



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jo Palmer MLC

Wednesday 3 June 2026

MEMBERS

Rob Fairs MP (Chair)

Hon Josh Willie MP

Vica Bayley MP

George Razay MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr Ferguson

Mr George

Mrs Greene

Ms Rosol

Ms Haddad

Mr Vermeij

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. JO PALMER MLC

Minister for Education, Minister Children and Youth, Minister for Disability.

Ministerial Office representatives

Lisa Free

Chief of Staff

Emma Lovibond

Senior Adviser

Vanessa Field

Senior Adviser

Lucy Mercier

Senior Adviser

Sarah Quaile

Senior Adviser

Rachael Andrews

Senior Adviser

Education Portfolio

Department for Education, Children and Young People representatives

Ginna Webster

Secretary

Ross Smith

Assistant Secretary

Kane Salter

Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support

Jodee Wilson

Deputy Secretary Development and Support

Cameron Dinnessen

Acting Deputy Secretary People and Culture

David Tilley

Director Education Regulation

James Burrows

Director Office of the Secretary

Erin Lee
Principal Ministerial Officer

Katrina Porter
Senior Policy and Project Officer

Patrick Gregory
Executive Director Libraries Tasmania

Glenn Lucas
Director Finance and Budget Services

Trudy Pearce
Deputy Secretary Schools and Early Years

Disability Services Portfolio

Department of Premier and Cabinet representatives

Melissa (Mel) Gray
Deputy Secretary, Policy and Reform

Ingrid Ganley
Director Disability and Reform

Kate Stewart
Senior Legal and Policy Officer, Office of the Senior Practitioner

Children and Youth Portfolio

Department for Education, Children and Young People representatives

Ginna Webster
Secretary

Ross Smith
Assistant Secretary

Kane Salter
Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support

Peter Whitcombe
Deputy Secretary Child Safety and Youth Justice Operations

Cameron Dinnessen
Acting Deputy Secretary People and Culture

James Burrows

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Tiffany Black

Executive Director Children, Young People and Families

Sharyn Cody

Director Youth Justice Facilities Reform

Sam Ledger

Director Custodial and Youth Justice Services

Zoe Robinson

Executive Director Care and Custodial Support Services

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Education, Children and Young People

The committee met at 8.00 a.m.

DIVISION 2

Department of Education, Children and Young People

CHAIR (Mr Fairs) - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the order of the House establishing Estimates committees, which provides questions that must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to issues of public concern in relation to former minister Ogilvie, if the minister chooses to answer them.

The time now being 8.00 a.m., the scrutiny of the Education portfolio will now begin.

I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I now invite the minister to introduce persons at the table from left to right, names and positions for the benefit of *Hansard*, please.

Ms PALMER - If I could introduce Ginna Webster, who is the secretary, and also at the table we have Kane Salter. Kane's title is deputy secretary, Business Operations and Support.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time schedule for the Estimates of the minister for Education is three hours. We will take a short break for morning tea at 10.00 a.m. The resolution of the House provides for a minister to provide additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question to the minister and the minister must indicate that they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary before the end of the portfolio's exam so it can be included in correspondence to the minister for answer.

Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Ms PALMER - Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee today about the important work that is underway across our 192 government schools, 18 Child and Family Learning Centres and 46 public libraries, all of which are vital and deeply valued parts of our communities. I'm joined by dedicated departmental staff here today, along with many others who are also working behind the scenes. I want to thank them for their ongoing commitment. Together, we will do our best to answer all your questions today here at the table.

At the outset, I do want to acknowledge our educators and support staff. Their care, professionalism and dedication are what makes the real difference every day for Tasmanian children and young people and their families. This Budget continues our strong commitment to education with nearly \$2.2 billion for the education portfolio in 2026-27, growing to over \$9 billion across four years.

This reflects our belief that education is the most powerful driver of opportunity. We're investing in what matters most, lifting student outcomes through evidence-based reform and this includes \$16.7 million to strengthen structured literacy and numeracy, ensuring every child

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has access to high-quality teaching and the foundational skills they need to succeed. Student wellbeing is also front and centre. Our \$38.4 million investment in School Breakfast and Healthy Lunch Programs is supporting attendance, engagement and easing cost-of-living pressures for families. We're taking decisive action to ensure our schools are safe and supported environments and this includes \$15.5 million for our Violence in Schools Action Plan, delivering trauma-informed supports for students and strengthening capability across schools that need it the most. We are also strengthening pathways for young people through a \$9.3 million investment in vocational education, work-based learning and flexible options, ensuring every student can find a pathway that works for them.

