and Skills Group. Additional witnesses in the gallery are Dr David Howes, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority; and Mr Bruce Armstrong, Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group. Any witness who is called from the gallery during this hearing must clearly state their name, position and relevant department for the record.

All evidence is taken by the committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts and any PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Witness advisers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I now give the witness the opportunity to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to attend the committee today. I have come with my deputy secretaries and Dr Howes as witnesses, as you introduced, and I have a presentation that shares some of the highlights of the department's 2016–17 performance. The Department of Education and Training provides services that have an impact on the lives of every single Victorian. We engage with and support 400 000 children and their families in early childhood, 950 000 students in schools, and 376 000 government-funded enrolments in TAFEs and other training providers. In 2016–17 the department spent \$13 billion across seven output groups to deliver these critical education services, and you can see the breakdown on that slide. Our focus is on achieving excellence and equity in all sectors, and our investment reflects this. Our goal is to ensure that all Victorians can access high-quality education and training.

I will start at the beginning, in early childhood. The early years lay the foundation for success in all the educational and life experiences that follow for children, particularly for vulnerable children. We are building on an already strong system to ensure that every child and family has access to high-quality, equitable and inclusive early childhood services so that they are ready for kinder, ready for school and ready for their lives ahead. By national standards, Victoria continues to have a high participation rate, with a 96.2 per cent kindergarten participation rate, and increased participation rates for Aboriginal children, from 82.2 per cent in 2015 to 90.5 per cent in 2016.

To ensure the quality of these services, we completed 2269 unannounced inspections to early childhood providers in 2017. We continue to improve the quality of our services, with 83 per cent of assessed early childhood education and care services meeting or exceeding the national quality standard. When we need to intervene on quality grounds, we do so, and we have taken strong enforcement action in a small number of cases. In April last year I signed a compact formalising the working relationship between this department, the Department of Health and Human Services and local government. The supporting children and families in the early years compact is a commitment to work together in new ways to improve the outcomes for vulnerable

children and families in the early years. In May 2017 the minister released the *Early Childhood Reform Plan*, which sets out the long-term vision for a world-class early childhood system in Victoria.

Moving to school education, we are continuing to build the infrastructure that responds to community needs, keeps pace with growth and is designed to deliver better student outcomes. As the graph shows, there will be a projected 90 000 more students enrolling in Victorian schools between 2016 and 2021, and we need to have high-quality facilities to support these new students. At the beginning of the 2017 school year we opened 10 new schools in metropolitan and regional Victoria, with a further 46 in the pipeline. As well as building new schools, we are transforming neighbourhoods by including sport, cultural and other facilities that can be shared with the wider community. Overall there are 1000 school renewal projects being delivered, and 10 tech schools are progressively opening across the state. The tech schools help us embed STEM and critical thinking, which is a core component of the Victorian curriculum and a skill vital to employment in the 21st century.

On student outcomes, the government established 10 new targets in 2015. These are ambitious five and 10-year targets which will drive improvements in achievement and wellbeing. It is early days, but our most recent NAPLAN results from 2017 show promise in some key areas. Victoria is one of three leading jurisdictions in Australia in NAPLAN and achieved the highest mean score on six out of 10 measures in primary NAPLAN. While Victoria has achieved strong results, our challenge is to lift results for all students and, as you can see from the slide, we are starting to see the green shoots of reform. Overall results for year 3 are especially pleasing. As shown in these charts, the proportion of students in both the top three bands and the top two bands of year 3 numeracy has increased by more than 5 percentage points between 2015 and 2017, and performance in year 5 reading is also strong, with the proportion of students in the top three bands increasing by almost 5 percentage points between 2015 and 2017.

But our focus has to remain on all years and all students to make progress towards the targets and lift school education outcomes in Victoria. In 2016–17 we implemented a number of initiatives to improve learning outcomes through effective curriculum delivery and improved teaching and learning. For example, the framework for improving student outcomes guides schools in how they can use school funding to obtain the best results and lift student achievement across Victoria. To support curriculum implementation, we have rolled out new tools that focus on improving literacy and numeracy.

We have also rolled out new training and development for current and future school leaders. We know that effective school leadership is central to achieving improved student outcomes, and the initiatives we are implementing are building leadership capacity across our system. In 2016-17, 118 school principals and assistant principals were trained to identify and build the capacity of approximately 700 emerging leaders within their networks as part of the Inspire: Local Leaders program. We introduced the excellence in teacher education reforms to raise the quality and the status of teaching, including a minimum ATAR for year 12 entry into undergraduate courses, to apply from 2018. In an Australian first, Victorian families now have access to the new Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution, which is responsible for resolving the most complex and difficult school disputes.

I will not go over the detail on this slide, but as you can see from it, we have implemented a range of targeted initiatives for vulnerable and at-risk students to support them to stay engaged in their education.

Higher education and training is the foundation for employment in Victoria. It gives students the skills they need for productive employment and supports member of the community to participate effectively. To meet jobs growth, we are building a modern training and skills system, high-quality responsive training services that mean every student should receive the support they need to gain the skills that industry needs and employers expect. The department has taken great steps to overhaul the TAFE system and set a high benchmark for training quality. In August 2016 the government launched Skills First to ensure Victoria's training and TAFE system offers high-quality training that is most likely to lead to employment.

To progress this reform, the department developed a new targeted funded course list to ensure that Victorian training subsidies target the skills that the industry needs to grow and meet future demands, introduce new subsidies that both support the delivery of high-quality training and better reflect the true cost of training delivery, and selected training providers through a rigorous selection process. We also added targeted funding streams to encourage businesses and training providers to work together to find new ways to train for new types of work, support high-needs learners to access training and succeed, and extend training provision into specialised areas experiencing shortages. The Victorian Skills Commissioner's Apprenticeship and Traineeship

Taskforce and industry advisory groups have been established to improve the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships and ensure better engagement with the industry. Skills First was implemented from 1 January 2017, and Victoria is the only jurisdiction to show an increase in TAFE student share between January–June 16 and January–June 17. Government-funded TAFE enrolments have increased by almost 11 per cent from 2016 to 2017.

We have given industries a voice in what courses are offered in Victoria to ensure that they have the skilled workforce that they need. An example of innovation and ensuring that training meets the changing needs of the community is Box Hill Institute which had 73 students enrolled in the certificate IV in cybersecurity in 2017. Box Hill is now a national leader in cybersecurity with TAFEs in a number of other jurisdictions now delivering the qualification developed at that institute. Student levels of satisfaction with training are high and have increased over the past two years. In 2016 almost three-quarters of students would recommend their training organisation, which is an increase of 8.6 per cent from the previous year.

Looking forward, the department continues to deliver education across the life course for all Victorians, regardless of background or circumstance. Education is critical to success in life, and from early childhood education and care, through schools and into training and further education, the Victorian education system is setting people up with the capabilities they will need to thrive and prosper in a rapidly changing world.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Secretary. I might commence with the first question. Secretary, just referring to your annual report — page 21 is the reference — can you please outline to the committee how the department is progressing in relation to implementing the election commitment that all government schools will have Safe Schools by 2018?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Chair. I will start with just some references generally to the impact of bullying on children, because I think we all understand that bullying is a harmful event for all children. It can directly impact on learning outcomes as well as the broader wellbeing of all young people. It is not acceptable and we do not tolerate bullying in any form in Victorian schools. We know that children who are bullied, students who are bullied, are more likely to feel disconnected from school, not like school, have poor academic outcomes, have lower attendance and completion rates, and lack quality friendships at school. They can often suffer from anxiety, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and feel wary or suspicious of others. So the department has a range of different approaches and programs to try and address these issues in different ways. Safe Schools forms part of this suite of initiatives. It focuses on students who identify as LGBTI and the fact that they are more likely to be victimised and bullied at school and that this has a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and their academic achievement.

We have quite a number of studies and research now that tell us that this group of students can be significantly impacted by bullying at school. A 2010 Australian study reported that young people's experiences had negatively affected their schooling, finding that 29 per cent reported they could not concentrate in school, 20 per cent missed classes or days at school, 20 per cent had their marks deteriorate, 18 per cent hid at recess and lunch, 16 per cent did not use change rooms and 13 per cent dropped out of sport; and while 10 per cent moved schools, 8 per cent dropped out altogether. In a further study in 2014 asking young people in what ways bullying had affected them in relation to their sexuality, 32.6 per cent said they could not concentrate in class, 19.5 per cent missed classes, 21.4 per cent missed days at school, with 23 per cent their marks dropped and 21 per cent hid at recess or lunch.

Ms SHING — Can we get the citations for those reports too at some point in time, Secretary — on notice is fine?

Ms CALLISTER — Sure, that is fine.

Ms SHING — I will just declare also that I am the Safe Schools ambassador, for the purposes of this hearing.

Ms CALLISTER — So we are concerned that young people who identify as LGBTI do experience high rates of bullying, and the majority of this abuse occurs at school. We do know that this is known to harm their engagement with education. There is, as I cited, some of a large body of international and national research, including peer-reviewed journal articles that show students who identify as LGBTI are more likely to be victimised and bullied.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies longitudinal study released in 2017, involving over 3000 Australian young people aged 14 to 15 years old, found that after controlling for all variables — so individual, family, school and social relationships — there were only three factors that increased the risk of suicide attempt in young people. The first was having self-harmed before, the second was being involved in crime and the third was being same-sex attracted. A national survey of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people called *Writing Themselves in 3* found that 61 per cent of LGBTI young people reported experiencing verbal abuse and 18 per cent reported experiencing physical abuse in relation to their sexuality. Further studies have found some of these issues continuing into post-school, university and TAFE.

So our focus is on how to reduce and prevent this abuse of young people, specifically LGBTI young people, in school. We have had a very specific response around Safe Schools. In many ways it is part of a suite of programs including our eSafety anti-bullying program that relates to cyberbullying, our Bully Stoppers program and our programs to combat racism in schools. So there are a range of different types of bullying and cohorts who are affected.

The Safe Schools unit within the department is working to provide support to schools and of course through schools to families and students. The department's delivery model requires government secondary schools that in the past had not yet participated in the Safe Schools program to complete four steps: firstly, to make a commitment to create an inclusive and safe environment for their school community, including for their LGBTI students; to identify actions the school can take to achieve their commitment; to identify the intended outcomes that the school expects to see as a result of its activity; and to publicly communicate that commitment, the actions and the intended outcomes. These are all outlined in the *Guide to Making Your School Safe and Inclusive for LGBTI Students*, which was released last year in August. That guide is publicly available on the department's website, and it is the key departmentally developed and endorsed resource for use by all schools in Victoria.

There is not a one size fits all in the approach to implementing these four steps. It is really important that the policies are tailored to fit the needs of particular schools, but it does focus on how to support schools to support the inclusion of all students, particularly LGBTI students, and on demonstrating meaningful engagement with the core intent of Safe Schools, which is building safe environments where all students will participate and be able to learn.

Mr T. SMITH — Just on a point of order before I start my question, Chair, I understand that that question was not relating to just merely 16–17, but that question was relating to the whole period of this government. Your question began by asking about 2014–15 election promises, and she was talking about —

Ms WARD — She being the secretary.

Mr T. SMITH — The secretary was talking about issues that are arising at the moment. I am just interested as to what precedents that is setting for the rest of the hearing.

The CHAIR — There is no precedent being set for the hearing. If you listened to my question, I said, 'In relation to the 16–17 year how that has the department gone in relation to implementing an election commitment?', so my question was very specific about 16–17.

Mr T. SMITH — I do not believe you actually mentioned 16–17.

The CHAIR — I did, Mr Smith. I actually referred to the departmental annual report for 16–17. That was my reference point.

Mr T. SMITH — If I could, Secretary, ask about the social media policy of your department and indeed for you as a departmental secretary, you on occasion during the reporting period tweeted favourably for Labor MPs and ministers. You have liked tweets by Labor MPs. I do not notice you liking any tweets, retweeting or tweeting in favour of any coalition, Liberal-National, Greens or DLP member of Parliament. I am just wondering if you think that is appropriate behaviour for a departmental secretary and whether or not you think that would not give rise to an expectation of political partnership from those of us in the loyal opposition. I am wanting you to explain —

Ms SHING — On a point of order, Mr Smith has couched his question in terms of whether or not the secretary thinks something, which is asking for an opinion. On that basis it does not comply with the standing orders as they relate to this particular reporting period or to the process that we are here for today.

Mr T. SMITH — The tweets were in 16–17.

Ms SHING — You are asking for an opinion. That is my point of order, Mr Smith.

Ms WARD — You might need to try and rephrase your question again, Mr Smith.

Mr T. SMITH — Ms Callister, why did you tweet favourably in favour of the Labor Party in 2016–17?

Ms SHING — On a point of order, Mr Smith has referred to the secretary tweeting favourably around the Labor Party. His question relates to tweets having been favoured. There is no proper basis for the question as it relates to the estimates period or to what we are here for.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — What is the point of order?

Ms SHING — You are seeking to —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — We have not actually been told what the point of order is. You need to raise it in terms of relevance or in terms of debating.

Ms SHING — I have raised it in terms relevance.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — You have not. You are just making a point in debate.

