

**RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**PAEC Inquiry into the 2024-25 Financial and Performance Outcomes**  
**Department of Education**  
**Monday 24 November 2025**

1. [Can the department provide] all the costs associated with reprinting, redistributing and securing affected exam papers?

*(Asked by Richard WELCH, pages 3-4 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

The cost incurred by the VCAA in 2024-25 associated with reprinting, redistributing and securing affected exam papers was \$0.69m.

*Transcript extract:*

**Richard WELCH:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, officials. Thank you, Secretary. Secretary, I would just like to talk about the exam bungle in 2024. Can the department provide a full and itemised breakdown of the total costs incurred as a result of the 2024 VCAA exam bungle, including the \$553,000 paid to the independent monitor and all costs associated with reprinting, redistributing and securing affected exam papers?

**Tony BATES:** Thanks, Mr Welch. I can give you some of the breakdown of those numbers you just asked about. I might have to take the cost of the reprinting on notice. I will just find my glasses.

**Richard WELCH:** It affects us all.

**Tony BATES:** As you mentioned, you were asking about the \$552,000 for the independent monitor.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes, and all the costs associated with reprinting, redistributing and securing affected exam papers.

**Tony BATES:** I can give you a breakdown of that cost. I think that is the number we disclosed in the annual report. That breaks into two components: the payments to Margaret Crawford PSM, who is the monitor, were \$95,200 in the financial year, and then we had a payment of around \$457,000 to KPMG, who supported the monitor doing a lot of the process mapping, auditing and review of things at the VCAA. Then I think I will just take on notice those other questions around the cost of reprinting.

**Richard WELCH:** The reprinting, redistributing and securing.

**Tony BATES:** Yes. There was almost no redistribution cost, because we did the reprinting before the papers were distributed. There was a very small amount of repacking that happened at – I will call it the secret warehouse, where we do all the packaging of the VCE papers. But I will come back, on notice, in terms of the cost of reprinting.

2. So how many vacancies do we have? Have we got more vacancies than before?

*(Asked by Richard WELCH, pages 6-8 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

Over the 2024-25 financial year there were **21,742** positions advertised. This is a **16.1% decrease** compared with the previous financial year.

Advertised positions include existing and new roles, temporary and short-term roles. It does not mean that positions are vacant at that time. However, the reduction in advertising activities reflects an improving teacher supply context and is consistent with overall growth in FTE teaching employees and improving teacher-student ratios.

Teaching staff includes Principals, Assistant Principals, Leading Teachers, Learning Specialists and Classroom Teachers.

*Transcript extract:*

**Richard WELCH:** So it is the board's fault. The teacher shortages are still prevalent throughout the state. I noticed in your presentation you said 'We've added 14,000 teachers,' but I do not know a single school that is not actively having to put in emergency teachers over and over again. Some classes we hear have not had maths teachers for entire terms et cetera et cetera. How many teachers are we short?

**Tony BATES:** I might just ask Dr Howes or Mr Robinson, who is up there, just to talk to that. What I will say, Mr Welch, is we had a very challenging time after COVID. We saw a lot of teachers exit the system, particularly in the secondary school level. It is still a challenge, but we are in a much, much stronger place than we have been.

**Richard WELCH:** Okay. Hopefully the figures reflect that.

**Tony BATES:** As I said, there are 14,000 more registered teachers in Victoria than there were five years ago. The number of teachers working in government schools has grown by 1358 FTE from 2024 to 2025, so we are recruiting strongly.

**Richard WELCH:** But that does not tally. So how many vacancies do we have? Have we got more vacancies than before? And how does that tally with the experience of schools? We have got all these extra teachers; well, why aren't they in the classrooms?

**Tony BATES:** I might just ask Mr Robinson to say something. I will just say, though, that it is recruitment season, as we are in term 4. For those of you who have got friends and family who are teachers, there is a whole process where –

**Richard WELCH:** Actually, just for the sake of time, I am really interested in the number of vacancies that we have got.

**David ROBINSON:** The number of vacancies fluctuates week by week.

**Richard WELCH:** What is it now? What are just your latest figures?

**David ROBINSON:** In the reporting period, which was October to November this time last year, we had an average of 700 per week. Now, that includes not just –

**Richard WELCH:** If you would, just what is it now, please?

**David ROBINSON:** As I said, I do not have –

**Mathew HILAKARI:** We are looking into the financial –

**Tony BATES:** Yes. We have come with all the 2024–25 data, so we do not necessarily have –

**Richard WELCH:** But you do not know what it is now?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** It is not relevant to the inquiry.

**Richard WELCH:** You cannot tell us how many vacancies you have got right now? Surely you can.

**David ROBINSON:** As I said, the number of vacancies fluctuates week by week.

**Richard WELCH:** No, I understand that. What I want to know is: what is the vacancy rate now?

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me. Is there a point of order, Mr Hilakari?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** There certainly is. It is not question time at the moment. We are doing an Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes.

**Richard WELCH:** It is a material, relevant question.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** No, no. It is not a material, relevant question for the inquiry.