At a system level, we are progressing important reforms, including multi-school organisations to better support principals and teachers, reduce administrative burden and enable a stronger focus on learning and wellbeing. We continue to invest in the early years, our workforce and our infrastructure because strong foundations and strong support systems matter. Importantly, we are doing this while maintaining a responsible approach, targeting investment where it makes the greatest difference and ensuring it delivers real outcomes.

At its heart, this Budget is about what matters most, ensuring every Tasmanian child and young person is safe, supported, learning and able to thrive. Thank you, Chair, and I welcome questions from the committee.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you've given a Victorian consulting firm almost \$0.5 million contract to evaluate your pet multi-schools project. How can you justify this kind of spending whilst at the same time cutting the Education department by \$230 million?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. Of course, it's a pretty bold and system-wide change we are looking at here with the aim, of course, to lift outcomes for every student in every school. The Independent Education Review found merit in trialling Multi-School Organisations - the work by Vicki Baylis, a very well-respected national educator.

MSOs are families of schools bound together through a united leadership team that is accountable for students' results across all schools in the MSO. Internationally, MSOs have lifted student achievement, teacher satisfaction and system performance. The Grattan Institute has recommended their trial right across Australia, so we're incredibly excited to have taken this evidence-based model. We're actually adapting it to the Tasmanian context with the assistance of local educators.

A robust evaluation is absolutely critical to ensure the MSO model delivers the intended outcomes, lifting student achievement, reducing administrative burden, strengthening leadership and improving quality. We want to know that our students are learning and wellbeing is improving in more ways than we might expect. It is really important we are evaluating this reform and this model. One of the things we know and learnt from the lessons of 20 years' experience in the UK with delivering similar reform is that one of the pieces of advice they gave to us is evaluate from the very start; make sure you are really focused on that. That's why we've had that investment into the evaluation.

I don't know if the secretary wants to add anymore to that.

Ms WEBSTER - That's covered that.

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Mr WILLIE - You and I both know that it hasn't worked everywhere in the UK. What specific problem are you trying to address with the Multi-Schools Organisation?

Ms PALMER - The problem we're trying to address is we see record investment in education in Tasmania and yet still I'm not seeing the educational outcomes. As a department we are not seeing the educational outcomes we want to see. Some wonderful results are coming through with lifting literacy, which is just fantastic. We're now going to be moving into that numeracy area but a lot of the feedback that I've had from schools, from principals, from teachers is, 'We want to be teaching, we want to be at the front of the classroom engaging with students. We don't want to be tied up in administration. We don't want to be handling some of the things that we've put onto our teachers and principals'. The MSO model is about lifting that administrative burden off our schools primarily and saying, okay, we can handle that side of it. What do we need our teachers to be doing is to be teaching. We have some amazing feedback. We're already seeing amazing feedback from the principals of our first MSO who are just talking about the advantage that comes from not feeling like they're managing in a silo, that they're actually able to call on each other, go through curriculum together, share resources, problem-solve together. It's been wonderful to hear that feedback from the principals who are already in that MSO.

As I say, the advantage we have from the Grattan Institute's research and also from going to the UK and seeing this model is they have had 20 years of ups and downs and mistakes. They have been so open and wanting to share that with us here in Tasmania and saying, an example of that is evaluate from the very beginning. Don't set up a reform and a structure that only has one direction. Be flexible. Let it be a living, breathing reform. That's what we're doing and we're super excited to hear from the principals we currently have in our MSO - one who said, 'This is a game changer' for them. For one of those principals in particular, it's actually been quite an emotional journey and a number of times, from a really emotional place, she has said wow, this is a game changer for her, as a principal. That's really exciting.

Mr WILLIE - You talk about feedback, but I talk to principals and teachers and there's a lack of buy-in with this reform, which is a real problem for you and the department in trying to implement it. How are you going to measure success?

Ms PALMER - Obviously, the independent evaluation will be a big part of that.

Mr WILLIE - But what's that measuring?

Ms PALMER - But also, we have we do pretty extensive work with our principals. The department is constantly engaging. every opportunity that I have to talk about it. I know that there are some principals who feel that way, but there are other principals who feel really differently. We have to make sure that we're listening to all those voices in the area. Where there are concerns - there's been occasions where the department has gone out specifically to talk to a cohort of principals who, I might have got some feedback, weren't feeling comfortable with the reform -to flesh it out, explain it to them. Where there's change, there's always going to be people who are up for and excited about that. There will always be people who might feel a bit hesitant about that, but that is our job, that is our role.