Ms SHING — I have. I have said it has nothing in common with the reporting period. Asking about what the secretary thinks —

Mr T. SMITH — It was on 2 May 2017.

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Smith, have you got a specific example?

Ms SHING — Do not just hold up —

The CHAIR — For the benefit of Hansard, who cannot see, perhaps —

Mr T. SMITH — It says:

Tonight @JennyMikakos launched the Early Childhood Reform Plan — an exciting vision to transform the EC system supported by \$202m #vicbudget

Here we have the secretary, with the minister, with the Education State political slogan festooned behind her. I do not think that is appropriate for a departmental secretary.

Ms Ward interjected.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward! Mr Smith, with that specific example, is it your contention that the secretary liked that tweet, retweeted that tweet or posted that tweet?

Mr T. SMITH — That is her tweet.

Ms SHING — Can you please refer to the secretary as the secretary and not —

Ms WARD — Please start to use the respectful term, Mr Smith.

The CHAIR — Order!

Mr T. SMITH — That is the secretary's tweet. She has retweeted a tweet by Mr Merlino with regard to the EBA; that was on 23 March 2017. The secretary has liked a tweet by Ms Spence with regard to an announcement in her electorate on 2 May 2017. I did not tweet these; the secretary did, and I am asking whether

she conforms with departmental guidelines and policies and whether it is appropriate. I am raising a legitimate issue of public interest with the conduct and the political partisanship of the public service in Victoria in 2018.

Ms SHING — On a point of order, this relates to government activity and not to what a party has done, Mr Smith. You have yet to identify anything that relates to the Labor Party. Do not mislead the committee process.

Mr T. SMITH — You might not like the question, but —

The CHAIR — Order! There is no point of order. The question stands in relation to why did the secretary like or retweet tweets about —

Ms SHING — Because it is a Labor government, I would have thought.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Shing!

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Mr Smith. I am incredibly proud of the work that the department has done on many occasions in relation to progress in education and major achievements. I have had a great deal of involvement in relation to early childhood over the course of my career and been a great advocate through many governments of the need to invest in and progress early childhood education. I have talked often in speeches about the impact that further investment and work in our early childhood system will have on long-term education outcomes. Indeed, I did so at a national meeting of education officials on Tuesday this week. It is a matter that we are progressing at a national level as well as at a state level. Many governments have had a strong role in increasing the investment and their vision for early childhood education, and the release of the new plan and the significant investment were a great achievement of much of the work of my department.

Mr T. SMITH — Secretary, I am passionate about early childhood too, but I am not passionate about departmental secretaries tweeting in support of politicians.

Ms CALLISTER — I do not believe it is tweeting in support of politicians, Mr Smith. I think it was tweeting in support —

Mr T. SMITH — I am sorry, Secretary —

Ms WARD — How about you let her finish her answer, Mr Smith?

Mr T. SMITH — She is not answering my question; that is why.

Ms WARD — The secretary is answering your question.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward!

Ms CALLISTER — I am trying to answer your question, because I do think this is about supporting a piece of work that the department has put considerable effort into over a long time. It is about a major achievement in public policy. The government of the day has taken that advice and has put forward a policy, which will be very, I think, beneficial to the early childhood system in this state. So I think that it is only about promoting the public policy and service delivery work that this department does and recognising that as a major achievement of the work that we have done.

Mr T. SMITH — Secretary, 2 May 2017:

Thank you to the stakeholders who attended our education briefing tonight. Another big budget for the Education State — a political slogan — with a photo of Mr Merlino addressing the faithful in, I would reckon, either the government party room or Room K.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr T. SMITH — I again ask you: with regard to the public sector’s social media guidelines, your Twitter page indicates your job title. This is not a private Twitter page. You were undertaking this as the secretary of the department of education. You are in my opinion tweeting in a partisan fashion in support of the Labor government. I have not seen a single tweet from you that suggests any form of bipartisanship with anything that the Greens have put up in an education speech, what the National Party have been saying or what I have been saying. With the greatest respect, you liked the tweet of a Labor backbencher —

The CHAIR — Is there a question, Mr Smith?

Ms WARD — This is not a question, Mr Smith; this is a rant.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward! Is there a question, Mr Smith? Otherwise I am moving on. Is there a question?

Mr T. SMITH — Yes. The question is: I am asking again about departmental guidelines and secretaries using social media to support the government. Really and truly —

Mr DIMOPOULOS — On a point of order about misleading the committee, Mr Smith referred to the Education State as a political slogan. The budget documents for the state of Victoria are littered with the statement ‘Education State’. It is not a political slogan; it is government priorities.

Mr T. SMITH — It is not worth the numberplates it is written on. But anyway, that is another matter.

The CHAIR — Mr Smith, if you can briefly rephrase the question, I will allow it. Otherwise we are moving on.

Mr T. SMITH — All right. Do you think —

Ms SHING — No, you are asking for an opinion.

Mr T. SMITH — Secretary, you liked the tweet of a Labor MP. Why did you do that given the political partisanship that exists within this place, and indeed your very sensitive job that is meant to be above politics and provide free and frank advice to government and not to engage in politics.

Ms WARD — On a point of order, Chair, can we please ask Mr Smith which tweet he is referring to when he is asking the secretary to respond?

Mr T. SMITH — I explained that before, and I was told —

The CHAIR — Mr Smith has read into the record tweets —

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Again for the benefit of Hansard, Mr Smith, you might want to refer to which tweet you just held up then.

Mr T. SMITH — Ros Spence.

The CHAIR — Okay, I will let the question stand. Secretary, briefly.

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Chair. I am not sure what that tweet is, Mr Smith, but perhaps if I could say two things. I have been a public servant for 30 years. I have worked for governments of both sides of the Parliament in the bipartisan and frank and fearless way that public servants do, and I do not believe I would be in this position if I had not done that and worked closely with ministers and backbenchers from both sides of politics, all sides of politics — crossbenchers included, minor parties — over the course of my career at both a delivery regional level as well as a policy and more senior level.

I am proud of the work that the department of education does. I am proud of the services that we provide Victorians. I think social media is one way to promote the achievements of education in our community and the achievements for local communities, for students, for families, indeed for industries, and I think that it is a way

that is regularly used these days to promote the work and be able to recognise the work that my department does for our community.

Ms SHING — Thank you, Secretary. I will keep going with the subject matter of Safe Schools if I may. This program, which is not part of the curriculum, fits alongside a number of other programs, which are also not part of the curriculum, which you referred to in the response to the Chair's question and which include school-wide positive behaviour, Bully Stoppers, e-Smart in relation to what I understand to be cyberbullying, the school focused youth program and, more broadly around developing self-esteem and confidence in young people, things like the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden program.

I just want to put it on the record around the status of these programs that these tools are part of a suite of initiatives that are not part of the curriculum. Can you please confirm again for the purposes of this committee and for the understanding of members of this committee that the Safe Schools program, designed to counter bullying in the ways that you have described, is not part of the Victorian state school curriculum?

Ms CALLISTER — That is absolutely accurate, Ms Shing. It is not part of the curriculum. As you stated, you had a good range there of the different kinds of programs that the department provides that sit around schools, that are designed to help students have confidence and feel supported, and support their general health and wellbeing, which will ultimately enhance their learning outcomes. There is a great deal of research to suggest that. So it is one of those types of programs that are not part of the curriculum but are offered where necessary to ensure that children and young people feel safe and supported and secure.

Ms SHING — Thanks, Ms Callister. In relation to your 30-year career in the public service, in response to a question from Mr Smith, I am just wondering if you were part of the Department of Education and Training or a previous iteration in the 11–12 budget reporting period?

Mr D. O'BRIEN — How is that relevant to the reporting period we are discussing today?

Ms SHING — It goes directly to a question that I will be proceeding with.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — On a point of order, Chair, we have been debating all week, in fact just about every question the member for Eltham has asked has been, 'Is this 2016–17?'

Ms SHING — I am happy to rephrase.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — You cannot now shamefacedly tear it all down.

Ms SHING — No, I am not shamefacedly doing anything.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — You are.

Ms SHING — I am happy to rephrase the question.

The CHAIR — I ask Ms Shing to rephrase.

Ms SHING — Thank you. Secretary, based on what you have said in relation to the Safe Schools program, is the objective of the program, as you have described it and based on the resources that are available and as they have been rolled out in the 16–17 period, about maintaining and meeting the 'duty of care to all young people to make sure they are safe, accepted and happy as they go through their school lives, regardless of their sexual orientation'?

Ms CALLISTER — Yes.

Ms SHING — Thank you. Just for the record, that is a quote from Mr Clem Newton-Brown in relation to the Safe Schools coalition funding which was provided in the 11–12 budget under the former Baillieu government, which indicated that the important service would continue and expand with funding increasing to 100 000 from an initial \$80 000 investment. I think context is important. No further questions, thank you.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — We will bear that in mind for future reference.

Mr T. SMITH — If I could turn to the Respectful Relationships curriculum, which is a recommendation out of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and domestic violence. Recommendation 189 said the Victorian government mandate for the introduction of this curriculum is important in the eradication of domestic and family violence, which we completely and utterly support. However, I am interested as to how various aspects of this curriculum are intended to eradicate family violence with regard to discussions of gender fluidity and gender identity. For example, Respectful Relationships introduces the concept of gender fluidity and establishes definitions of sex and gender.

The term gender is used for the differences that are created as a result of the social and cultural expectations about what is acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a boy or a man or a girl or a woman. This is different from the term sex which is used to denote the biological or physical differences between the bodies of males and females.

The CHAIR — Do you have a source for that quote, Mr Smith, just for the benefit of the witnesses?

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, it is the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum.

The CHAIR — Okay. I just thought for the benefit of the witnesses if they can have that document there, they can —

Mr T. SMITH — They will be familiar with it because I do not think anyone is debating that this is not in the curriculum. I am intrigued as to how the scope of this quite worthy goal has, I would suggest, become awfully politicised with various different post-modernist views of sex and gender creeping into it. I do not understand how, for example, some of these topics educate children with regard to an anti-violence agenda in the home or anywhere else for that matter.

Ms SHING — Could it be because 80 per cent of trans kids try to kill themselves by the time they are 24? Could it be that?

Mr T. SMITH — On a point of order, Chair, I was referring to domestic violence. That is a really important subject. I am asking how this curriculum is targeted to that.

The CHAIR — The question stands.

Ms CALLISTER — Mr Smith, I will make some initial comments and then I will ask Ms Haire to give a little bit more detail. There are two aspects to Respectful Relationships education in Victoria. One is the teaching of respectful relationships education, as you rightly say, a key component of the Victorian curriculum F-10, and that occurs through the health and physical education, and the personal and social capability curriculum areas.

The second element is a whole-school approach, which encourages schools to look at all their existing processes and culture to ensure that they model respectful relationships and gender equality practices across the entire school community. I think it was based on evidence to the royal commission from a number of pilot schools that have been engaged in this for some time, and the royal commission felt that this was a good long-term opportunity to help model these behaviours that might in the longer term change some of the terrible experiences that mostly women and children have.

As I said, the Victorian health and physical education, and personal and social capability curriculums are based on the Australian curriculum. They are strengthened in Victoria to provide an explicit focus on respectful relationships. Through this element of the curriculum, students are supported to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to strengthen their sense of self; learn to recognise and regulate emotions; develop empathy for others; and build and manage safe and respectful relationships. Content description in relation to preventing domestic violence can be found across all the different levels.

The curriculum is delivered through the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning resources. Key topics include emotional literacy, personal strengths, positive coping, problem-solving, stress management, help-seeking, gender and identity, and positive gender relations. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the CEO of which is here, has specialist curriculum consultants to help schools as to how they deliver social and emotional learning topics, including the Respectful Relationships curriculum.

There is a resource kit for Victorian schools — to understand the Respectful Relationships program, as well as a leading schools and partner schools initiative. Some intensive training —

Mr T. SMITH — Would I be able to have a copy of the resource kit?

Ms CALLISTER — I believe it is on the website, Mr Smith. As you said, this comes from the government's commitment to implement all the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Recommendation 189 says:

The Victorian government mandate the introduction of respectful relationships education into every government school in Victoria from prep to year 12. Implementation should be staged to ensure school readiness and to allow for ongoing evaluation and adaptation.

Mr T. SMITH — Sure, which we support, but you have not really answered my question with regard to some of these more politically sensitive topics, particularly in the primary school years, that you have brought into this curriculum that I would suspect a lot of people would say bear no resemblance whatsoever to an anti-family violence agenda.

Ms CALLISTER — Okay. I will just ask Ms Haire to give you a bit more detail.

Ms HAIRE — Mr Smith, the resource that you are quoting from is the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships resource, which is a suite of support documents to support the teaching of the Victorian curriculum. They are not mandatory or required; however, they are mapped towards the elements of the curriculum that the secretary just spoke about, and so —

Mr T. SMITH — Let us just get this clear: this is mandatory and part of the curriculum.

Ms WARD — No, Mr Smith, you have misunderstood.