**Richard WELCH:** The number of teaching vacancies in Victoria is not relevant?

**The CHAIR:** Mr Welch, Mr Hilakari has not finished. I cannot hear what the point of order is. Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** We are undertaking an Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes. It is not question time or time to just ask what you randomly want. We have a purpose here for the committee –

**Richard WELCH:** Well, I want to know if we are making progress.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** and our witnesses have come with that information for you.

Roma Britnell interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Deputy Chair, I am going to rule on the point of order. On the point of order, Mr Hilakari is correct in saying the terms of reference for this inquiry go to the years that he has just mentioned. Mr Welch, if you want to rephrase your question in terms of the year that we are examining, I think Mr Robinson can give us some information.

**Richard WELCH:** I am not sure how I can rephrase the question. I just want to know: are we making progress?

**The CHAIR:** Mr Welch, we can rephrase it for you. Do you want to rephrase your question or do you want to move on?

**Richard WELCH:** I will move on.

**The CHAIR:** Right.

**Richard WELCH:** Are we making progress?

**David ROBINSON:** I think the answer to that is yes. We are seeing continual growth in the teaching workforce year on year. As the Secretary has –

**Richard WELCH:** Are we seeing a decline in vacancies?

**David ROBINSON:** Yes. We can take the comparative vacancies question on notice, but the number of vacancies in the reporting period – in the peak recruiting period – was 700, which represents about 1 to 2 per cent of the total workforce. The important point to note about vacancies is they are not just positions, or they are largely positions that are being recruited for for the following school year at schools preparing themselves for what their workforce needs are in the coming year, as well as any –

**Richard WELCH:** That is great. Thank you. Thank you for that. Just on capital works, Secretary, how many school upgrades or new builds have been delayed because of budget pressures that stem from the government's underfunding of the public school system?

**3. How many classes across Victorian government schools were assigned a teacher who did not hold the required or specific teaching area expertise?**

*(Asked by Roma BRITNELL, page 13 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

**Out-of-field teaching**

Through the School Staff Survey, the department collects data on the subjects taught by secondary teachers in Victorian government schools. The survey also collects data on the subjects that secondary teachers in Victorian government schools have specialised in during their teaching qualification or further post-graduate qualification.

All teachers in Victorian government schools must be registered to teach and satisfy the legal obligations to be a teacher. Data on qualifications does not capture where a teacher may have undertaken other professional learning in areas of the curriculum they are delivering.

Results from the School Staff Survey indicate that in 2024 92.7% of Victorian government teachers instructing at the secondary level held a bachelor or post-graduate qualification in at least one subject they were teaching. Further, 69.2% of Victorian government teachers instructing at the secondary level held a bachelor or post-graduate qualification in all subjects they were teaching.

*Transcript extract:*

**Roma BRITNELL:** Thanks. Just back to classroom vacancies, in the 2024–25 school year, how many classes across Victorian government schools were assigned a teacher who did not hold the required or specific teaching area expertise? I believe teachers have two areas of expertise for the subject or class they are actually asked to teach. And if you do not have the numbers, could you take that on notice?

**Tony BATES:** I think Mr Robinson might have some of the numbers at hand. We refer to that as out-of-field teaching. We do collect information on that. It is particularly an issue in areas like mathematics, where there is just a real shortage of mathematics teachers.

**Roma BRITNELL:** That is my question. Why are there classrooms that have no mathematics teacher for terms and parents are not aware of it? That is what I am told is happening in some of the areas that I am across.

**Tony BATES:** Yes, and there are different levels where people – if we are teaching VCE maths then we are looking for people that have definitely got that area speciality. One of the programs which we have not touched on before is we do have what I will call upgrade or transition things. So you might have a teacher who has got a chemistry or physics discipline, but they have not done the full mathematics –

**Roma BRITNELL:** Could they be included in the figures that you either give me on notice – so they are training to go into that area but do not have the two areas of expertise. How many classrooms are there with children that have got teachers without those area-specific qualifications?

**Tony BATES:** I might just ask if Mr Robinson has some of the stats at hand.

**David ROBINSON:** I can quickly look them up, Secretary. I think you are asking around the number of teachers in the system that are –

**Roma BRITNELL:** That are in front of classrooms that do not have expertise.

**David ROBINSON:** operating under permission to teach. Is that right?

**Roma BRITNELL:** Yes.

**David ROBINSON:** I can quickly get those numbers for you. I think there are two categories of permission-to-teach teachers in the system. The first is through the Teach Today and Teach Tomorrow program that I mentioned earlier. Those teachers have a –

**Roma BRITNELL:** I am not asking about the type of teacher. I am asking how many classrooms there are that have a teacher in front of the students who do not hold the qualification for the area of expertise, whatever the language is, where they have to have one area but they do not have that qualification or they are upgrading. How many classrooms? You can give that to me on notice. I am happy with that.

**4. And how many of those actual [school] buildings, while we are on that, do not have air conditioning?**

*(Asked by Jade BENHAM, pages 15-16 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

**Air conditioning in government schools**

The Department of Education has an ongoing responsibility to balance and prioritise the needs of over 1,580 government schools. Schools have a range of learning environments including adaptable learning spaces, covered outdoor learning areas, modular classrooms, and traditional classrooms.