This reform is based in evidence. The Grattan Institute has brought their research to Australia and said we should be looking at this right across the country. For us, here in Tasmania, extraordinary investment across education. Sometimes it's not about more

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investment, sometimes it's about what is our system? Is it our system that we actually need to be focused on, and this is a change in our system in how we are delivering education.

Mr WILLIE - My question was: how are you going to measure success? You didn't answer that. You said there was an evaluation, but what's the evaluation evaluating? How's it going to measure success?

Ms PALMER - Certainly. Yes, for sure. I will pass to the secretary, thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. The evaluation will track the trial over time and there will be some key questions we want answered during the trial. It's really important that evaluation is done independently. This is major reform, so that's why we have an independent evaluation. But the key questions will be: is the model being implemented well? Are the schools getting the right support? Because, as the minister said, it is about what support the schools get to allow the principals to work with their teachers and teachers to work with their students to get better educational outcomes. Is the structure we've implemented working in practice? Is it improving student outcomes? That's what we all want to see, in terms of student learning, equity and engagement. Is it strengthening the workforce? Principal support, as you mentioned; making sure that the principals are getting the support that they need. Is it sustainable for teachers? Is it improving the teacher capacity to work with their students in the way that they need to? Is it reducing pressure on schools - reducing admin burden, more focus on teaching and learning? It will also look at broader system impacts - whether the model can scale across Tasmania and whether it delivers value for investment.

We will get regular findings; it won't be just the report at the end. The evaluation will also include some schools that are not part of an MSO, to make sure we can have a comparison, because we do want to make sure that all of our 192 schools are supported and we're reducing admin pressure on principals, which is certainly what they want. Certainly, when I visit schools, I don't really meet any principals that say they need to do the job of principal better, because they're doing that fabulously well. What they do tell me is the system really needs to be able to support them better, and that's what we're aiming to.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, thank you for your appearance and officials. I will echo your acknowledgement of our educators and their support staff. They do a remarkable job on behalf of us, as parents, and future generations.

You joined the Cabinet in April 2022. I do want to ask you a question about former minister Ogilvie's legal fees. It's now been established that over \$120,000 has been spent on her legal fees and she has resigned from her ministry for misleading parliament. I want to ask you about the Cabinet decisions, as a Cabinet minister: when was the decision to cover her legal fees made and which portfolio does it pertain to?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. There are clear guidelines for legal assistance in place. The policy and guidelines governing the granting of indemnities and legal assistance are publicly available. The policy and guidelines clearly state that indemnity and legal assistance can be considered against legal processes brought under several circumstances. The circumstances include civil proceedings; criminal proceedings; inquiries or investigations, including integrity bodies, coronial inquiries, anti-discrimination matters and any other body with inquisitorial powers. These are complex matters, particularly given confidentiality requirements. I won't be commenting any further.

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Mr BAYLEY - Minister, that's a shame. I think it is regrettable you're not prepared to answer that in relation to Cabinet and those decisions but, I hear you, and I will move on because I'm very interested in the almost \$230 million of efficiencies or cuts to DECYP. We're very interested, and I know you have been asked a number of times, about your definition of frontline jobs versus back-office jobs. The word 'back office' has been used extensively and I have a question here from Aaron explicitly, who's a senior IT support officer, who wants to know, and I quote:

I would like the government to define and list the job titles of those they categorise as frontline workers. In education, teachers, teachers assistants, psychologists, et cetera are usually in the spotlight, but IT support staff in the field are also amongst many jobs on the frontline. IT support jobs continue to be cut with the expectation that the services remain the same. We keep hearing that we won't be expected to do more with less or the same with less, but there has been no announcement to the wider population about any services being cut.

As you can appreciate, this is of significant concern to staff - all educators and their support staff. Aaron is explicitly asking you to define 'frontline workers'. I guess, the reverse of that is have you got a list of the so-called back-office jobs that are up for review or being targeted as part of these operational efficiencies?

Ms PALMER - Look, I thank you very much for the question. Can I acknowledge, as a minister, that this is hard. This is tough.

Mr BAYLEY - This is people's futures.