Ms HAIRE — Respectful relationships is part of the curriculum, as the secretary spoke about, under health and physical education, and social and emotional learning. The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships resources are not mandatory and are not required; they are support documents which teachers and schools are provided with to use, should they wish to, and as part of the approach to education in this state, teachers make those choices according to the needs of the class, the school community and the purposes.

Mr T. SMITH — How much money did you spend developing the new Victorian curriculum? It was, what, \$21 million or \$22 million — about that?

Ms HAIRE — I would have to check that amount.

Mr T. SMITH — But the documents are not mandatory to be used, so then what is the point of doing it?

Ms HAIRE — The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority is responsible for the curriculum and introduced the next curriculum at the start of last year, as previously discussed. Part of what the department does is provide tools and resources to assist teachers and schools to implement the curriculum, but those resources are not mandatory or required because we take the view in Victoria that the people who know best what to teach to the students in their school and their class are the teachers and principals. But I am happy to run through those documents —

Ms SHING — Inevitably I suspect we will come back to it.

The CHAIR — Yes, we can go back to it.

Ms WARD — Secretary, as I get to my question, and I will continue the conversation around respectful relationships, you might want to assist Mr Smith with his task as the opposition spokesperson on education by explaining what teacher resources are and how teachers actually use resources in schools for their classes. I think that might help clear up some of the confusion that Mr Smith has exhibited.

Mr T. SMITH — How does that relate to 2016–17?

The CHAIR — Is that a point of order, Mr Smith?

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, it is.

Ms SHING — Are you now saying that your question did not relate to the reporting period, Mr Smith? It is based on your question.

Mr T. SMITH — My question did relate to the reporting period.

The CHAIR — Order!

Mr T. SMITH — Her question was about me.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward —

Mr T. SMITH — I am not in the reporting period. I am here —

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Smith! Ms Ward can you rephrase your question please.

Ms WARD — Yes. Secretary, in order to assist Mr Smith in his endeavours to uncover teaching resources used throughout the 16–17 reporting period, could someone please explain to Mr Smith how teaching resources during that period are used by teachers to enhance learning within their classrooms?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Ward. I have invited Dr Howes from the VCAA to come up to help address that question.

Ms WARD — Thank you.

Dr HOWES — Chairman and the committee, I might read an example from the personal and social capability curriculum as a way of illustrating an answer to the question that is being asked. One of the things that students are expected to learn is that they will be able to describe the characteristics of respectful relationships and ways that respectful relationships can be achieved. That is the content that teachers are required to work with with students. How they do that is up to them. I think the connection, Mr Smith, in response to your question there, is understanding the nature of respectful relationships and what can be done to maintain them also goes to the heart of where and how to seek help if a person, a young student, is either in or is witnessing a toxic or a violent relationship.

Ms WARD — Thank you. I will pose the question then that a young student who is emerging as a transgender student, for example, may be experiencing family violence at home because there is unhappiness —

Mr T. SMITH — On a point of order, Chair, is this relating to a specific incident from 2016–17?

The CHAIR — I think, Ms Ward, rather than phrase your question in the present tense, if you can rephrase your question in the past tense so it does not create any ambiguity for members so we know clearly that you are referring to 16–17.

Ms WARD — So for the teaching resources that were used over 16–17, if a teacher had been presented with a student who was experiencing family violence at home because they were transgender, these resources could help in that 16–17 period —

Mr T. SMITH — Again, Chair, I don't like moving endless points of order because —

Ms WARD — if that teacher understands how to assist that student.

The CHAIR — Order! Point of order, Ms Ward.

Mr T. SMITH — It is purely hypothetical, Chair. There is no evidence from 2016–17 of the issue that Ms Ward is referring to.

Ms WARD — Why are you so afraid to have this question answered, Mr Smith?

Mr T. SMITH — I am not even doing what has been done to me all week, so I do not like doing it —

Ms WARD — How would they be deployed in that circumstance? How were they deployed in that circumstance?

Mr T. SMITH — I am just holding them to the standard they have held me to all week.

The CHAIR — Order!

Ms WARD — I will rephrase the question.

The CHAIR — Can you restate the question please, Ms Ward?

Ms WARD — How would those resources have been deployed?

Ms HAIRE — Ms Ward, I might assist with that question because I think it is perhaps not a curriculum question as much a —

Mr D. O'Brien interjected.

Ms HAIRE — Sorry, apologies. So, as the secretary said, there are two aspects to Respectful Relationships in Victoria and this has been the subject of considerable notice, including by the royal commission, as Mr Smith pointed out, and also recently by the national children's commissioner, who commented favourably on this approach. As the secretary said, it is both an element of the curriculum where students are taught those social and emotional capabilities and it is also a program which is about the whole-school program which ensures the operation of the school reflects those values of anti-discrimination and ensuring equality and support, and in particular any norms that may lead to family violence.

As part of supporting the whole-school approach, there was investment during the year in question — not into the resources, but into additional support through the learning places regional services in our department, where we had additional people deployed into our area offices to assist schools specifically should there be reports either by students or by staff of family violence. That is to assist principals with their heavy workload to ensure that they have the appropriate support to respond to and appropriately refer students and teachers, should there be an incident of family violence.

Ms WARD — Thank you. So with the whole-school approach that you mention, how many schools have signed up to participate as partner schools and how are they engaging with the program?

Ms HAIRE — Ms Ward, in February 2017 the government announced 126 government, Catholic and Independent leading schools to commence implementing the whole-school approach in their schools. Following an expression of interest, an additional 25 leading schools have signed on, which is a total of 151.

Ms WARD — How is the department assisting schools to engage with parents, families and the broader community regarding this initiative over that reporting period?

Ms HAIRE — There are many ways in which the department is supporting schools to engage with families and communities. I have got a couple of examples that I will find of the ways in which schools are doing this, which might be the best way to illustrate it.

Ms WARD — Thank you.

Ms HAIRE — At Upper Yarra Secondary College, as part of the whole-school approach, it identified a lack of posters or books showcasing women authors, women who helped shape history, women in STEM, women playing sport or strong female characters. The school purchased many new resources to ensure that both genders are represented in the school's library and promoted the new resources through the school. At Kyneton Primary School, they used some of their grant money as a part of the program to buy a set of football jumpers for the girls football team, as they did not have enough jumpers for both boys and girls teams. The school also purchased a range of library books that promote gender equality that will be used in reading sessions with years 5 and 6. The leadership team at Kyneton Primary School also developed a pledge for why they doing this work, which says, if I may read it:

In response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, Kyneton Primary School is committed to promoting and embedding Respectful Relationships and gender equality into our school's ethos, vision and values. In our school the focus is on treating

everyone with respect and dignity in the hope of creating real and lasting change in the lives of our students, staff, families and the wider school community.

Ms WARD — How did the department measure success of this program over that period?

The CHAIR — Briefly, Ms Haire.

Ms HAIRE — At this stage, Ms Ward, the measure of success which is reflected in budget paper 3 is the participation of schools, both as leading schools and as partner schools.

Ms WARD — Thank you.

Mr T. SMITH — So I understand now that you are suggesting that this curriculum, and it is a curriculum, which talks about — this is for grades 5 and 6:

It is important that students are familiar with the basic vocabulary needed to understand sexual orientation and gender identity.

And it goes on. Despite it being part of the Victorian curriculum compulsory aspects for F–10, you are suggesting that it is merely a guide for teachers and they do not have to use it. So the expense that you have gone to is largely —

Ms Ward interjected.

Mr T. SMITH — How would you describe this document, then? I am at a loss to characterise it myself.

Ms HAIRE — The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials — that is how we describe them — are resources which cover the eight topics of the social and emotional learning aspect of the Victorian curriculum. So they are support materials which support the teaching of the Victorian curriculum. There are eight topics which are covered across the span of school years. The first is emotional literacy —

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, I have read it. You would not call it a curriculum, though, despite the fact that it is part of the Victorian curriculum?

Ms HAIRE — No, it is not curriculum.

Mr T. SMITH — Okay, so here we go again — it is not curriculum; it is never curriculum.

Ms HAIRE — The document that you are referring to is not curriculum; it supports the curriculum.

Mr T. SMITH — You referred before to allowing teachers to be the best judge of what to teach in their classrooms, and I am just interested — and this is probably to the secretary — in how many ex-teachers there are on your executive.

Ms CALLISTER — You mean in the whole department's executive?

Mr T. SMITH — I mean in your senior executive, how many ex-teachers there are.

Ms CALLISTER — There are three.

Mr T. SMITH — And who are they?

Ms CALLISTER — Well, there are three here today — Dr Howes; Ms Haire is an ex-teacher; Mr Armstrong, sitting behind me, is an ex-principal of Balwyn secondary college.

Mr T. SMITH — I am aware of that. I am interested as to what feedback you have got from teachers with regard to the scope and size of the current Victorian curriculum, with things like Respectful Relationships, which are now embedded within it.

Ms SHING — Mr Smith, a point of order —

Mr T. SMITH — In 2016–17, when they were developing the new Victorian curriculum.

Ms CALLISTER — I am going to ask Dr Howes to answer that, but I would just preface it by saying that in anything that we develop for schools, whether it is support materials for the curriculum — and I just note that last year we developed extensive support materials for schools around literacy and numeracy, which have been well received — so whether we are developing professional support materials to support how teachers teach the curriculum, or whether we are developing new policies or procedures that we expect of our schools, we have a number of different ways that we consult and make sure that we draw on the expertise of principals and teachers.

Indeed we regularly second teachers and principals into the department to work on particular projects. We consult with the principals associations. We have an expert reference groups of principals that we consult with on a regular basis about everything from new financial processes that we might be introducing that will create extra requirements for schools right through to, as I said, professional resources that we are developing. I would not presume to develop these things without regular and multilayered, often quite extensive, consultation with the people who are delivering those services. I will ask Dr Howes just to talk specifically to the curriculum.

Dr HOWES — The Victorian curriculum, as is widely known, is based on the Australian curriculum. We made a very, very conscious effort to cut out anything that could be regarded as extraneous. One example of that is there are seven general capabilities in the Australian curriculum; there are only four in the Victorian curriculum. We were acutely conscious of the need to balance not overloading teachers and students with giving them access to the knowledge and skills that will be fundamental for their success. I think on balance the feedback from teachers would be that we have been successful in that endeavour.

Mr T. SMITH — Three thousand pages worth? That is just the Victorian curriculum.

Dr HOWES — The scope and sequence, which sets out the knowledge and skills, and the achievement standards which teachers are required to assess against, that is 136 A4 pages.

Mr T. SMITH — I am interested in why, then, we have still got three cross-curricular priorities. I understand what you are saying about 136 A4 pages, but I have printed off the curriculum — or maybe it is not the curriculum; I get awfully confused with your definitional descriptions. The Victorian curriculum is 3000 pages long, sir.

Dr HOWES — With the foreword, the support materials and all of that, I am sure it is a lot of pages, but when we actually take the scope and sequence that sets out what students are required to learn and how they will be assessed, we have cut that down as far as we think we can while still ensuring that every student receives the knowledge and skills they will need for the 21st century.

Mr T. SMITH — And the three cross-curricular priorities?

Dr HOWES — That is another difference from the way in which the Victorian curriculum has been implemented in Victoria compared to the Australian curriculum. We chose not to represent those three cross-curriculum priorities as separate or additional components. So Aboriginal history and cultures, which is one of those three cross-curriculum priorities, is not represented in the curriculum as an additional element, something else that students need to learn. The history of Aboriginal culture, pre-settlement, is embedded in the history curriculum —

Mr T. SMITH — That it is.

Dr HOWES — just as is the history of settlement and the impact of settlement since, and the same is true for Australia's place in Asia and for sustainability. Sustainability, for example, is not represented as an additional element of the curriculum, but learning —

Mr T. SMITH — No, but it is in English, for example.

Dr HOWES — Not in the curriculum, no.

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, it is.

Dr HOWES — I can respond to a specific illustration.

Mr T. SMITH — I will go and get the specific aspect that I am referring to.

Dr HOWES — There is a distinction between the content of the curriculum and then the elaborations and the illustration of how that can be done. There are examples, I am sure, in various resource material of how arguments, for example, or disputes about what represents sustainable energy are conducted, but in English that will be around how to analyse argument or how to construct an argument.

Ms PENNICUIK — Good afternoon, Secretary, deputy secretaries and everyone else who is here from the department. Thank you very much for coming to what is our final session of the outcomes hearings. I would just like to ask some questions about early childhood if I could. I will be referring to the department's annual report and also to the questionnaire. The 2016–17 annual report at page 8 reports that:

\$13.7 million through the children's facilities capital program to upgrade existing, and build new, integrated children's centres and early learning facilities. An additional \$1.2 million ... to over 300 successful applicants for minor expansions ...

et cetera. And page 37 of the general questionnaire lists:

\$5.3 million increase in grants to local government to provide funding in children's facilities capital program in 2016–17.

The first question is: are they two separate items — the 13.7 and the 5.3? I presume the department keeps track of where new early learning centres are needed or need to be either replaced or refurbished, so if you could just talk a little bit about that. What percentage of existing early learning centres may still be in need of either replacement or refurbishment? I note too that \$13 million is 0.01 per cent of the full education budget. You said earlier that is what it is, and it just jumped out at me as being a rather small percentage.