The department does not centrally hold data on the number of classrooms with air conditioning.

*Transcript extract:*

**Tony BATES:** Ms Del Monaco can check, but the value of the school assets across the state is around \$40 billion and there are 30,000 buildings, Jo? Something like that.

**Joanne WANDEL:** 32,000 buildings across the portfolio.

**Jade BENHAM:** And how many of those actual buildings, while we are on that, do not have air conditioning?

**Tony BATES:** I will come back to air conditioning. There is a multi-layered system. So every school, in the SRP funding – student resource package funding – gets maintenance funding for basic things like painting, maintaining gutters and various other things. That is determined by the number of students enrolled at the school and a couple of other factors, and also there are extra allowances depending on the size of the school grounds for mowing and all those sorts of things. Then we have the planned maintenance program. That is on top of that individual school funding. Ms Wandel and her team have a \$200 million per year –

**5. Can you just perhaps get back to us with how many are not disability accessible at a standard that we are requiring in this day and age? Would that be possible?**

*(Asked by Jade BENHAM and Roma BITNELL, page 16 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

**Disability and inclusion requirements in government schools**

The Department of Education is committed to embedding inclusive education in all school environments for students with disability and additional needs.

As per requirements, established schools in Victoria were designed to meet the accessibility standards that were in effect at the time of design and construction.

New builds adhere to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the National Construction Code and the department's Building Quality Standards Handbook, which sets the minimum performance criteria for all school and early learning capital projects, including new construction, refurbishment and maintenance works.

For existing buildings, while we do not have on record how many schools may have areas that are not accessible, the department's Accessible Buildings Program (ABP) makes modifications to existing infrastructure to ensure students with disabilities at the school have access to education in line with their peers, and ensures the Government meets its requirements under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Adjustments can also be made for staff and parents with disabilities.

Schools can apply year-round and should seek support from the department's regional office before applying.

*Transcript extract:*

**Roma BRITNELL:** Will you come back to us with how many out of those 32,000 schools do not have air conditioning?

**Jade BENHAM:** And are not compliant with disability access legislation.

**Tony BATES:** I think that we do have a disability compliance program.

**Roma BRITNELL:** So all schools are compliant with disability regulations?

**Joanne WANDEL:** We have an accessible buildings program, which is a capital program that all schools can apply to, and that there are no –

**Roma BRITNELL:** Can you just perhaps get back to us with how many are not disability accessible at a standard that we are requiring in this day and age? Would that be possible?

**Joanne WANDEL:** We can take that on question on notice.

**Roma BRITNELL:** That would be great.

- 6. Perhaps you could give us the numbers of how many people have been allocated to the schools, particularly in the regions, who assist them with that administrative burden, because I am not seeing that.**

*(Asked by Roma BRITNELL, pages 17-18 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

As at June 2025, there were 26,322.8 FTE education support (ES) class employees in the Victorian government teaching service. Staff in these roles perform a range of activities in schools which may include providing administrative support. Under the Victorian devolved model, principals are responsible for establishing the staffing profiles at their school, including the roles of their ES staff. The Department of Education does not have visibility over the number of ES staff specifically undertaking administrative tasks.

In recognition of the value of increased administrative staff in schools, in April 2025, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments signed an agreement to deliver an Operational Teaching Assistant pilot. This pilot trials 32 new FTE administrative education support staff roles in Victorian government schools between 2025 and 2027. These roles are specifically designed to take on operational, administrative and compliance tasks that are typically undertaken by teachers,

thereby freeing up teachers to focus on the learning and wellbeing tasks that have the greatest impact on their students. This pilot will be evaluated, and expansion of the pilot will depend on future government budget decisions.

In addition, the department delivers supports to schools to reduce workload through centralised programs. For example, 12 departmental FTE are allocated to support small schools with administrative tasks through the School Administration Support Hub (SASH). SASH assists small schools with a range of administrative functions, including cash budgeting, eduPay support and recruitment, local payroll, CASES21 Finance and Administration, Student Resource Package (SRP), and Schools Targeted Funding. In the reporting period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, SASH supported 170 schools, with over 10,500 requests for assistance closed on the service portal (see table below for the full list of schools). This number does not reflect additional ad-hoc queries and assistance the team provides over the phone or at the school.

The Small Schools Program provides over 300 small rural and regional schools with access to a coordinator to support them to manage their facilities maintenance, occupational health and safety compliance and return to work obligations. The program has 20 regionally based coordinators who provide support to schools.

The Statewide Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Services Program provides free delivery of OHS services for all government schools to reduce workload and improve safety management and emergency preparedness. This includes an in-person service, supporting schools to update and create safety documents to ensure Victorian government schools are compliant with OHS and emergency management requirements. 40 OHS professionals who are regionally based provide services to schools, meeting them at their point of need, to reduce OHS workload for schools.