Ms PALMER - Behind each number is a person and I'm very aware of that, as is my secretary and her team. As I mentioned in the previous answer to Mr Willie, our investment in the Education portfolio alone has actually increased by 76 per cent since 2014. However, we know that more money doesn't always equate to better outcomes. So, our focus needs to shift from the level of investment to how effectively it's actually used to deliver real outcomes. The department will streamline -

Mr BAYLEY - Chair, please, on relevance. The question was explicitly around what are those jobs. We've heard part of this with Mr -

Ms PALMER - I'm explicitly answering it, Mr Bayley.

Mr BAYLEY - Well, please. Okay, thank you.

Ms PALMER - The department will be streamlining corporate and back-office functions by around 10 per cent.

Mr BAYLEY - We've heard that.

Ms PALMER - We've been really transparent with that.

Mr BAYLEY - What are those back office - what are those corporate jobs, though?

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Ms PALMER - And these operational efficiencies will set the department on a pathway to sustainability and it will enable us to continue to prioritise investment in the people and services working directly with children. As I've said a number of times, we're not proposing any cuts to frontline services or to schools. So, I'll now -

Mr BAYLEY - So, what are those jobs?

Ms PALMER - Mr Bayley, though you, Chair, I will answer it how I see fit. I would like to cross to my secretary for further on this. Thank you, secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Absolutely agree that all of our staff are valuable and they are all working really hard to provide the service that they need to provide to the agency and to the children and young people in the community. What we'll be doing and what we've started to work through is how our functions and our systems are structured. We want to make sure that we avoid any duplication. We came together as an agency in late 2022, so there is an opportunity now for us to look at how we can make sure that some of those positions that we have are not duplicated. We'll be looking at opportunities, as we said, to streamline. We need to make sure that our statutory responsibilities and obligations are fully met. Any proposed reforms that we undertake will be staged and carefully implemented and we do want to absolutely consult with staff and their unions. We want to maintain service continuity while we review the level and effectiveness of those supports. We want to protect frontline capability, particularly services that directly support children, young people in schools.

We have to engage with effective change management, and I note the question from Aaron and thank him for that, and I understand the level of uncertainty that exists within our staff. We are going to work through this carefully and we are going to take staff on this journey with us. We want to strengthen our change-management process. We want to make sure that our staff are protected and looked after. But, overall, our approach to this will be, as the Premier announced, to open a targeted voluntary redundancy program. We will work through who puts their hand up for that. We don't want to lose all of our staff from one area, of course; we want to make sure that we are able to be sustained. Many staff will see this as an opportunity in terms of redundancy and may be looking for change.

Mr BAYLEY - I guess that's a different question. This is about: is there a list of quarantined or protected roles within the department that if someone puts up their hand for redundancy, it would be replaced because that position is not expendable? I guess that the nub of Aaron's question is: what are the jobs that are protected or quarantined from these cuts and what are the jobs that are open? I think you owe it to the employees of the department to settle some of their minds and also, I guess, flag with others that perhaps they need to be more interested in those redundancies or be looking elsewhere?

Ms PALMER - I agree partially with your statement and, as you say, you know you've used the example of Aaron and by us providing information that we have here at the table for you, we're also trying to be really sensitive about this. As you say, for some it might be relief, but for others it can be anxiety as well. So, we're trying to be really sensitive. We're trying to make sure that those conversations with staff are happening in a really appropriate manner. We do have information here that we are certainly happy to share, but it's important to say, this is under development. This is looking at streamlining corporate and back-office functions and we don't want to be in a position where people are feeling any more anxious than they already are.

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But, with those comments, and I hope you understand how we're trying to approach this, and the spirit by which we're trying to approach this, I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister, so some of those functions will be leadership and management roles. They will be administrative and support roles. Communications, marketing -

Mr BAYLEY - What does support mean in that context?