Ms CALLISTER — I am going to ask Mr Keating to respond to your question, at least initially.

Mr KEATING — I will talk generally about the program that we run first and then address the numbers specifically if that is okay. For many years the department has run the children's capital grants program, which is where we ask local government or not-for-profit providers to submit applications for projects they are wanting to deliver. Right now we have \$70 million worth of projects being rolled out. They go out in grants rounds and generally we are providing a co-contribution to local government. In the 2016–17 year, we provided \$13.7 million through that grants round to 26 major projects, including \$4.1 million in the growth areas of Melbourne.

The \$5.3 million you referred to in the questionnaire I am just going to check. The reference there to \$5.3 million is in the section which is talking about expenses charged from a prior year. In the administration of our programs we put in estimates as to what the expenditure is likely to be, but given it is a grants-based program sometimes there are discrepancies between financial years about exactly when the works take place. That \$5.3 million would have been anticipated to have been spent in the prior year, and then it is expensed in the following year.

Ms PENNICUIK — My question was on the percentage of ELCs that are still needing replacement or refurbishment.

Mr KEATING — There is a very wide range of early learning settings — local government, for-profit, not-for-profit.

Ms PENNICUIK — That is right. You might want to take it on notice. It is quite a lot of detail.

Mr KEATING — Yes. We can certainly provide information about the grants round in terms of the places we have created and the improvements in terms of summarising that information.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes. There is the grants wraparound, but part of my question was: are you keeping track of it rather than just waiting for people to apply for grants et cetera? How does the department do that? It may be that you have to take that on notice.

Ms CALLISTER — A great deal of the early childhood standalone services are provided through local government. They are owned and operated, or owned at least, by local government and generally the department is a contributor to that capital through the grants round in different areas and at different times. We also of course fund kindergarten in long day care, where we do not necessarily pay a contribution to the capital.

Because of the huge range of ways that early childhood services are offered and provided, we would not necessarily have an overall systematic view of every facility in the state in the way that we do for schools. But we definitely have a strong focus on where we have growth and where we have growth in numbers of children coming through who will need early childhood places and ultimately school places.

Ms PENNICUIK — If you have got any more information, I would be happy to get that provided on notice. I just wanted to go quickly to your presentation, Secretary, with regard to two figures there on page 4. One was the 569 places for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. If you could talk a little bit about why that number. The other one was the welcome increase in participation rates for Aboriginal children, from 82 to 90, but I would like to know where the 10 per cent that are not participating are located.

Ms CALLISTER — The 569 places, Ms Pennicuik, are kindergarten places that we prepurchased to try and increase the number of children who are either Aboriginal or known to child protection for whom we can offer free kindergarten places. But we have struggled over successive years, for a range of reasons, to be able to ensure that we are actually able to get all of those children placed. It is a combination of matching demand and supply and some privacy-type issues. It is a complex issue. We found some success in the previous year, so we then repeated it and increased it this year with prepurchased places. So we had places available in kindergartens in areas that we know to have a higher concentration of either Aboriginal or other vulnerable children who are eligible for these places, and that has proven to lift the number of these children who are participating in early childhood education quite significantly. I do not have the figure of that lift with me, but I might be able to get it for you. I am sorry, what was the second part of question?

Ms PENNICUIK — That was whether the department knows the location of the 10 per cent of Aboriginal children who are still not participating in kindergarten.

Ms CALLISTER — We do not know absolutely where, but we do have the most dispersed Aboriginal population of any state in Australia. It is located quite differently to other states. We do have the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan, which spans early childhood, schools and TAFE and higher education. I think it is the first comprehensive Aboriginal education plan for quite some time to set ambitious targets to increase participation. I am quite heartened by the increase in our Aboriginal early years participation rate, but I am completely committed to continuing so that it matches or exceeds the non-Aboriginal participation rate.

It does lend itself to a very place-based approach with local providers in places like Gippsland, the Latrobe Valley, East Gippsland, places like Shepparton and places like Mildura and Echuca, and locating and engaging families with culturally appropriate services so they feel committed and included. Taking a very family-based approach with the Aboriginal community has proven to be more successful. Much of the work done in health and human services with this community we are very deeply engaged with as well so that we have a joined-up approach rather than a siloed approach to on the one hand early childhood participation and then on the other hand some of the other things that health and human services deal with.

The compact I referred to in my presentation, between local government and health and human services and the Department of Education and Training is completely focused around how — as the three key parts of government, with local and state — we engage. It is very focused around Aboriginal children as well as other disadvantaged and vulnerable children. I think it will assist us to systematically apply some of the successful programs. The trajectory up I think is positive.

Ms SHING — I would like to touch on a number of the components of the presentation that dealt with NAPLAN and the expected outcomes in the 16–17 period for NAPLAN results, at budget paper 3 in the 17–18 budget. That also then goes on to 177 and 183 around achievement in NAPLAN. The Education State targets — I think there are nine of them — were set prior to the reporting period and were operating during that period. They have been part of delivering improvements that you have referred to in your question.

What I would like to do, though, is to understand in some greater detail more about the international standing which Victoria has on the results of the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, how we compare to other states and territories during that period and the detail on the literacy and numeracy strategy around reaching Education State targets, as you have described them in your presentation, please?

Mr CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Shing. That is a very comprehensive question. The government did actually set 10 targets —

Ms SHING — I beg your pardon, not nine.

Ms CALLISTER — in late 2015. They represent the ambition and the goals to improve outcomes for every student in every classroom regardless of their starting point. They are focused around the whole child, so they are focused around the themes of academic excellence, critical and creative thinking, resilience, physical activity and breaking the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes. I think they are ambitious targets, so they are five and 10-year targets, because building sustainable change takes time. We have learned that from the improvement in many jurisdictions around the world.

I will ask Dr Howes in a moment to speak specifically to NAPLAN, but in terms of the results of the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which is otherwise known as the PIRLS — it is an international test of literacy achievement and reading comprehension at year 4 — the results for 2016 were released in December 2017, and Victoria was the top-performing Australian jurisdiction in this test, with results that were similar to the ACT but were significantly above all the other states and territories. The proportion of Victorian students achieving at or above the international standard has risen from 80 per cent in 2011 to 86 per cent in 2016, and the proportion achieving at the advanced level has increased from 12 per cent in 2011 to 19 per cent in 2016.

Only six of the participating countries had more than 19 per cent of students achieving at the advanced level. Within Australia only the ACT had a higher proportion of students achieving at the advanced level. These are early signs from an internationally compared sample test that Victoria is making some significant progress.

Ms SHING — Just in relation to teacher quality as well, you did discuss the ATAR change to, I think, an ATAR of 80 or above, but in relation to teacher quality and teacher education reforms, how are that allocation and those target measures equipping the profession to in fact deliver the best of what we possibly can?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Shing. In 16 and 17 we implemented a number of policies, programs and initiatives that are aimed at ensuring that all students in Victorian government schools have access to high-quality teaching. The policies and initiatives support the employment and development of a high-quality teaching workforce, including securing the best and the brightest in the teaching profession — much more support to teachers in their early years.

Unlike some other professions where there is a significant induction period, teaching has not had a systematic approach to supporting a new teacher more significantly than you might support a teacher of 10 years. If you think about a new medical graduate or a new psychologist or a new nurse or indeed a new occupational therapist, paramedic, police officer, most of these professions have forms of oversight, supervision and induction that help build the early capability of the profession. Supporting teachers in their early years to really strengthen their practice is extremely important. Supporting teachers to continually improve their practice, so really trying to focus on the professional development requirements that are part of registration of teaching but ensure that what is on offer to teachers builds their capability. Supporting those teachers that want to become leading teachers, teachers that want to move into the principalship role, building a pipeline of those people to build their ability to lead other teachers within their schools or become leaders of schools. There has been a whole suite of initiatives to invest in teacher capability and resources. I think I mentioned earlier the literacy and numeracy resources that have been provided to support teachers to deliver those parts of the curriculum.

Ms SHING — Is there progress in relation to accommodating population growth as part of the greater demand for teachers that will flow from that, within that qualitative improvement over time and meeting those targets?

Ms CALLISTER — Yes, I believe so. I believe we want to make teaching in Victoria one of the most sought-after professions from some of our most capable and high-achieving students, and having an ATAR of 80 — 70, I am sorry —

Ms SHING — Seventy, I beg your pardon. I have misled there; I did not mean to. I thought it was 80.

Ms CALLISTER — is an important part of that.

Mr T. SMITH — If I could just follow on, it is actually 65 for this year, isn't it, going to 70 next year?

Ms CALLISTER — Yes.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you, Secretary, just to clarify that. If I could return to Dr Howes. Dr Howes, you were suggesting before that the cross-curricular priorities are not embedded across the curriculum. Is that what you were suggesting?

Dr HOWES — No. My apologies if that was not clear. They are embedded. They are not treated as separate or additional elements of the curriculum.

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, I know. That is the point that I was trying to make to you before — that they cut across all aspects of the curriculum.

Dr HOWES — To the extent that elements of Aboriginal history and culture are located in the study of history and the arts and English, they are embedded in the English curriculum or the arts curriculum.

Mr T. SMITH — Or, for example, it says — and this is for sustainability —

All learning areas within the Victorian curriculum F–10 have a potential to contribute to the sustainability cross-curriculum priority. Sustainability is included in each area in ways that are consistent with the content and purpose of the learning area. Each learning area contributes differently to the sustainability cross-curriculum priority, its key knowledge, concepts and skills.

So, for example, in foundation to level 2 history there is a sustainability aspect to the curriculum —

Ms PENNICUIK — As there should be.

Mr T. SMITH — Is that really relevant?

Ms PENNICUIK — Is that relevant!

Dr HOWES — If I can step back to talk about Foundation 1 and 2, out of the 12 domains of the curriculum, in the first three years teachers are only required to report on English, Mathematics, Personal and Social Capability, and The Arts in order to focus on the fundamentals. The way in which sustainability is embedded in the English curriculum that I think you were referring to is around questions of how to analyse argument, how to analyse the way in which issues are presented, how to understand in mathematics the use of data, in science, how to understand how ecosystems work. What we have tried to do is not add to the curriculum but ensure that students are able to apply the skills and knowledge that they are learning to contemporary issues.

Mr T. SMITH — Right. If I could move back to you, Secretary, with regard to the Education State targets, which came in, as you suggested, for the school year 2016. We have had two full school years that cover the reporting period, and according to your data you have gone backwards in seven out of nine target areas.

Ms CALLISTER — I am sorry, Mr Smith. Could you just repeat the —

Mr T. SMITH — You have gone backwards in seven out of nine target areas of the Education State's own special targets you brought in in September 2015.

Ms CALLISTER — Do you want to specify, Mr Smith, which ones you think —

Mr T. SMITH — I am referring to an *Age* article from two weeks ago, where it says year 9 reading: 20.7 per cent down to 20.5 per cent, a 2025 target of 28.7 per cent. I think you are very well aware of what I am referring to, Secretary. I am happy to read out every last bit of data I have in front of me, but I am sure you have got far better resources than I do so you might like to explain to me why that is the case and what you are doing to improve them.

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you. Thanks for the question. This is an ambitious reform program, and as I think I said earlier, they are five and 10-year targets because building sustainable improvement does take time. It is important to remember, I think, that in Victoria we start from still a strong base in high performing. We want to do a lot better, but we still remain one of the highest performing jurisdictions in the country.

Mr T. SMITH — I want to be the best, Secretary, and we are going backwards in certain areas.

Ms CALLISTER — I think the ambition of this reform agenda is to realise significant lifts in achievement across the board, but we have focused in on a number of things in the early period with schools because we

know that early change and long-term success are underpinned by a strong focus on school leadership and improving teacher practice in classrooms. At the end of the day what happens in a classroom, the teaching and learning in a classroom, is the thing that makes the biggest difference for our students.

Mr T. SMITH — Absolutely. So why for the first two years of these new targets have we gone backwards?

Ms CALLISTER — We can go through each of the targets, but I will just start by asking Dr Howes to start with the NAPLAN targets.

Mr T. SMITH — I want to know about the Education State targets.

Dr HOWES — The NAPLAN targets are a subset of those targets. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority is responsible for working with ACARA on the NAPLAN data and on gathering the data for —

Mr T. SMITH — My understanding is that the NAPLAN data feeds into the final Education State target, which is going backwards.

Dr HOWES — I am happy to talk to that.

Ms CALLISTER — Yes, but, for example, Mr Smith, one of the targets is that 25 per cent more students reach the highest level of achievement by 2020. The data source for that, for year 5 reading, is NAPLAN. For year 9 reading the source is NAPLAN. So for a number of these targets the source that we are measuring them by is NAPLAN. Then there are some targets that have been introduced, such as critical and creative thinking, for which there was no measurement, because it has not been measured before. So the VCAA spent time creating a benchmark for that against which it can be delivered. On pride and confidence in our schools, the data source for that is a survey. So each of these have different data sources, but the ones that relate to increasing our performance in year 5 and year 9 reading and in year 5 and year 9 maths and then in scientific literacy, which is a PISA data source, those first four are directly measured by our NAPLAN performance, so NAPLAN is relevant to those targets of the 10.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you for providing that clarity with regard to the basis of these targets. I would just like to know why our performance is going backwards in them.