Aireys Inlet Primary School	Greater Geelong	Portland Primary School
Albion North Primary School	Greta Valley Primary School	Powlett River Primary School
Altona North Primary School	Gunbower Primary School	Rainbow P-12 College
Apsley Primary School Ararat	Harrierville Primary School	Richmond High School
Ararat North Primary School	Harston Primary School	Richmond Primary School
Ararat Primary School	Hepburn Primary School	Robinvale College
Ardeer Primary School	Heywood District Secondary College	Rokewood Primary School
Ardmona Primary School	Inglewood Primary School	Rosedale Primary School
Arthurs Creek Primary School	Jamieson Primary School	Roslyn Primary School
Ashby Primary School	Kallista Primary School	Rubicon Outdoor School
Ballarat Specialist School	Kananook Primary School	Rupanyup Primary School
Bass Coast Specialist School	Kerang South Primary School	Seaspray Primary School
Bealiba Primary School	Kinglake West Primary School	Shelford Primary School
Beeac Primary School	Kismet Park Primary School	Sherbrooke Community School
Boolarra Primary School	Koorlong Primary School	Silvan Primary School
Boort District P-12 School	Korumburra Secondary College	Sovereign Hill School
Broadmeadows Primary School	Laharum Primary School	Spring Parks Primary School
Brunswick South West Primary School	Lake Boga Primary School	St Andrews Primary School
Bullarto Primary School	Lake Charm Primary School	St Arnaud Primary School
Cape Clear Primary School	Lalor North Secondary College	Stanhope Primary School
Carisbrook Primary School	Landsborough Primary School	Sunshine Heights Primary School
Carnegie Primary School	Langley Primary School	Sunshine Special Developmental Sch
Casterton Primary School	Launching Place Primary School	Swan Hill College
Castlemaine Primary School	Lavers Hill K-12 College	Swan Hill North Primary School
Charlton College	Leitchville Primary School	Talbot Primary School
Chatham Primary School	Lindenow South Primary School	Talgarno Primary School
Christmas Hills Primary School	Lismore Primary School	Tallarook Primary School
Coimadaí Primary School	Loch Primary School	Tambo Upper Primary School
Colac West Primary School	Macarthur Primary School	Tanjil South Primary School
	Macclesfield Primary School	Taradale Primary School



Collingwood English Language School	Malvern Central School	Tatura Primary School	
Concongella Primary School	Maramba Primary School	The Lake Primary School	
Craigieburn Primary School	Marnoo Primary School	Thomastown Primary School	
Creswick North Primary School	Meredith Primary School	Toora Primary School	
Croydon Community School	Merino Consolidated School	Tootgarook Primary School	
Darraweit Guim Primary School	Milawa Primary School	Trawalla Primary School	
Dartmoor Primary School	Miners Rest Primary School	Tungamah Primary School	
Daylesford Primary School	Moomba Park Primary School	Tyers Primary School	
Dhurringile Primary School	Moonambel Primary School	Ultima Primary School	
Dillbadin Primary School	Mount Beauty Secondary College	Undera Primary School	
Dimboola Memorial Secondary College	Moyhu Primary School	Underbool Primary School	
Don Valley Primary School	Moyston Primary School	Walwa Primary School	
Dookie Primary School	Nambrok Denison Primary School	Wandiligong Primary School	
Edgars Creek Primary School	Nathalia Primary School	Wantirna Primary School	
Eildon Primary School	Natimuk Primary School	Warracknabeal Secondary College	
Ellinbank Primary School	Natte Yallock Primary School	Warrenheip Primary School	
Eppalock Primary School	Navarre Primary School	Waubra Primary School	
Everton Primary School	Neerim District Rural Primary School	Waverley Meadows Primary School	
Falls Creek Primary School	Newcomb Primary School	Welshpool and District Primary School	
Fitzroy Primary School	Newham Primary School	Werrimull P-12 School	
Foster Primary School	Newstead Primary School	Whitfield District Primary School	
Frankston East Primary School	Noorat Primary School	Whorouly Primary School	
Frankston Primary School	Nullawil Primary School	Willaura Primary School	
Geelong English Language School (interim name)	Olinda Primary School	Winchelsea Primary School	
Gladesville Primary School	Panmure Primary School	Yalingbu Yirramboi Royal Children's Hospital School	
Glengala Primary School	Peranbin Primary College	Yallourn North Primary School	
Goroke P-12 College	Pomonal Primary School		

*Transcript extract:*

**Roma BRITNELL:** We might move on, because we will just get the number, and that is all we really need. The next question I have got is: the questionnaire indicates, on page 124, that the department currently has around 5000 FTEs, and this is almost double the number of 2012, which was 2831 FTEs. In the midst of a teacher recruitment crisis, why is the government prioritising bureaucracy over frontline services?

**Tony BATES:** Well, Ms Britnell, the first thing I would say is that the number of students in our system is very, very significantly larger than it was in 2012. So, as we have spoken about –

**Roma BRITNELL:** So that is equivalent growth, or is it –

**Tony BATES:** It is not only that, but there have been a number of what I would probably characterise as machinery-of-government changes. One of the things we have done –

**Roma BRITNELL:** The bureaucracy has got bigger.

**Tony BATES:** Well, the model we used to have was the school support service, which is our allied health workers – so speech therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists; in 2012 those staff were based in schools. They would be based in a school, and they would then support a network of schools. What we found was, to be direct, the schools where they based were getting really, really good service, and a number of schools in the network were not getting as much service. So we did what I would effectively call a machinery-of-government change where we transferred those roles out of schools and into the regional offices. So that is around –



**Roma BRITNELL:** So students are getting better mental health support in the schools, and better allied health support for students?