Ms WEBSTER - Admin support, sorry, beg your pardon. Some of our data analytics and research roles, some of our finance and accounting, some of our HR and workforce, IT and digital is included in some of that. Some of our policy and project and advisory roles. Of course, we would not be looking at teachers and those sorts of roles, the minister has been clear about that, but we are not going to take a shotgun approach to this. We're actually going to do this in a really careful, staged and deliberate way. We have meetings set up with our leadership group in the next couple of weeks. We've got meetings set up with the unions. And we really want to work through with staff because it is hard. We want to identify those staff who are interested in an opportunity to take a redundancy or have a career change. But, we do owe it to them to work through it with them first on that occasion. But, of course, we know where we need to cut back and we need to avoid duplication. That is the key thing and making sure that we can use technology appropriately, making sure that we're providing the right support to schools in a non-bureaucratic way, so we will look at how the department is structured to be able to do that. But, as I said, this will also include leadership and management roles within the organisation.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, the latest national assessment program of literacy and numeracy, NAPLAN, reveals that almost four in 10 Tasmanian students are behind in literacy and numeracy. Compared to our standard in 2008, our standard has also dropped. I know the government spending \$16.7 million to improve literacy and numeracy, and in our last Estimates discussion last year, you mentioned that Lifting Literacy had been a great benefit.

Can you please show us some data about how much improvement we have done in literacy and numeracy?

Ms PALMER - Look, we have been doing some amazing work in the literacy space. This work began a number of years ago - indeed, when our Premier was Education minister, and it's been certainly championed by Education ministers since then. It's been absolutely wonderful to see how this reform has been really changing lives, because literacy - if you are not able to read, it impacts you right throughout not just your childhood, but into adulthood.

One of the things that we've done is that we committed to an hour of structured literacy. Most schools do it at the beginning of each day, I guess when kids are the most fresh, and then we backed that in with a further commitment to actually, I think it was over \$12 million in funding last year, to strengthen the resourcing of literacy resources in schools. The schools that we've seen who have taken this on adapted and adopted this way of teaching literacy early; we're seeing some amazing outcomes, which is really exciting.

One of the recommendations or one of the findings that came out of the independent review of Education by Vicki Baylis was saying to the government: look, stay on your course when it comes to the work you're doing with Lifting Literacy. You're getting those early indicators of really great outcomes. So, we know that our Lifting Literacy strategy is working.

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I've shared before how exciting it is for me, as a minister, to go to a school and before the principal has even made it to the front door to talk to me, to introduce themselves, I have the literacy advocates in the school running up going, 'Look at our data. Look what our preps are doing. Look what our grade 2s are doing.' So, we know that our teachers are excited about that as well.

One of the things that we've been able to do with that resourcing package is actually be able to put physical resources into schools. We've been able to put tiles into the hands of every single prep to grade 2 child, which is the boards where they can make words. And I loved sitting at Trevallyn Primary School with a prep class, and their very first lesson with the phonics tiles was learning how to open them up, get them out, put them back and put them back away. We know that it's really responded well with teachers, and we know that it's seeing those real improvements, which is really exciting.

Prof RAZAY - Do we have data to show? We are hearing benefits, so it's nice to know that there is an improvement.

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister: in terms of some of our PAT testing, which is progressive achievement testing, we have a percentage of students in prep and year 1 achieving year-level expected standard in PAT reading. It has increased - this is 2025 data. So, from 2021 it was 79.3 per cent; in 2025 it was 82.9 per cent. The percentage of students in year 2 to 6 achieving expected year-level standard in PAT reading has gone up from 79 to 80 per cent, so there has been an increase there. The percentage of students in years 7 to 10 achieving expected year-level standard in PAT reading - from 74.9 per cent to 75.1 per cent.

We do know that that process to turn those results around does take time, but absolutely, the work that we're doing builds on the foundation from the previous year. So I'm not sure if we've got - we do have the deputy secretary responsible for literacy, who might be able to provide more information.

Prof RAZAY - Yes, please.

Ms PALMER - Can I introduce the committee to Jodee Wilson? Jodee's the deputy secretary Development and Support.

Could you just repeat the question?

Prof RAZAY - Just because we heard that Lifting Literacy has shown some benefit, and it's nice because we get these NAPLAN results, but we are still behind. Well, we are hearing benefits - can we have some numbers so we can say, 'Look how much we are achieving over the last few years?'

Ms WILSON - We have started to see some improvements across both NAPLAN categories, but also our progressive achievement tests, which is what the Secretary spoke to before. There are small gains. And we can provide that individual data in relation to NAPLAN, but they're across the areas where we've increased energy and effort. In reading, particularly, we've seen, across the years, improvements.

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Mr GEORGE - Thank you, Chair. Good morning, minister. Thanks for being here. It's been a while since I attended school, so every question that I have today comes from teachers and academics in the teaching profession.