Dr HOWES — I can offer a comment from the perspective of the VCAA, which is responsible for gathering, reporting and the analysis of the data. Our psychometricians will put a caveat around the data, which is that there is a measure of statistical significance that needs to be taken into account that I am sure the committee is familiar with. For the background, all education measures report a mean, but there can be uncertainty around factors that impact on that mean. So there are confidence intervals established which enable us to determine whether the variations that inevitably occur were the result of a variation or an actual change in performance. Using statistical significance, which ACARA report on in the national report, there was no change in any of the measures in 17.

Mr T. SMITH — So you are happy with how everything is going?

Ms SHING — Sorry, a point of order —

Mr T. SMITH — The first two years —

The CHAIR — Point of order, Mr Smith. Ms Shing.

Ms SHING — Asking somebody whether they feel happy about something, again, is, firstly, not relevant and, secondly, is asking for an opinion.

Mr T. SMITH — Are you confident that we are on track given that we have gone backwards, on your figures, in the first two years of these new targets — that we will reach, for example, 46 per cent by 2020 in year 5 reading, 28.7 per cent in year 9 reading or 39.9 per cent by 2020 in year 5 maths, where we are currently on 30.6 per cent? That is an enormous expectation, yet we are going backwards, on your figures. Where I am going with this question is: are you going to change anything, say, in FISO, to improve performance to reach your own targets?

Ms CALLISTER — Perhaps I will start by saying, Mr Smith, that they are ambitious targets, and of course we would like to see more progress. We have seen good progress in a couple of these targets, and we are heartened by that because in all of the research and the evidence from systems that have significantly improved — in Ontario, in London through the London Challenge and a number of others — it is rare to see system lift in everything at once, particularly early in a big reform. I say that not by way of not being concerned; our view is that we need to take advice — and we do that a great deal, from many experts — about whether there are things in this reform agenda that we need to continue to refine or tweak or even possibly radically change, but we are two years in where schools only got their additional equity money in 2016, where they were recruiting and embedding new programs, where many schools have had to recruit literacy specialists and a range of other teachers, where a lot of our professional development programs only occurred through 2017, where we have asked a lot of schools and they have gone through a great deal of change. So I think this is an issue we regularly consider. Are there things that we can do to improve or change this? I think, two years in, the general advice to us seems to be that there are positive signs. The Grattan Institute — we do talk to them, among others — and particularly Pete Goss talk about not jumping at shadows if there is a bit of lack of —

Mr T. SMITH — No-one is jumping at shadows, Secretary. We have been stagnating for 15 years.

Ms CALLISTER — I think these results show us that in some cases, as Dr Howes said, the slight reductions are not statistically significant so we should continue on our course and possibly accelerate some of the initiatives. We do know that schools need time, and principals have said that to us, that they want time to embed a lot of these initiatives and to really systematically utilise those resources. I talk to principals all the time about these reforms, all the time, not just the principal associations. I talk to principals and teachers very, very regularly about their experience of the current range of initiatives. There are the two areas of NAPLAN where we have made some really positive inroads. I think there are some other things here that we are thinking hard about and wondering whether there are certain things we need to —

Mr T. SMITH — For example, on literacy, in 2016–17 the South Australian government began a trial in 50 schools for a phonic screening check in grade 1. The Victorian government has not yet committed to that, did not commit to it in 2016–17, and has not to this date. Is that something that you looking at to improve literacy?

Ms CALLISTER — There is something that we do, I think it is in either prep or grade 1. The notion —

The CHAIR — Mr Keating, I believe you wish to make a brief statement or make a brief correction.

Mr KEATING — Just to follow up on the question that Ms Pennicuik asked earlier which was about the \$5.3 million identified on page 37 of the questionnaire. The correct answer in terms of what that number represents is that between 2015–16 and 2016–17 in the expense line of grants and other transfers there was a significant increase of \$217 million. The questionnaire explains the make-up of that. Part of that increase of \$217 million was caused by \$5.3 million additional expenditure on children's capital grants, so it was not a transfer from 15–16 to 16–17 as I said; it was simply that there was more expenditure in the 16–17 financial year.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that clarification, Mr Keating.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Good afternoon, Secretary and officers. I just wanted to continue on from the questions that Ms Shing and Mr Smith asked about the NAPLAN results and the Education State targets. I have got to say I am not a teacher, so I am not sure if that disqualifies me from discussing education, but hopefully it does not. Just in terms of the responses to the questions that Ms Shing asked and also your presentation, I can see here on page 7 that in numeracy it appears to me that it has increased in year 3 and 7 and then in reading again in year 3 and 7 in the reporting period. In many of the other year levels it has also increased bar maybe one or two, if I am reading it correctly.

I think sometimes we can fall into a trap like when you have a headline figure for unemployment and then you chip away and you get to a lower figure, but sometimes the long-term unemployed are still unemployed. I was just wondering if you could give us some more detail from the 16–17 year about the kids who are still the ones that need to be assisted further and are lagging behind. What cohorts are they? Are they regional place-based? Are they ethnic background? Are they socio-economically disadvantaged? Can you break down those figures a

bit further by cohort or whatever information you have? So do kids in rich areas do better, as an example? I was going to link that to equity funding, but I will do that as a supplementary.

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Mr Dimopoulos. I think we would have to take part of the question on notice in terms of a more detailed breakdown by area.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Sorry, Secretary. I was a bit meandering. They are good results. Numeracy and literacy in the 16–17 financial year were good results. What I would like to know is which are the sort of stubborn cohorts to get up there in terms of better numeracy and literacy outcomes?

Ms CALLISTER — I am going to ask Dr Howes to talk in more detail, but the data does show that the most disadvantaged students in primary school made bigger learning gains in 2017 than in previous years. That does not mean that we have got every single disadvantaged kid out of the bottom two bands of NAPLAN, but it is a promising sign that some of our most disadvantaged kids have lifted more than previously.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — That is heartening.

Ms CALLISTER — The students currently in year 3 have benefited quite significantly, but we also see some improvements for children in year 7. I might ask Dr Howes to speak specifically to the results.

Dr HOWES — Thank you, Secretary. One of the areas in which results have moved is in year 3. Year 3, while it is not one of the Education State target areas, is an important lead indicator. The increases there have been in the realm of more than 5 per cent shifts upwards in both reading and numeracy. Of the five NAPLAN domains, reading and numeracy are the most foundational. Reading provides the foundation for students to learn in science and history. It is that change that happens around grades 3 and 4 from learning to read to reading to learn. The expectation that we would have on the basis of the trend data is that because there are now more students in the top three bands for NAPLAN at year 3, that will flow on to year 5.

One of the cohorts that has been most disadvantaged is the Aboriginal cohort — Koori students. We are seeing a performance differential there between Victoria's performance and the national performance. So, for example, in reading at year 3 the percentage of Aboriginal students who are at or above the national minimum standard was 88.7 in Victoria and 81.6 at the national level. So while I am sure the department would recognise that there is room for further improvement in that, relative to other parts of Australia we are doing better.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Excellent. So in relation to the equity funding part of my question, in the reporting period how did that assist in a very practical way those cohorts, or the grade 3 level at least that you were talking about? Was it extra aides? Was it actually directly maths teachers or English teachers?

Ms HAIRE — Mr Dimopoulos, the equity funding was allocated on the basis of a school's socio-economic family and educational measure. So the schools with the most disadvantaged families received greater amounts of funding. That went as an amount into the school's student resource package and schools were supported with an evidence-based framework for improving student outcomes to decide how they might spend that money. I am not sure, the secretary might want Mr Armstrong to speak to some examples of the way different schools choose to allocate the additional money.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I would not mind a couple of examples, because they go directly to the improved numeracy and literacy results, I imagine. That is the whole point of this investment in that financial year — to improve numeracy and literacy, and it seems to have done that.

Mr ARMSTRONG — Thank you, Mr Dimopoulos. The injection of equity funding into schools allowed schools to take on a range of initiatives that were relevant to the needs of their particular communities and the students that they serve. So, for example, at Benalla college, Benalla P–12 College appointed an additional assistant principal and two extra leading teachers to lead improved teaching and learning. Coaches have also been engaged to help teachers use their data better to assess student learning needs and to improve their teaching practice. They have also engaged a behaviour analyst coach to engage with students and a specialist speech pathologist to deliver oral language programs. So you can see that there is a suite of additional inputs that have been there through professional services that have been engaged both within the school and beyond the school.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — With the speech pathologist, that would have been quite specific to that school's needs, I imagine.

Mr ARMSTRONG — It is not a generalist thing. Other schools may have undertaken other activities. So, for example, at Roxburgh College they engaged the Australian Research Council to deliver senior science programs through their equity funding to improve science engagement and the understanding of students with particular needs and focus on the participation of girls in senior physics and chemistry classes. So schools use their data and analyse that data. They make goals and key improvement strategies in their annual implementation plan and then allocate the funding to their particular needs.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Thank you. Finally, the department I imagine has made a link between that investment and the increase in numeracy and literacy results?

Mr ARMSTRONG — Particularly there has been a focus within the department on improving literacy and numeracy. The department launched its literacy strategy for primary-aged children from F–6 in June last year. That is version 1 of that strategy. So, yes, there has been a particular push on literacy and numeracy.

Mr T. SMITH — I am waiting for the answer to my previous question.

The CHAIR — Is the witness able to provide an answer to Mr Smith's previous question?

Ms CALLISTER — Just to clarify, Mr Smith, this was the question about phonics testing?

Mr T. SMITH — Phonics screening.

Ms CALLISTER — Phonics screening, yes.

Mr T. SMITH — Similar to what they have done in South Australia — the Labor government in South Australia.

Ms CALLISTER — I will give two parts to this answer, and I will tell you what we are actually doing. It is compulsory for teachers to assess all children commencing prep in Victorian government schools using what is called the English Online Interview, the first of four modules which give an assessment of every student's early literacy skills, with a strong focus on phonological awareness. The English Online Interview assessment gives a picture of every student's early literacy skills, including their reading, writing, speaking and listening, and it incorporates a phonemic awareness task with students identifying rhyming words and generating rhyming words, and also a phonics task with students identifying words with the same first sound, identifying the end sounds in words and giving a name or a sound for upper and lower case alphabet letters. The feedback from the evidence-based assessment gives a snapshot of every child's current progress and gives classroom teachers the opportunity to develop individual learning plans. It is not just a simple checklist assessment; it is quite grounded in helping build an approach to teaching around individual children.

There are additional modules of the EOI available for teachers of years 1 and 2 to assess progress in literacy learning, including reading, with elements that are focused on phonics. In module 2, which is undertaken at the end of foundation or the beginning of year 1, students are assessed on their capacity to manipulate the sounds in spoken words and to substitute initial and final sounds in words and on their ability to recognise patterns within print. In the phonemic awareness task in this module, students identify and generate rhyming words. In the phonics task students are again assessed on their ability to give a name or a sound for upper and lower case letters, to segment one-syllable words into individual sounds and to manipulate the sounds into one-syllable words.

In module 3 students are assessed on their ability to manipulate the first, last and middle sounds in one-syllable words and to pronounce unfamiliar words composed phonetically in regular syllables. In module 4, which is generally undertaken at the end of year 2, students are assessed on their ability to independently read and comprehend a variety of different texts. And as students read they develop new self-correcting strategies and read with increased fluency. They are assessed on their ability to read for the literal, inferential and evaluative information.

So the content of what is proposed in the national year 1 phonics test we have to date considered is largely covered in what the Victorian assessments are offering. At present any potential changes to our current approach to phonics for children in prep to grade 2 may be influenced by the report of David Gonski to the federal government, which will then come to the education ministers council. It is one of the things that has been discussed by the council at a national level a number of times. We have considered and looked at what we

are currently doing, which I just described in some detail, and consider it quite comprehensive. We think that what David Gonski will probably do is look at the range of ways it is done in other states and territories and, as you have identified, South Australia and Victoria and possibly what happens in other jurisdictions, and that may inform further change that could be implemented.

Currently the requirements on teachers are quite extensive and the ability to understand where students are is quite extensive, and we would not want to impose something additional until we are at a point where it is informed by probably that next level of national discussion and evaluation.

Mr T. SMITH — Very quickly, because I know Mr O'Brien has got some questions he wants to ask, in 2016–17 how many children dropped out of school?

Ms SHING — Do you mean permanently or on a temporary basis?

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, permanently.

Ms CALLISTER — Can we come back to you on that, possibly before the end of this session?

Mr T. SMITH — Absolutely. And very quickly —

Ms SHING — Sorry, was that primary and secondary, one or both of them?

Mr T. SMITH — Schoolchildren, the whole way through, prep to 12. In terms of new buildings, who was responsible in 2016–17 for the funding of air conditioning in all new school buildings?

Ms CALLISTER — I will hand that question to Mr Keating.