**Tony BATES:** It is definitely more equitable than it was under the old system. Really there has been no change in those numbers, but they get counted now in the regional office numbers rather than in the school-based numbers. I think that is around – Dr Howes is just showing me the numbers here – 600 positions. Yes, about 600 positions were transferred from being in schools to being in the department for annual report purposes. I would just point out that a lot of those that growth in numbers is –

**Roma BRITNELL:** So schools are feeling better supported and getting more equitable services, out in the regions in particular, where they are really needing that extra allied health support?

**Tony BATES:** The overall feedback we get is yes, compared to 10 years ago, when there were some schools that just could not get access to allied health services. With this change in the tasking and assignment model, that is a more equitable distribution of access to those services.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Okay. And the recent review of the administrative burden recommended that this be solved by adding even more staff to the department. Isn't it possible that the thousands of extra bureaucrats in the department are in fact responsible for the increased workloads on schools?

**Tony BATES:** I can ask Mr Robinson to talk to the administrative burden if you would like. Look, there are a range of things around record keeping, things like making sure that we have got safety plans for students. As you know, we have had a small number of tragic circumstances, some of them in both government and non-government schools, where students have been exposed to peanuts and there have been severe anaphylaxis incidents. So there is an increase in some of the record keeping we need to make sure that all students are being kept safe. But the independent review did recommend potentially getting more admin assistance to help teachers with some of those tasks, so it is something that we are alive to. I might just ask Mr Robinson to talk a little bit about –

**Roma BRITNELL:** I think you are talking about in the schools there, but this is referring to in the department. Teacher support in the classroom is not something I am arguing against at all.

**Tony BATES:** Part of what the admin review talks about how we do have a program called the support service for small schools. There are a number of things that principals and business managers need to do to comply with WorkCover requirements, child safety requirements and a whole lot of other things, so we already do run a program where we have a central admin bureau where, rather than every small school having to do all that themselves, they can delegate some of that work to some central offices, which we have spread across regional Victoria. I think there is one in Latrobe Valley and there is one in Ballarat to help support regional schools. The review of the admin burden recommends expanding that type of program so that some of those tasks that principals and school leaders are doing can be transferred to other people so they can focus more on educational leadership. It is a report that we are continuing to consider.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Yet we hear from principals, certainly in the regions where I frequent, that they are incredibly overburdened with the administrative challenges, and my experience on school council was doing lots of that policy work for the school, which I would have thought the department would do. So that is not the experience that I am hearing about in the regions.

**Tony BATES:** I think you are picking up the point that the independent reviewer made in the report. There are a number of compliance things that can be done. The question is: do they need to be done by the school principals and the leadership team? I might ask Mr Robinson to very quickly talk about where we are in the implementation of the review.

**David ROBINSON:** Thanks, Secretary. The independent review undertook some extensive consultation over the back half of last year, and they did hear from principals and teachers about the issues that you have raised. From the report, we are implementing immediately, from the start of

2026, six of the recommendations. The first is going to your point, making sure that we have got clear tracking of the administrative and regulatory requirements of schools, making sure that we are tracking that and making that as streamlined as possible and ensuring that –

**Roma BRITNELL:** Perhaps you could give us the numbers of how many people have been allocated to the schools, particularly in the regions, who assist them with that administrative burden, because I am not seeing that.

**Tony BATES:** We can definitely come back with the numbers in, as I call it, that SASH program.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Allocated to the individual schools, though, so we can see that evidence that these schools which are really struggling, where principals are struggling and teachers are saying they have got too much regulatory compliance, have actually been given physical assistance, which is what I am hearing, in the classroom and at the school level, right across the state and right to the borders – like Portland and –

**Tony BATES:** Yes. We can definitely give you the details of the SASH sites spread across the state. The other thing I will say –

**Roma BRITNELL:** I actually want to hear what was allocated to each school so that we can see the difference made, so if you have got six teachers and one principal, that they actually have three extra people allocated to work on that regulatory burden. That is what I am hoping you just said.

**Tony BATES:** Well, it is a bureau, so the point is that there is a group of people –

**Roma BRITNELL:** So if one school is better at yelling, they will get more support than a school who is overwhelmed and just has not got the chance to even speak out.

**Tony BATES:** No. There is a bureau model. I can give you the list of the schools who are signed up to the bureau, so we can do that. These are the number of people –

**Roma BRITNELL:** So you have to sign up to get that assistance, and it does not go to every school?

**Tony BATES:** It is designed primarily for small schools.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Small, remote or both?

**Tony BATES:** Yes. Yes. Well, both. We can give you a list of the schools. It is not a compulsory service, it is an opt-in service for principals and school leaders. We can definitely give you a list of the number of people in each of the bureaus and then which are the schools that have asked to be working with and to have support from those services.