According to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, Tasmanian students have higher minimum requirements across all subjects; higher minimum hour achievement requirements across all senior secondary years; higher minimum hour requirements for literacy and numeracy at ACSF level - if you'll excuse the acronyms; no prior recognition of NAPLAN results; and the lowest ICSEA, which is socio-economic judgments, of any state.

The independent Education review heard that teachers and students are both punished by expecting excessive standards with the most demanding certification standard in Australia. So, what evidence do you have that the current Tasmanian Certificate of Education Standards are accurately reflecting student achievements, rather than punishing capable students and capable teachers?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It was an amazing body of work that Vicki Baylis did and how she was able to draw together voices right across the space. It's led to a body of work that we're doing around defining educational success, and it certainly did stem from the work that Vicki did. So, you know, the review told us that we need to strengthen Tasmania's understanding of the importance of education and we need to define educational success in the Tasmanian context.

The review also told us that we need to recognise and celebrate all of the learning pathways that are available to our students, rather than just having that sole focus on TCE or on an 'A' task or - that's why, as part of our response to the review, we've committed to developing a shared and inclusive definition of educational success, and this definition will apply to every learner in Tasmanian schools. It is a foundational part of the response to the review, and it will help guide reform that sets learners up for success at all stages of their education.

So, through the review, young people told us clearly that success is broader than just grades alone. It's about developing life skills, it's about developing social skills and about having real choices that they can make, how they actually grow as individuals. It's about achieving personal goals. And I loved that, through their voice, you know, their definition of success was also about how they can contribute meaningfully to their communities. So, we've reflected on those student voices, and we've drawn on analysis of work in other jurisdictions and are working with our stakeholders to progress a definition which can be owned by young people, our schools and the community.

So, a shared definition of educational success - some of the things that are going to shape that, or are shaping it, are: how we approach the TCE, including what we recognise as part of TCE; how we measure progress; how we design and deliver curriculum; how we support schools; and how we recognise different pathways. And importantly, it's not just redefining success, not just adjusting a policy, but how can we actually shape possibility in that space?

We're also, as part of that work, I asked the department to look at how it actually reports on the way we measure success with our students. What's the data that we're collecting? Is it

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different to other jurisdictions? I mean, Tasmania gets compared all the time with other states, and yet we're measuring different things; it's not like-for-like.

One of the things that I have tasked the department with is - you know, we need to be looking at other jurisdictions and we need to be - if we want to size up Tasmanian kids, then we've got to be doing it like-for-like with other jurisdictions, because our kids are phenomenal. They're doing extraordinary things. Our teachers work so hard. They're so passionate and they invest into the lives of their children. Then we get data back which makes it look like, you know, Tasmania's right at the bottom of the pack - but we're measuring different things. That is a body of work that I have tasked the department with.

Did you have anything further to add to that, secretary?

CHAIR - Just before we go, minister, I am being lenient with times. If the committee's happy to continue to hear from the secretary, or do you want to -

Mr GEORGE - I'm happy to hear, but I agree, we should try and keep these answers down and allow the questions more room to move.

CHAIR - I mean, I'm not sticking right on the deadlines as I've been running them.

Mr GEORGE - It would be good if the secretary could just add - what I'm asking, really, is: are you looking at changing the requirements for the TCE? That's all I want, a 'yes' or 'no', really.

Ms PALMER - Your question was a little longer than that, to be fair, Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - It was, but at the end of it that's what I was hoping for.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister: I think certainly the finding from the independent Education review was that the TCE is a, you know, recognised metric. However, it's insufficient on its own as recognition of the range of attainment for young people, so what the minister has described is correct.

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you. Minister, welcome, good morning. I really want to compliment you sincerely for what you're doing in this portfolio. For nearly 20 years, educators - rather, I should say education bureaucracies - have largely ignored the evidence base that came through the national inquiry into reading in about 2005, but you're doing it, and I just applaud the work that you're doing in structured literacy explicit instruction, which you spoke about in your opening statement. And if time permits through the morning, I'd like to come back to that.

Given that we've had some discussion on the multi-school organisation (MSO) model, and you've shared already that you've had positive feedback from principals in the trial about the benefits that they're seeing from being part of a multi-school organisation, and you talked about relieving administrative burden so that our teams can focus on teaching and learning, my question would be: what is the next stage of the government's plan in relation to multi-school organisations? Have you worked out where the next MSO is going to be?

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Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for the question. As you say, multi-school organisations are looking to lift the student outcomes by uniting schools to be families of schools under one executive leadership. We know this will strengthen support for principals and teachers - which is what they're asking of us, reduce that administrative burden which, again, is what is being asked of us, and allow our schools to focus on more learning and wellbeing together.