Mr KEATING — Thank you for the question. The approach to air conditioning in schools for a long time has been: in the northern part of the state — so pretty much above the Great Dividing Range — when we build a school or we refurbish a school, air conditioning goes in; for schools that are south of that, we do not put any air conditioning in. We will work with those schools to design passive cooling and shading to make sure they can actually function and stay at a good ambient temperature.

Mr T. SMITH — But it is the responsibility of the school to fund the cooling device — call it what you will?

Mr KEATING — So when we are building a new school or refurbishing a school, no, we do not put in air conditioning in those southern parts of the state. Some school councils have elected to put different heating and cooling solutions into their schools after that, sometimes air conditioning but other times other things as well.

Mr T. SMITH — Can you provide a list of all schools that do not have air-conditioned classrooms?

Ms SHING — Or did not during the period; what do you mean?

Mr T. SMITH — In 2016–17.

Mr KEATING — We will be able to provide an estimate.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you very much.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Secretary, can I go back to growth suburbs — I think you were responding to Ms Pennicuik before. In the budget papers, on page 61, there was \$10 million for new kindergartens in growth suburbs. Can you give me an idea of how many kindergartens applied for those funds?

Ms CALLISTER — Yes.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I appreciate some of this may need to be taken on notice. I have got quite a number of questions.

Ms CALLISTER — No. I think we possibly are able to —

Mr KEATING — Yes.

Ms CALLISTER — Mr Keating?

Mr KEATING — So over three successive budgets there has been investment into early children services in terms of capital. There was initially a \$50 million capital grants program. The additional \$10 million in the 16–17 year was specific to investment in the growth areas of Melbourne. In the 2016–17 financial year the grants program that we ran awarded \$13.7 million for 26 major projects. That funding round of 13.7 includes some of that \$10 million that was announced in 16–17 but also funding from prior years, and in that there was \$4.1 million directly to establish new kindergartens in the growth areas of Melbourne.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So 4.1 for the growth areas. Can I, perhaps on notice, to save time, get a list of those ones that were in the growth areas if you have them, and also an update on where they are at. I assume they are currently under construction.

Mr KEATING — We can certainly provide that information. I think all the information is currently on the Victorian School Building Authority website in terms of all of the projects, both school and early childhood, where they are up to, their expected completion dates and the amount spent.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — That would be great. Does that have a definition of what you call the growth suburbs for the purposes of this fund?

Mr KEATING — The growth areas are defined as per the Victorian Planning Authority's defined growth areas.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Can you also tell me how many portable rooms are being used as kindergarten classrooms given the demand that we talked about earlier?

Mr KEATING — I can't talk about what is happening in terms of what other providers might be doing in terms of the construction techniques they have used to deliver, whether they are private providers or not-for-profits out there, but in terms of those that are on school sites there would be very few relocatable buildings that are used for kindergarten services. However, we have worked recently with the City of Hume and the City of Wyndham, where they have had some growth pressures at the start of this school year, to actually provide some modular builds — built offsite buildings that can be quickly established to provide services for those kids. So it would be something not so much using relocatable buildings but starting to look for different building techniques, to actually have things built offsite so they can be put up quickly, which we are starting to explore for schools and early childhood.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — While I am on relocatables could I ask, again perhaps on notice unless you have got it there, Secretary, how many relocatable buildings or portables the government actually has as at June 2017. I am not talking kindergartens now.

Mr KEATING — As at June 17 I could not give you the precise number, but we have approximately 6000 relocatable buildings in the school portfolio.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Is that within a couple of dozen?

Mr KEATING — I will have to check precisely. It would —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — If you could give us on notice the actual figure, that would be great.

Ms WARD — I am also interested in the growth that is going on with our schools and the work that was being undertaken over the 16–17 period. There have been a lot of new schools happening. In your presentation you talk about 10 being delivered over the 16–17 period — and land acquisition and so on. Regarding the relocatables that Mr O'Brien was talking about, can you please talk us through how these new relocatables work, because I understand that it is quite new technology that is being used to create these buildings. I will indeed have one of these in my own electorate at Lower Plenty Primary School.

Mr KEATING — There are obviously lots of different ways to deliver infrastructure. Traditionally a lot of schools are done with a lot of builders on site, digging a big hole, putting a fence around it and progressively doing stages of a build. One of the things that we have explored significantly, particularly as part of our asbestos removal program, is rather than demolishing a building and having lots of messy trades and lots of construction

happening on site, actually having a lot of prefabrication done, so in a manufacturing site having all the components of a building preassembled and then having schools assembled over a couple of weeks.

An example of that would be Southmoor Primary School, which had a building open at the start of this year. They had a building which had large amounts of asbestos. Rather than just taking the asbestos out and refurbishing the building, there was a decision to fully demolish the building in November of last year. We then had the building constructed offsite, and then in the first three weeks of January that building was assembled on the school site ready for the start of the school year. For a normal construction schedule that might have taken four to six months to do that same task.

Ms WARD — And what are the environmental properties of these buildings? Are they better? I understand Mr Smith has got concerns over air conditioning. How does the passive heating and cooling work in these newly designed buildings?

Mr KEATING — The heating and cooling work exceptionally well. They are designed very much from the perspective of making sure they stay cool and warm in all different temperature ranges, so there is good shading, there is good ventilation, there are fans and there is good passive ventilation.

Ms WARD — So fans are included in the build?

Mr KEATING — We are doing 30 of these buildings at the moment and I think the majority of them will have fans.

Ms WARD — Great. Thank you. How are these buildings catering for children with disabilities and other needs?

Mr KEATING — There are a range of things we do when we are looking at designing a school. There are obviously all the legislative requirements around making sure they are compliant with building requirements, but in recent years we have really gone well beyond that. We revised our design standards in the 2016–17 period to include what are called universal design principles. Rather than, for example, simply saying that a child can access a building but to access the building they have to go around the back, up a ramp and in the back way, it is designed from the outset to make sure that every single part of the school is accessible to all students all the time. It is an intrinsic part of the design that we put into all our schools now, and for any of these prefabricated or relocatable buildings it is part of the requirements on these manufacturers to make sure they are designed under those same design principles.

Ms WARD — Terrific. I have got buildings happening in my electorate, as you would probably be aware. I think most of us probably have something going on with our schools in our electorates. We had the member for Gembrook be retweeted by the building authority over some work that he had going on. So there is a lot to celebrate and communicate. How is the department engaging with communities to let them know how this is progressing, what the effects are going to be, what the benefits are going to be, traffic management, all of that kind of thing?

Mr T. SMITH — In 2016–17.

The CHAIR — In the context of the 2016–17 year.

Mr KEATING — In the period in question the Victorian School Building Authority was established as a new function within the department. One of the major things that was a focus of that, beyond just delivering the infrastructure program, was actually genuinely engaging much more with schools and school communities to understand what their expectations were, improve communication and make sure that their concerns were taken on board. When you look at a primary school or a secondary school undergoing major works, it can be disruptive. As a parent as well I know you want to know what is happening at your school.

So one of the major focuses has been making sure the school has got the information to communicate to parents and students what is happening when and what the designs are, and including communities in the design process to make sure they can actually contribute to the look and feel of what is going to happen. For us that has been a major focus, and the more we do it, the more we realise the community wants more. So it really has been a huge uplift in our capability, and I think that a lot of the positive communication and a lot of the feedback we have been getting from schools is not just about the design; it is about feeling included in the design process.

Ms WARD — And I think this has been the experience at Montmorency South Primary School. Thank you.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Secretary, I would now like to go to skills training for a moment. According to the questionnaire that the committee received from the department, on pages 33 and 34, there was a \$250 million underspend in the Victorian training guarantee. I am just seeking clarification: is that calendar year 2016 or the financial year?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Mr O'Brien. I have just got Mr Latina back at the table, the relevant deputy secretary, so I will just ask him to address that issue.

Mr LATINA — If you could restate the question — it was whether it was on a calendar-year basis or a financial-year basis?

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Yes. So the questionnaire says a \$252 million underspend, but it does not say — sorry, to clarify — is it calendar year or —

Mr LATINA — If it was in the budget papers, it is on a financial year basis.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — No, no, no, this is in —

Mr LATINA — It is just a number of the budget paper 3 measures relate to calendar year.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Right. Okay. But this is actually the questionnaire — so you are saying that is financial year. We established last year in the May hearings, though, that the 2016 VTG underspend was 365 million, so it is a little confusing, but that may be calendar year. But more particularly recently the Productivity Commission in the ROGS report indicated that only 698 million was spent in 2016 of a \$1.2 billion program, which would indicate an underspend of 500 million. I am just try to work out which is right.

Mr LATINA — In terms of the ROGS report saying there was \$500 million underspent?

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Yes. So it says 698 million was spent of the VTG, so that leaves a \$502 million underspend in 2016. I am just trying to work out which it is.

Mr LATINA — In terms of the funding of the underspends, I am not sure that we are — in terms of a point of comparison between the ROGS report and the output group in the budget papers, that they are directly comparable. They may be comparing different measurements of the training that has been undertaken.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So you are saying the ROGS report would not specifically refer to VTG papers?

Mr LATINA — It would not only include VTG payments, so there are differences. The definition for the output group for budget purposes of the contributions that go into that would be different to the definition of expenditure in relation to ROGS.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Either way, we have got an underspend in in the budget of either 252 million or somewhere of around 500 million. The evidence that we received last year and that we have been told repeatedly is that that money is reinvested in the forward estimates. Presumably in next year's budget, then, the Victorian training guarantee will be well in excess of 1.2 billion; is that a fair assumption to make?

Mr LATINA — The composition of the output group is broader than only the Victorian training guarantee, so it comprises a number of other programs and activities beyond the mainstream Victorian training guarantee that you are referring to.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I am obviously not the expert, but I very clearly recall former Minister Herbert saying the VTG was 1.2 billion a year. If there has been an underspend of 252 million, and the department has told us that it is to be reallocated across the forward estimates, it will presumably be more than 1.2 billion next year.

Mr LATINA — The output group, as per the budget papers, comprises 2.4 billion. There are other components that are beyond the —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So it is not disaggregated — the VTG is not disaggregated out of that output group?

Mr LATINA — That is right.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Since basically 2014 till today, but obviously in the period that we are talking about, has any money from the VTG been taken back, returned to Treasury or used on projects outside the higher education portfolio?

Mr LATINA — I may refer that to Ms Atta.

Ms ATTA — From the 2015–16 year there was, as I think you have mentioned, Mr O'Brien, funding reallocated across the forward estimates. Some of that funding into the next year has been for a range of training initiatives, including those provided through other portfolios, so in that sense some of the funding, for example, in relation to family violence training has been used outside of the department, but consistent with the skills —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Have you got a figure on that?

Ms ATTA — No, but I could —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Take it on notice?

Ms ATTA — take that on notice for you.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I guess the clear question I am after is, generally when a department underspends on a program, Treasury comes knocking and says, 'Thank you very much. We'll have it back'. Has any VTG money gone back to Treasury?

Ms ATTA — I will just have to check the detail for you. There was a reinvestment of the bulk of that underspend from 15–16 into 16–17 and then some across the forward estimates. There may have been a small amount of that that was lapsed funding that was not reinvested.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Could I have that on notice if I could?

Ms ATTA — I will follow that up for you.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — But 16–17 as well — has any of that money been returned to Treasury?

Ms ATTA — So in 16–17 a part of the carryover request to Treasury included funding that was not fully spent in the skills and training portfolio. Again, I would have to check some of that. The majority of that funding, as I recall, was carried over and will be available in 17–18. I will follow up for you to get a specific breakdown of what was approved for carryover and any that was not.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — That would be great.

Ms PENNICUIK — You can take up the government's time with that. If we can stay with vocational education and training, and for the department's annual report — I think it is page 18, but anyway the table that looks at the enrolments in higher education and skills. The department has recognised, I think it is, an overall decline of around 15 per cent in enrolments, and if you look at all the categories — age, gender, region et cetera — they have all fallen over the time period between 15 and 16. But a couple certainly jumped out at me, which were around a 22 per cent fall in participation by unemployed learners, from 113 200 to 87 900, and around a 16 per cent fall in enrolments in courses for which there are skills shortages. I wonder if you could expand on what analysis perhaps the department has done, because I think for unemployed learners that is quite a large decrease in enrolments, and it is a very important cohort, I think, of students.

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Pennicuik. I will ask Mr Latina to address the substance of your question, but I would just preface it by saying that a great deal of work has gone on, particularly in 16 and 17 and earlier, to try and address some really significant quality issues in the training system.

Ms PENNICUIK — I appreciate that overarching —

Ms CALLISTER — There may well have been many unemployed learners in courses that did not, quite possibly, lead to actual employment or skills that were what we would consider sufficient quality. In readjusting the training system to utilise both the commonwealth regulator but also our own contract management and

market entry abilities in Victoria we have been very, very focused on lifting quality, even if that changes the size of the training market. I will just hand over to Mr Latina to address in more detail the substance of your question.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, and how, since those figures, the department has analysed the causes over and above what the secretary said, and what it might be doing to address the problem.