**7. I think I read that Marra in Kalkallo, when it opens next year, will have out-of-school care, will it? It is a new specialist school opening in Kalkallo next year.**

*(Asked by Lauren Kathage, page 22 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

Marra School in Kalkallo will commence a high intensity Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) service in 2026.

*Transcript extract:*

**Lauren KATHAGE:** I think I read that Marra in Kalkallo, when it opens next year, will have out-of-school care, will it? It is a new specialist school opening in Kalkallo next year.

**David HOWES:** I will have to check.

**8. Just on that actually, what is the average number of early childhood services that would be allocated per staff member?**

*(Asked by Aiv Puglielli, page 33 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

On 30 June 2025, there was an average of 66 services per Authorised Officer in Victoria. There are other key roles that support monitoring and compliance across services in Victoria. This includes investigators, monitoring and compliance staff and licencing staff.

Since June, the number of Authorised Officers has increased with additional resources.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. Just looking at the 2024–25 department performance statement, page 6, ‘Early childhood sector supports and regulation’, the average target turnaround for issuing a quality rating for early childhood services was 50 days. Can I ask how many authorised officers were undertaking those assessments for the 2024–25 period?

**Tony BATES:** I might ask Deputy Secretary FitzGerald to go through that. As we said earlier, Mr Puglielli, we know we missed that target a little bit, but as I said, there are the three targets there around the number of inspections – so 4700 versus 4000. We did prioritise getting more inspections done even if it meant we were a few days behind on writing up some of the reports. We thought that was really important in terms of trying to lift the standards of child safety as much as we can. Bron, do you want to talk to that one?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** Yes, thank you, Secretary. Thank you for the question. It is an important matter. The number of authorised officers that the regulator had in place at the end of the reporting period was approximately 100. Those authorised officers are responsible for conducting ratings and assessments – so the assessments about which those reports are written – but they also conduct unannounced compliance visits and other investigations and inspections. So their activity needs to be divided carefully across those different roles. We do expect that authorised officer workforce to increase over time. With the additional 60 roles coming in, we expect that group of authorised officers who are based out in regional teams across the state to grow. It does take time for the authorised officer workforce to uplift, partly because we are recruiting. These are pretty technical specialist roles, so it takes time to recruit the right group of people. And then it does take nine to 12 months to train those authorised officers in the specialist skills that are needed for their work, up to their full capacity.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** For the 2024–25 period specifically, though, can I ask: what was the total FTE for those authorised officers that were in place at that time?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** It was approximately 100.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** FTE, though – so that is the number of positions?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** Yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Right. Okay.

**Tony BATES:** Mr Puglielli, just to go to your question, we do not tend to say, ‘You are doing an initial service inspection, and you are doing reaccreditation.’ It is a geographic model, so as Deputy Secretary Fitzgerald said, the authorised officers tend to be based in our regional offices, and what we are looking for is that they know their patch and they know all the services. So it means that they range across those different types of regulatory inspections.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Just on that actually, what is the average number of early childhood services that would be allocated per staff member?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** I am happy to answer that question. The specifics of that we can take on notice.

**9. How long after the centre's been notified [of the centre's rating assessment] would they expect that to be published [on the Starting Blocks website]?**

*(Asked by Aiv Puglielli, pages 33-34 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

A service's quality rating is published on the Starting Blocks website, 14 days after the final report is sent to the approved provider.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. That is much appreciated. Just to clarify, from that target I referred to at the beginning of the questioning, if an early childhood education provider has been rated below quality standards, it would take six weeks for the centre to be notified. Is that correct?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** For all services, regardless of what the outcome of their rating assessment process is, the target is 50 days, and we are currently at 54 days in terms of the turnaround on that. Once the rating and assessment outcome is known by the service and communicated, that is also published on the Starting Blocks website, which is a publicly available website that makes that information available not just to others in the sector but also to parents and persons in the wider community.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** So parents and guardians are notified within that timeframe?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** The information is published after that timeframe. So after the service is notified, then the information is inputted into the National Quality Agenda Information Technology System, or NQAITS, which is the technology system that ACECQA hosts and administers. Out of that system then it is published on the Starting Blocks website, and so any parent can search their local services and look at their assessment and rating outcome. It publishes not just the headline outcome of 'exceeding', 'meeting' or 'working towards' but also the individual outcomes for the seven national quality standard domains.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes. How long after the centre's been notified would they expect that to be published?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** I can take on notice whether there is a little bit of lag between when the service is notified and the publication, but I would not expect it to be a long period. Once it is in NQAITS, it would then upload fairly quickly to the Starting Blocks website. But allow me to take it on notice. It might be a matter of a week or two.

**10. Can I ask, staying in this sector, how many incidents of abuse were reported to QARD in 2024–25 – during that budget period – and how many of those have resulted in action?**

**... The question was more closely around incidents of abuse, but I appreciate the information that you are providing.**

*(Asked by Aiv Puglielli, page 34 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

Incidents of sexual abuse in services must be reported to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP). The CCYP received reports of 27 allegations of sexual offences in Early Childhood Education services in the 2024–25 period<sup>1</sup>.