Following the establishment of our first MSO, the department recently undertook work to identify next schools to participate in our MSO trial. The selections of schools was guided by a clear and transparent set of principles and processes that were developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including the MSO Trial Advisory Panel, which has representatives from the Principal Advisory Group, Tasmanian Principals Association, Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations (TASSO), Australian Education Union, the Community & Public Sector Union, United Workers, and of course, our MSO Trial Steering Committee.

Following an expression of interest and a short-listing process, I'm really delighted to announce today that Hobart City High School will be joining New Town, Moonah and Risdon Vale Primary Schools as the new member of MSO 1, and that will be happening next year. We're super-excited about that, as I know the principal from Hobart City High School is as well.

Our second MSO will be established to commence in 2027 and that will be in the north of the state. We'll be making announcements soon about those participating schools. Our third MSO, we're looking to have that established in 2028. This phased approach will ensure that we're implementing a model that is fit for purpose for our system, fit for purpose for our teachers and, of course, for our students. And I've consistently indicated that we will be taking a careful and considered approach with the trial, starting small and then growing over time.

Finally, it will be great to hear from the voices of our principals in our MSO 1, and just a couple of very short quotes. One of the principals said, 'Teachers from all three schools genuinely value the opportunity to work together, share expertise and build consistency in practice.' And another said, 'For principals having trusted colleagues to share the mental load with and to collectively plan next steps has been incredibly beneficial.' I could go on; I have lots of inspirational statements from the principals already involved in this, but with respect to time, thank you very much for the question and I am super-excited about the next steps.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, only adding one school to the multi-school organisation indicates a lack of interest from other schools. I remember a briefing from your office where you wanted to add a lot more schools. Isn't that problematic in itself?

Ms PALMER - No, not at all. We're absolutely delighted that Hobart City High will be joining MSO 1 and that very soon we will be announcing the new schools in the north that will be set-up schools for MSO 2. We have always said that we have to start this reform slowly and carefully. I think the other thing that's really important with this is that we don't have schools that are moving in the MSO - just in the MSO space - we're setting up all our schools for this reform. So, all of our schools have already gone into groupings of schools and that is setting them up to move into MSOs. We actually see all of our schools as part of this reform. The first step for the majority of our schools is in groupings and again, we are getting some wonderful feedback about how that is working. Then we turn the dial up even further by the alignment through the MSO model. In particular, I'm so delighted that we actually are having a high

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school coming into MSO 1. We have our three primary schools, so to have a high school coming into that space, we see extraordinary opportunity there and are really excited about that announcement as I know that principal is. Then, as I say, our plan is for the beginning of 2028 that we'd be looking at our third one.

Mr WILLIE - But the plan was to add more schools in the second year than one.

Unknown - You want it to speed up?

Ms PALMER - In the second year we're adding one to MSO 1 and we are setting up a whole new MSO, which will have schools in the north and, as I say, we are taking this slowly in the MSO space but, at the same time, it's actually the groupings of schools, which is part of this reform that all of our schools are already all engaged with. I'll just see if the secretary has anything to add to that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, some of the learnings from the UK model was that the expansion happened really quickly and we've certainly also learnt that they were too geographically spread out in some cases. So, we're taking a really measured approach and using the evaluation methodology to make sure that we're doing this in the right way, so that it's sustainable. I think the impact of that will be measured through that independent evaluation, as we talked about as well. We're just taking a really careful approach to the way we roll this out.

Mr WILLIE - Well, the plan was to add more schools, so what it indicates to me is there is a lack of interest in being part of this and that's exactly what I'm hearing when I engage with principals and teachers. Will you be directing schools to participate in the trial?

Ms PALMER - Mr Willie, we received quite a number of expressions of interest from schools, but what we have learnt from the research from the Grattan Institute and also from our own experience in the UK is that charging ahead full steam is not the way to go. So, we are taking that advice where there is evidence to show that we are doing this the right way. There were quite a number of expressions of interest and they're the schools that we'll be looking at how can we develop further because we know that they want to be involved with this. But, again, we are going to do this the right way and I'm super-excited with how it's progressing and really looking forward to getting some of the evaluation interim reports back. And I am excited when I get feedback from principals who have put their hand up to say, we really want to be part of this, this is exciting, we see this as a game changer for our school. But, we are being really careful about rolling this out slowly and methodically. As I say, there were a number of expressions of interest and we'll be looking at those schools into the future. But again, you have to look at the groupings of schools that is part of this reform, which every single school is involved in, where they have an executive lead, and are being set up to move into the MSO reform trial. And remember, this is a trial, this is a five-year trial and we want to set this up for generations to come, so we're not going to be pushed -

Mr WILLIE - It sounds like nobody wants to participate.