Mr LATINA — Following on from the secretary, since the introduction of Skills First there has been a very strong focus particularly in terms of strengthening our focus on quality. That involves focusing on not only the quality of the providers and the selection of the providers but also the funded course list, which is industry driven and has got a strong connection between training and the needs of industry to increase the likelihood of jobs at the end of the training. There has also been a very rigorous process of engaging with industry to ensure that the needs of industry both in metropolitan as well as regional Victoria are well met, and in particular markets as well, and cohorts.

The role of the Learn Locals is also very important in that, because particularly in regional areas they have got flexibility and capability in dealing with a number of specific cohorts. It is generally pleasing to see overall that there has certainly been a lot of efforts and progress made in addressing a number of cohorts.

In terms of youth in particular and their engagement with vocational education, it is quite instructive to consider the movements in the participation of youth in vocational education in the broader context around policy settings of the federal government in relation to higher education as well — that is, particular programs such as VET FEE-HELP have made an important and key impact in terms of participation in vocational education.

In the figures in 2016–17 — these are Australian Bureau of Statistics figures in terms of the participation of 15 to 24-year-olds in post-school training and education in Victoria — no post-school study was 63 per cent, and that has essentially been very consistent for a number of years. This is for calendar 16, I should say. For vocational education it slightly dropped. There is a proportion of the overall —

Ms PENNICUIK — I am sorry to interrupt; I really always am sorry to interrupt. It is just that the Chair does not give me very much time and he will chop me off, so if you could provide that on notice, I was really interested in the unemployed learners, whether or not they are aged 15 to —

Mr LATINA — Yes.

Ms PENNICUIK — Not so much their age, but the unemployed people, who I think are an important cohort and seem to have fallen more than the average, if you look at those figures. Why would that be, and what could be done about it or is being done about it in terms of the department?

Mr LATINA — One of the things that has been done about it has been, in the context of Skills First, the introduction of a program called Reconnect, which is specifically focused around supporting potential learners that are particularly early school leavers that perhaps need broader support across a range of wraparound services to enable them to participate in vocational education and succeed and connect up with jobs as well. Reconnect is a new program that has been rolled out through specialist third-party providers to enable that focus on that cohort. Certainly it is early days in terms of that program, but the feedback in the context of 16–17 was very positive.

Ms PENNICUIK — I will be interested to see if further figures see a decrease in that decrease, if you know I mean — if that is not a double negative. You mentioned engaging with industry, and there are the industry advisory bodies, and there was \$2.1 million, I think, in a Treasurer's advance reported in the questionnaire. How many of those advisory bodies are there and — you may need to take this on notice — where are they and what areas are they focusing on, and were all of them established in that particular period?

Mr LATINA — Those advisory groups — what we call IAGs, the industry advisory groups — are led of course and chaired by the Victorian skills commissioner, Neil Coulson. There are approximately 13 or 14 of those groups that have been established. Essentially they are established on an industry sector basis, and they meet on a regular basis to provide advice to the commissioner and to the government broadly around industry priorities. They are supplemented also by a number of regional forums that the skills commissioner runs together with the department to ensure that you are capturing both the industry feedback but also from a

regional perspective as well. There has certainly been a lot of work that has been done by the commissioner — for instance, in the Mallee region — during 2016 to drill down in terms of understanding specifically what the occupations are that are in particular demand now and into the future as well.

Ms PENNICUIK — Okay. If there is anything more that you can supply about those unemployed learners, that would be much appreciated.

Ms SHING — I would like to talk about STEM — science, technology, engineering and maths. I know that this was touched on in the course of the opening presentation, particularly around the development of specialist course offerings such as, I think it was, cyber security that you referred to at Box Hill, and the way in which this is reflected in the importance of one of the 10 targets aimed to set the bar on achievement of specific STEM outcomes. Budget paper 3, page 177, does actually refer to student outcomes in numeracy and the associated Education State targets that we have canvassed at some length in the hearing today. We know that the majority of skills and training opportunities, and indeed career prospects down the track, for new and emerging sectors as well as for existing industries will have a very keen focus on STEM outputs.

As part of preparing people for employment and for secure employment in future work landscapes, not just within the metropolitan areas but within regional and rural Victoria as well, how are the targets and the objectives in the budget and as funded going to have a direct correlation to better performance of students in the STEM areas and in finding jobs that link in with industry? This is a mixed question on STEM, on the setting of STEM guidelines and priorities, on linkages with industry and again in terms of our tech schools and the work that is being undertaken there. I know it is pretty broad ranging, but STEM does infuse just about everything that is being undertaken in primary, secondary and other study.

Ms CALLISTER — It is indeed a very broad question. We could probably fill all the remaining time.

Ms SHING — The Chair will not let me unfortunately, but yes, I share your view.

Ms CALLISTER — I will ask Ms Haire to speak to some of the detail, particularly of the tech schools, and we may range to other parts as well. But I just preface it by saying last week I went to the Victorian Space Science Education Centre, which is based at Strathmore college —

The CHAIR — An outstanding secondary school in the electorate of Essendon.

Ms CALLISTER — and it is a space centre with the most incredibly amazing immersive and interactive STEM curriculum and science curriculum, which is not just for the students at Strathmore but many schools participate from all around the state. I visited that school with Australia's chief scientist, Alan Finkel, who took a great deal of interest in how the STEM curriculum was being implemented in the science centre. We spent probably about 3 hours there watching how the students progressed. It is really an extraordinary example of some of the work that is happening in our schools in Victoria. To have the chief scientist, I would not say give it his tick of approval, I would say perhaps show admiration and endorsement of the nature of the curriculum and the way it was being taught was a very good experience.

Ms SHING — Excellent. Ms Haire, I am also going to ask if you are in a position to talk about STEM for girls and better opportunities for girls and women to be involved in STEM too, that would also be wonderful. It is a cause very, very dear to my heart.

Ms HAIRE — Thank you, Ms Shing. I might just give a broad overview of the approach to STEM and then pick up some of your specific points.

Ms SHING — Sure. Thank you. I am also happy for you to take things on notice in the event that we run out of time.

Ms HAIRE — As the secretary noted in her opening, the economy and the labour market, and as Mr Latina has said, are shifting towards high-skilled industries and occupations. In order to be ready for that labour market, students need STEM and other 21st century skills to be able to thrive and reach their potential in that complex world. One of the ways in which we are addressing that need for both boys and girls in government and non-government schools is through the tech school program, which engages students in an immersive, high-tech, industry-linked STEM learning program. The tech school program has exposed students to the latest technology and the latest industry using the best evidence-based STEM pedagogies.

However, there are a range of other things that we are doing in order to ensure that students have the appropriate level of STEM skill and capability. That is part, as you know, Ms Shing, of the Education State targets, which include that over the next five years for year 5 and 10 years for year 9, 25 per cent more students will be reaching the highest levels of achievement in mathematics, as we have already discussed today. One of the key interventions for that during the year in question was the launch of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, which my colleague Mr Armstrong referred to earlier, and providing additional resources to teachers for the teaching of numeracy as well as literacy is part of that strategy.

The *STEM in the Education State* is a plan launched by the Minister for Education, which sets out a range of other elements, including the primary maths and science specialist initiative, which provides for 200 teachers to gain the knowledge and confidence to drive significant improvements in mathematics and science participation in disadvantaged primary schools in Victoria, both metropolitan and regional, to go to your point about regional targeting, Ms Shing. And the complementary element of that in secondary schools is the secondary STEM catalysts program where 60 teachers at 30 of the state's most disadvantaged schools across Victoria are trained to lead, encourage and mentor other teachers in high-impact STEM education for year 7 and 8 students.

This goes to the point that both the secretary and Mr Armstrong made earlier, which is about the importance of reaching directly into the classroom and providing support to the teachers who are teaching the students every day, which of course is consistent with the research of Professor John Hattie of Melbourne University that the most significant in-school determinant of student outcomes is the teaching — the quality of the teachers. Those programs are directed at supporting teachers to improve their practice.

The CHAIR — In the interests of time we might pass to Mr O'Brien. Ms Haire, if you can provide additional information on notice?

Ms HAIRE — Sure.

Ms SHING — If there is something on notice that you can provide, in particular on girls in STEM and increased participation for girls and women in those STEM offerings, and course and job offerings as well, that would be useful. Sorry to cram it all in.

Ms HAIRE — I am sorry I did not get to that.

Ms SHING — No, no. That is all right. There was a lot in it. Thanks.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Just returning to the VTG, we have established now that for at least the last two years there has been a very large underspend in the VTG and it has been carried forward. My question now is: why therefore are training providers being forced to turn away students, because they have been told there is a cap on numbers?

Ms CALLISTER — Thanks, Mr O'Brien. Some of the changes to market entry relate to 2018 — so the funding for this current year, not to the 16–17 year.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — The question I am trying to get at, Secretary, is that we have had two years now of underspends. When we say, 'What has happened to that money?', we get told it is rolled forward. This is very directly about the outcomes from 2016–17 and what has happened to that money. I take it from your comment that you accept that there is a cap on enrolments. I am asking the question why.

Ms CALLISTER — The changes to the way in which training places are allocated for the current year are based on our forecasting of the need for industry and jobs and on whether the numbers of people being trained are likely to get jobs in the industries in which they have been trained. I will ask Mr Latina to talk to it in a little bit more detail, but we are trying to not have people go through training courses in such large numbers that the chances of them receiving meaningful employment in those areas is reduced. We are trying to all the time — and it is a pretty fluid market — look at the forecasts around what industry needs and ensure that the training provision is geared towards that.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So, Secretary, I very much agree that we should be focusing on the areas of need. Why therefore have certificate III courses and diplomas in early childhood education and care, for example, been cut by 90 per cent, when that has been identified by the skills commissioner as an area of need. And likewise there have been cuts to screen and media, civil construction plant operations, competitive systems and processes, and

the certificate III in health services assistance — all cut by 90 per cent when they are areas that the skills commissioner has identified are areas of need.

Ms CALLISTER — I will hand over to Mr Latina.

Mr LATINA — I think the references you are making relate to the provider allocations for the calendar year 2018. As part of Skills First there is not only the provider selection process but also an allocation process to ensure that the allocation of training places meets industry need and to ensure that there is also a strong connection between training and jobs.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — But that is the point I am making. Every single one of the regional jobs and training needs reports identifies anticipated employment demand in those areas, yet they are being cut and/or capped.

Mr LATINA — As part of that allocations process and working with industry and potential providers as to how to allocate those taxpayer dollars, there is a lot of analysis that goes into determining how best to allocate those dollars. The department prepares what is called a jobs and training needs report half yearly, which identifies what industry and what the community is indicating as to where the jobs requirements are, not only in terms of the occupations but also the quantity that is required for a particular year. That is a process which is undertaken. My recollection, for instance, in the area of early childhood education is that the training needs report which the department put out indicated that there were about 4000 additional jobs that had to be generated in that area. There was training required for that area.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Can I just cut you off there. As I indicated, with early childhood in particular, every published advice shows that there is a need for more workers in the early childhood sector, yet that has been cut by 90 per cent. How does that —

Mr LATINA — If I can just get to the point. The jobs and training needs report prepared by the department indicated, based on economic analysis and based on industry feedback, that there should be around 4000 training places required. When we went out to the market and training providers came back as to what they were intending to deliver in 2018, it was in the order of 14 000 places. This is in the context of over the last three years there being approximately 50 000 people trained in those areas. Putting aside issues of the quality of the training or the connection with industry and industry requirements, in a broad sense it has been a very strong connection in terms of a mismatch between the quantity of the training that has been undertaken previously and what industry is saying is the quantum that they require. It is important to note, though, that in terms of the —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I think you have answered the question. Thank you. I appreciate that. Sorry, I am just conscious of time.

Mr LATINA — Sure.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Can I quickly move on to a related issue with respect to kindergarten teachers, Secretary. Last year at PAEC you admitted that kindergarten teachers are not required to be vaccinated, despite the no jab, no play rules. Is that still the case?

The CHAIR — Or is that still the case in 16–17.

Ms CALLISTER — I believe so. Ms Haire?

Ms HAIRE — Yes, it is, Mr O'Brien. There is advice to those workers, as to other workers, about the vaccinations they may wish to take in the course of their employment.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — What about school teachers? Are they required to be vaccinated as well?

Ms HAIRE — They are not required, but they receive the same advice about potential vaccinations.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — How does that equate with the government's noble requirement to have four-year-olds vaccinated at kinder?

Ms HAIRE — Sorry, could you say that again?

Mr D. O'BRIEN — I am trying to see the logical connection between the two: not requiring kindergarten teachers, and particularly schoolteachers as well, to be vaccinated but requiring children to be. What is the logical connection with that?

Ms HAIRE — I think some of this might have been covered in the recent discussions about the legislation in the last couple of weeks. With the goal of reaching a certain level within the community, the best practice and the advice that we get from the department of health is that vaccinations in childhood assist to protect the community. The Department of Education and Training's role in this is not to lead the policy, as you would imagine, but we implement the policy on the advice of the Department of Health and Human Services in relation to epidemiological and public health advice. The vaccination program, which is internationally consistent, I believe, is based on that advice.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — The exemption in the legislation with respect to concession card holders allows, we think, up to 30 000 children to be exempt from the no job, no play laws. Do you know exactly how many children are not vaccinated in the kindergarten and school sectors at the moment?