In 2024-25, QARD took 134 enforcement actions in relation to incidents of inappropriate behaviour towards children.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes. No worries. Thank you. Can I ask, staying in this sector, how many incidents of abuse were reported to QARD in 2024–25 – during that budget period – and how many of those have resulted in action?

**Tony BATES:** I will just say, Mr Puglielli, there is a very broad spectrum of notifications that come to QARD. Again, I will just get Deputy Fitzgerald to speak to that. Appropriately, staff members yelling at children will be reported. If a staff member grabs a child that is running past, that will be reported. So there is a very big spectrum of different behaviours that are all required to be reported under the national law. Bron, can you maybe just talk to some of those stats?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** Yes. That is right. The rate that we measure here – and I can take on notice the numbers – is the number of serious incidents per 100 services. In Victoria we recorded 126.4 serious incidents per 100 national quality framework services. So this excludes the Children’s Services Act services – there are about 150 of those in Victoria. Now, that 126.4 serious incidents per 100 is the second-lowest incident rate in Australia. The national average is 148.1 serious incidents per 100 services. In terms of the number, we will need to take that on notice and come back to you.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes. That is okay.

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** The thing that I think is important to acknowledge, as the Secretary says, is serious incidents encompass – yes, they encompass the most concerning instances of physical or sexual abuse but they also include a wider variety of serious matters, including notifiable diseases; if a child has an asthma attack, for example; trips and falls and other accidental injuries of a serious nature that might require hospitalisation. It captures a fairly broad –

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** The question was more closely around incidents of abuse, but I appreciate the information that you are providing. Can I ask: has QARD ever been subject to litigation over its handling of a case?

#### **11. Can I ask: has QARD ever been subject to litigation over its handling of a case?**

**...Okay. Where possible, the numbers there would be important and whether there were any outcomes in particular from those cases would be of benefit to the committee.**

*(Asked by Aiv Puglielli, page 34 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

No litigation has been brought against QARD regarding the handling of a case.

The Education and Care Services National Law does enable persons subject to some regulatory decisions to apply for external review at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

*Transcript extract:*

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<sup>1</sup> [CCYP-Annual-Report-2024-25-Final-for-publication.pdf](#)

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** The question was more closely around incidents of abuse, but I appreciate the information that you are providing. Can I ask: has QARD ever been subject to litigation over its handling of a case?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** I am sorry. Could you repeat the question?

**Tony BATES:** Has it been subject to litigation?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** On occasion –

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** On occasion?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** Not litigation. On occasion their decisions are challenged at VCAT, so there is a matter to resolve for the regulator, but I am not aware of civil litigation. But allow me to take that on notice. There might be some historical matters that I am not aware of.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Where possible, the numbers there would be important and whether there were any outcomes in particular from those cases would be of benefit to the committee. Thank you. Do you have a list of providers that you can provide to the committee that have been reported more than once?

**12. Do you have a list of providers that you can provide to the committee that have been reported more than once?**

**Any providers that have been reported more than once for incidents of abuse.**

*(Asked by Aiv Puglielli, page 35 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

Under information sharing restrictions set out in the Education and Care Services National Law, the Regulatory Authority is unable to provide the requested information.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Where possible, the numbers there would be important and whether there were any outcomes in particular from those cases would be of benefit to the committee. Thank you. Do you have a list of providers that you can provide to the committee that have been reported more than once?

**Tony BATES:** Reported under the serious notification –

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** I am sorry. Can I ask you to repeat the question for me?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes. Any providers that have been reported more than once for incidents of abuse.

**Tony BATES:** Abuse?

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** In particular physical or sexual abuse or just for sexual abuse?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Physical or sexual abuse.

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** Yes. And you are asking about the approved provider as opposed to the service? Is that what you are –

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I am asking for a list of the providers that have been reported more than once for those types of events.

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** More than once.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes.

**Bronwen FITZGERALD:** I do not have that information to hand, but we can take that away on notice.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you.

**Tony BATES:** Mr Puglielli, I will just say there are active police investigations still underway. So I am just going to say that we will just need to be very careful. We are working closely with Victoria Police. I would not want to in any way jeopardise any ongoing criminal investigation. Again, we will take that on notice, but we may need to defer the release of some information until other processes have run their full course.

**13. With respect to Brunswick Secondary College, their art building was once a rope factory, and therefore it is not a purpose-built classroom space. I understand two of the west-facing art rooms overheat every afternoon as they do not have air conditioning, but using fans also is not an option because then they start blowing all the art materials all over the room. Can I ask: is the department aware of this issue, and will it be fixed?**

**I understand one of their staff offices requires a replacement air conditioner. Its existing one is broken, and this is an office that is used by, I am told, six staff members who regularly meet with students, with parents and with other teachers. Again, is the department aware of that issue? When and how will that be addressed?**

*(Asked by Aiv PUGLIELLI, page 16 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

**Brunswick Secondary College**

The Department of Education acknowledges that keeping cool during the summer months is an important issue for both staff and students.

The department's air conditioning policy allocates cooling systems equitably, focusing on schools with the greatest need. Air conditioning is installed in teaching, staff and administration areas in schools located within climate zones 20 and 27, as classified by the National Energy Rating Scheme. These zones, primarily in northern Victoria typically experience higher temperatures.

The college is located outside the eligible climate zones for government-provided air conditioning. Schools that are outside these zones are encouraged to explore other cooling options with lower environmental impacts. These include ceiling fans, smart building design, tree planting and outdoor shade sails. Schools may also choose to install air conditioning independently, if they cover the cost of installation, maintenance and operation.

Schools can manage maintenance requirements, including repairs to air conditioning systems, using funds allocated annually through the Student Resource Package, which includes allocations for building maintenance.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay. Thank you. I might move on to another matter. We touched on air conditioning before. With respect to Brunswick Secondary College, their art building was once a rope factory, and therefore it is not a purpose-built classroom space. I understand two of the west-facing art rooms overheat every afternoon as they do not have air conditioning, but using fans also is not an option because then they start blowing all the art materials all over the room. Can I ask: is the department aware of this issue, and will it be fixed?

**Tony BATES:** I might just ask Ms Wandel if she could come up and just check if –

**Andrea DEL MONACO:** West?



**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Their west-facing classrooms.

**Tony BATES:** Yes, I know the one. It is Dawson Street.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I would have to check the street, but I can come back to you if that is useful.

**Tony BATES:** Yes. Ms Wandel, if you have anything on Brunswick Secondary.

**Joanne WANDEL:** Thanks, Secretary. Thanks, Mr Puglielli, for your question. I do not have anything on that school specifically. I am very happy to have a conversation with the region and that school around what might be possible in those instances. As I have previously mentioned, schools that are generally in the north of Victoria, where extreme heat is experienced, are provided with air conditioning. Where schools are not in those zones, we can still work with them to identify what might be suitable options available to them. In this instance I am very happy to take that on notice and have those conversations with the school.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you – much appreciated. I should stay on that school actually. Likewise, I understand one of their staff offices requires a replacement air conditioner. Its existing one is broken, and this is an office that is used by, I am told, six staff members who regularly meet with students, with parents and with other teachers. Again, is the department aware of that issue? When and how will that be addressed?

**Tony BATES:** Again, we might take that on notice, but I might then just refer to some of my earlier answers about can I call it the maintenance pyramid.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** We can probably refer to the transcript for that, if you have already provided that information. Thank you, though.

**Tony BATES:** But we will look into that one, and it may qualify for support under the emergency maintenance program. We will just get some understanding on the thermal issues in that room.

**14. ...for years Brunswick North Primary School has been asking government for help to replace the rotten window frames on the top storey of their original heritage building. For understandable reasons it is a safety risk, and it also becomes more expensive to fix the longer that the issue goes on. The school has got a 100-year anniversary celebration coming up. Can we expect those frames to be fixed by then?**

*(Asked by Aiv PUGLIELLI, page 36 of the transcript)*

*Response:*

#### **Brunswick North Primary School**

Ensuring school premises are safe, secure and well-maintained is a shared responsibility between schools and the department. Schools should manage the maintenance of school facilities using funds allocated annually through the Student Resource Package which includes allocations for building maintenance and a grounds allowance.

The department is aware that older buildings have additional maintenance needs and provides a 20% modifier to maintenance funding for heritage listed buildings under the Student Resource Package.

The Planned Maintenance Program is administered by the Victorian School Building Authority to deliver targeted funding for high priority maintenance.

The planned maintenance works for Brunswick North Primary School include replacement of the windows along the upper western facade of the original heritage building. The department will

continue to work closely with the school and sequence works to ensure that key areas are addressed ahead of the centenary event wherever possible.

If schools undertake their routine maintenance and an unforeseen issue outside of the school's financial capacity arises, the Emergency Maintenance Program (EMP) can provide assistance for issues which pose an immediate risk to the health and safety of students and staff. An application for funding can be made with the assistance of the department's Regional Office.

The VSBA's Make-safe Program provides assistance to schools that have sustained damage through an 'incident' or 'event', such as vandalism, fire, flood or storm. The program is available to all government schools 24/7 to remediate damage, destruction and loss of buildings that causes an immediate health and safety concern for staff, students and the community.

*Transcript extract:*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Okay, thank you. Staying nearby, for years Brunswick North Primary School has been asking government for help to replace the rotten window frames on the top storey of their original heritage building. For understandable reasons it is a safety risk, and it also becomes more expensive to fix the longer that the issue goes on. The school has got a 100-year anniversary celebration coming up. Can we expect those frames to be fixed by then?

**Tony BATES:** Again, we will take that one on notice. I understand in a lot of those heritage buildings, particularly the two-storey ones, that maintenance is complex, but that is the sort of stuff that the SRP maintenance should have been used for along the way. It really is for painting and that basic maintenance. We are aware that, for whatever reason, a number of schools let that go and then it starts to become a much more expensive and complex issue, but we will follow up on that one and see what we can do to support the school.