Ms SHING — At the moment or during the period?

The CHAIR — As of 30 June 2017.

Ms HAIRE — I can tell you that in April 2017 there were 1050 children who were enrolled under the grace period provisions that you are referring to.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — In kindergartens or schools?

Ms HAIRE — In kindergartens.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Just in kindergartens?

Ms HAIRE — The policy does not apply to schools —

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Sure. No. Sorry, but I asked the question —

Ms HAIRE — because, as you would be aware, school is compulsory and so there cannot be a barrier for children to attend school.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — So when the grace period expires, what happens after that?

Ms HAIRE — Sorry, I apologise — the secretary has just pointed out to me that four months later with that same cohort in 2017, 505 children remained unvaccinated.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Sorry, four months later?

Ms HAIRE — In August 2017, 505 children were enrolled under the grace period. It may not be the same children, but the number of children fell over the year, which amounts to — I think going to the start of your question — less than 1 per cent of the kindergarten population.

The CHAIR — We might come back to that in a moment. Mr Dimopoulos.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Thanks, Chair. Mr Latina or Secretary, you described for us the skills need — or gap, I suppose — of industry and how the government seeks to match that to the training schedule, so to speak. I want to focus a bit more on the quality, though, because I know that was a big commitment of the government in that year in fact when it was first elected — weeding out the dodgy providers, restoring funding to TAFE and ensuring that taxpayers were not throwing their money away on online courses and iPads. There is nothing wrong with online courses, but the quality of the course has to be there. Give us a sense of that investment — the 16–17 financial year, budget paper 4, page 44 particularly. I just want to get a sense of how you improve quality.

Ms CALLISTER — I will hand that to Mr Latina in the interests of time.

Mr LATINA — The context of our focus on quality was really the review of quality assurance that was undertaken in 2015–16 and then implemented through a number of recommendations, all of which the government accepted. There are certainly a number of key measures that have been put into place to strengthen quality. The first one, as we have indicated, is around the strengthening of the provider selection process as part of Skills First, and that has led to a smaller number of better quality providers. We have also had that —

Mr DIMOPOULOS — How much smaller, Mr Latina?

Mr LATINA — The number of providers was outlined in the secretary's presentation. It is from 450 to 330 approximately.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Just on that, sorry, I do not want to cut you off so you cannot remember where you are at, but in that financial year that we are discussing, 16–17, do you have a sense of how many non-compliant training organisations were relieved of government money?

Mr LATINA — Yes, I do. In 16–17 the department undertook investigations which ended in the termination of VET funding contracts for 13 registered training organisations, and eight of those were for serious non-compliance.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Can you give us an example of what made one of those examples serious non-compliance? What was it? Was it offering courses that did not exist? What was it?

Mr LATINA — Examples could have been for serious breaches of the contracts that the department had entered into with those RTOs.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — But just from the perspective of a user — so as a student.

Mr LATINA — From a student perspective it would have potentially been in terms of training that was not meeting the course requirements. It could have been in terms of the training provider providing inducements to students to sign up to courses. There is a wide range of breaches that a registered training —

Mr DIMOPOULOS — All funded by the public purse.

Mr LATINA — That is correct. Of course, not all of the training that a registered training organisation undertakes is subsidised by the Victorian government.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — No, of course. The qualifying parts are.

Mr LATINA — Yes.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I am sorry, if you could continue what you were talking about in terms of the compliance measures.

Mr LATINA — I think the other important measure, in terms of quality, that has been undertaken during the course of 16–17 has been a very strong focus in terms of ensuring that students and employers have the voice in terms of the quality of the training that is being undertaken. During the course of 16–17 approximately 50 000 students would have been surveyed through an SMS mechanism to obtain their feedback in terms of the quality of the courses that were being offered. That is important, valuable intelligence that we get in terms of making those subsequent decisions around our providers. Similarly with employers — we surveyed in the order of 20 000 employers to get their feedback as to the training that has been undertaken that they have been involved in as to whether it meets their requirements as well.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Just finally on that question directly, do you have metrics in that year at least of how that investment — the weeding out of the dodgy providers, the strengthening of the quality of the courses — it may be too soon but has led to better opportunities or more direct opportunities for secure work for these graduates? Because that is the aim of the TAFE sector predominately.

Mr LATINA — That is right. By way of example in terms of some of those assessing the key performance indicators from the students' perspective, when we surveyed those, three out of four students who left training were satisfied with their training, which was up 1.5 per cent. Almost three-quarters of the students would

recommend the RTO, but also, importantly, they indicated that they delivered on the purpose of the training, and therefore the main purpose of the training, which is of course to improve their employment prospects, has increased as well.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Fantastic. Thank you.

Mr T. SMITH — The Victorian government schools agreement signed on 23 March 2017 sets out three classes of teachers, which includes a new class called ‘learning specialists’ who we pay to the same level as leading teachers. The EBA provided for 3000 learning specialist teachers, who are supposed to meet the Australian professional standard for teachers and be from the levels highly accomplished or lead teacher. How will these learning specialists be appointed? What assurance is there that these learning specialists will meet and are meeting the APST? What is the process for promoting a classroom teacher to a learning specialist and on what basis?

Ms CALLISTER — I might ask Mr Armstrong to respond to your question, Mr Smith. Thank you.

Mr ARMSTRONG — Thank you for your question. In relation to the learning specialist classification, as you said, it meets the Australian standard for teachers. It is at a higher classification level at leading teacher. There are two mechanisms for appointment to the position, which are all handled through the local selection of staff managed by the principal, who would appoint a panel under the merit and equity selection processes required for all appointments of staff within our government schools.

There are two mechanisms. One is an external advertisement to a vacancy that can be tagged ‘learning specialist’ for a particular need within the school. It could be in a particular curriculum area seeking particular services. It could have a literacy focus, a numeracy focus or a general pedagogical or teaching focus — improvement for teaching — that matches a curriculum area within the school or within a primary school for a particular grade level within the school. The learning specialist can also be advertised internally on a higher duties allowance, and similar processes would need to be hosted within the school for the internal advertisement for teachers within that school to make application through the normal merit and equity selection processes.

Mr T. SMITH — So in terms of what AITSL are talking about as a highly accomplished or lead teacher and your characterisation of them as a learning specialist, are we comparing apples with apples here?

Mr ARMSTRONG — Yes, we are. So the application of that standard, we are not doing the full accreditation process because the Victorian government has not signed up to the allocation of what are called the HALTs — that is a particular certification process that AITSL goes through — but it is the application of the knowledge and skills in the standard to that particular learning specialist position.

Mr T. SMITH — And why in 16–17 did the Victorian government not sign up to HALTs as per AITSL’s expectations?

Mr ARMSTRONG — There are a whole range of reasons that at that particular point in time the government did not sign up to it. There are only about 200 highly accomplished and lead teachers in the whole of the country. Not every state and jurisdiction has made an alignment between the HALTs and remuneration. So the particular classification within the EBA is ‘learning specialist’ at lead teacher level within Victoria.

Mr T. SMITH — So let me get this straight: the learning specialist has the same qualifications and experience as a lead teacher, or it doesn’t?

Mr ARMSTRONG — It meets the standard. In the particular standard that you are referring to it refers to things the teacher should know and be able to do to demonstrate the standard. That application of what teachers should know and be able to do is applied to the learning specialist position.

Mr T. SMITH — Can you provide on notice to the committee the difference between what AITSL is expecting from highly accomplished lead teachers and what you are expecting from learning specialist teachers?

Mr ARMSTRONG — I think the critical issue is it is the same as a lead teacher classification in Victoria but uses the AITSL information as applied to that particular learning specialist position: somebody who is capable of role modelling to other teachers excellent teaching practice and has the capacity to coach others in the practice.

Mr T. SMITH — But there are only 200 of these HALTs around the country.

Mr ARMSTRONG — I would have to check on the exact number, but it is a small number given the total numbers of teachers that are employed in all sectors — independent, Catholic and government — across the country.

Mr T. SMITH — Because I think AITSL has an expectation that was to be rolled out across the Victorian sector in this EBA and it has not been.

Mr ARMSTRONG — AITSL is a national body. That would need to be agreed to by ministers through the normal national processes. There has not been a commitment to that in Victoria is my understanding.

Mr T. SMITH — Okay. I will move on quickly to violence in schools. There have been a good number of WorkCover claims by teachers and other staff:

... 'student punched and kicked me'; 'anxiety symptoms as a result of being threatened and attacked by student'; 'student punched me in the face, several times'; 'student threatened, attacked, terrorised and traumatised me'.

There was an item on Channel 9 news last night which observed that there were 1179 incidents which involved assaults on teachers. In 16–17 how many teachers were violently assaulted by students, and what was the punishment for the students engaged in this criminal conduct against teachers?

Ms SHING — Is this just the public sector or the private sector as well?

Mr T. SMITH — Public sector, only for the simple fact that I do not imagine they would have data for the private sector.

Ms WARD — Why don't you ask? You never know what you might find out, Mr Smith.

Mr T. SMITH — If they have got data for the private and Catholic sectors, I would be more than interested to hear it.

Ms CALLISTER — Mr Smith, I am aware of the report last night and I just want to get the numbers right here. The reported figures were categorised, if you like, between serious assaults in schools, which were both student to student and sometimes student to employee, sometimes teachers, sometimes other employees. Then there were serious incidents and then more minor incidents. So in serious incidents there was a decline between 16 and 17 of 42 — so from 266 to 234 — and that includes both alleged assaults against teachers and alleged assaults against students. But on the more minor incidents there was an increase, so the increase was from 1179 to 1613. I just want to make an overarching caveat that these are a subset of our overall incident report system, and our incident report system can have everything from a branch falling off a tree to graffiti to whatever.

Mr T. SMITH — Sure. But I am specifically asking about assaults on teachers.

Ms CALLISTER — Yes.

Ms SHING — Physical assaults, yes?

Mr T. SMITH — Physical assaults on teachers.

Ms CALLISTER — The other caveat I just want to make is when we record these reports they are alleged reports — this is before they have been investigated or substantiated — because we want to know in real time if there is an issue of concern, but sometimes what is initially reported does not in fact turn out to be exactly what actually occurred. So I just want to make that point. In 16 the assaults against employees or aggressive behaviour against employees was 47 of assault and 287 of aggressive behaviour, and then in 17 the assault was down against employees — because this may not just be teachers —

Mr T. SMITH — I understand.

Ms CALLISTER — It was 30, and the aggressive behaviour or assault against employees was 307.

Mr T. SMITH — For these assaults what was the punishment for those perpetrators?

Ms SHING — They are alleged in some cases, though.

Ms CALLISTER — Well, they are alleged assaults, so there would be a whole range of things that would start with an investigation. I think for anything categorised as a serious assault the police would be called, so there would be police investigations. There are police investigations required for anything that a principal believes is criminal, serious criminal behaviour. There would be disciplinary action within the school. There is a range of —

Mr T. SMITH — Would you be able to, on notice, provide me with substantiated assaults and what the punishment was for the child or indeed mature minor that was involved in that situation — obviously confidential in terms of not relating to a school or an individual; I think that is important to note — in 16–17?

Ms SHING — You are talking only about assaults by students?

Mr T. SMITH — I am.

Ms CALLISTER — Assaults on employees by students by outcome.

Mr T. SMITH — Correct.

Ms CALLISTER — I will take on notice how we could try and give you that.

Ms SHING — Thank you very much. I would like to, in the remaining smidgen of time that we have, talk about apprentice and trainee commencements and the target in budget paper 3 at 188 in relation to the 2017 target and the outcomes to support apprentices. Mr Dimopoulos has asked about the decline in traineeships due to the low-value, low-quality traineeships that were offered by a number of the providers that Mr Latina referred to in his evidence, but how are these initiatives providing support for apprentices in a way that enables them to gain meaningful on-the-job experience and that support within the learning environment to secure and remain in the employment of their choosing and specialty?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Shing, and in the interests of time I will go straight to Mr Latina.

Mr LATINA — Thank you for the question. Clearly there is a number of activities that the department is doing to support not only the participation in but also completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. It is correct when you say the number of traineeships has fallen down significantly, and that is off a very high base due to the policy settings at the national level through inducements and so on. Apprenticeships themselves have been quite stable over a number of years in terms of numbers. There are some opportunities for reform there, but in terms of the commencements they are starting to increase.

There is a number of initiatives that have been undertaken, including the major projects skills guarantee; the apprenticeship support officers who provide that practical mentoring, coaching and problem solving for apprentices for that first year; the half-price car registration, which commenced on 1 January 2016; and also, and of course importantly, recognising that while there has been some improvement in terms of apprenticeship commencements, there is some work to do in terms of completion. So the Victorian skills commissioner commenced a review in May 2017 to identify opportunities for further reform and improvement.

Ms SHING — Thanks. Just on notice, if you could provide the number of businesses that have employed a displaced or unemployed apprentice or trainee as a consequence of eligibility for payroll tax exemption from 1 July 2016, I would be grateful.

The CHAIR — I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 10 business days of that request.

Committee adjourned.