Ms PALMER - No, I think that's a really negative. That's a very negative way of looking at it. I know that, for some reason that I don't understand, Mr Willie, you are opposed to this, but everything that teachers and principals and parents are saying to me, the answers are found in the evidence that sits behind the multi-school organisation. I will offer you as many briefings as you like to ensure that you are really well informed about this because, as I say, the things

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that we are trying to achieve are all touchpoints of that MSO model - removing that administrative burden, having principals work together collectively and share each other's resources -

Mr WILLIE - If I could draw the minister back to the question, which was, will she be directing schools to participate in the trial if you can't get people to sign up?

Ms PALMER - We already have quite a number of expressions of interest and we're working with those schools -

Mr WILLIE - Will you be directing schools to participate in the trial?

Ms PALMER - This is the direction that we are going with this trial, but we haven't had any conversations about directing schools or how that might be. That's why we went out to an expression of interest. That's why we wanted to see which schools wanted to put their hands up early to be part of this trial. We also got a little bit of feedback from a couple of schools that they needed more information. They were interested and wanted to be part of it, but didn't feel that they were quite ready to commit as yet, so we're working with those schools as well. As I say, you know, it is just really exciting the feedback we're getting from principals who are either, please, I want to be part of it, or can I have some more information because I think this is a direction I really want our region to be going in.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you, Chair. Thank you to you minister and secretary for the detail around some of those so-called 'back-office' jobs from leadership down to policy, project and advisory. I'm really interested in a bit more of the specifics around those roles. Some of those roles sit in schools, as opposed to within the department and, sort of, off schools. So, my question is, are those positions eligible for or targeted for cuts and efficiencies if they sit in schools, or are schools quarantined? I guess that extends to positions like facility attendants, admin officers within school settings, flexible learning staff and teacher assistants. So, you understand my question, I'm really trying to understand whether it's a back office in the department or a back office in the school, and whether or not the schools are quarantined from these efficiencies as well.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I'll pass to the secretary. Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, certainly the definition of the positions that I've described are not positions such as teacher assistants or facility attendants.

Mr BAYLEY - Social workers.

Ms WEBSTER - No, that's right.

Mr BAYLEY - But some of them you accept may sit in schools?

Ms WEBSTER - Some of those positions may administratively sit in schools, absolutely. We would be looking at all of those positions and, as we've said, the absolute priority is to protect those positions that are providing direct support to schools.

Mr BAYLEY - But those that sit in schools aren't necessarily quarantined or protected from -

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Ms WEBSTER - I think when you say 'sit,' sorry, through you, minister, some positions may 'sit' in a school area, or work among a range of different schools. IT, for example, is one of those areas that go into schools regularly to do really important work for schools. Obviously, what we wouldn't want to do is minimise that work. We're looking at how we can use technology and make sure our technology is as up to date as possible because our students, know technology well and they use technology, so we wouldn't want to do that.

What we do need to do is carefully work through all of those roles and make sure we can provide a sustainable education, support workforce and child safety and youth justice workforce into the future. There may be some areas where we have some duplication, we're able to say we can look at how those positions work together. We will be doing this in a careful way. We will be working through with staff. We don't have a list of positions we are targeting. We are working through carefully with all our back-office roles, our non-frontline in school. We also have child safety roles that deliver really important work. Child safety workers, for example, youth justice workers. There are a lot of people that support directly some of those functions.

We are going to be working through this in a careful and planned way, but we will also give staff an opportunity put their hand up and say we're interested. There might be, for example, a staff member who's interested in one area and there's a staff member in another that we might move someone to another position. There's a whole range of things that we need to work through. There are consultation processes we have to undertake with unions. I mentioned that I've spoken to all the unions and set up meetings with them in the next couple of weeks to work through this. We do want to do this together. The reality is that we do have to minimise the number of positions we have. We have to be a sustainable organisation as we move forward, but we are going to do this in a careful way.

Mr BAYLEY - That's great. Are the voluntary redundancies open to all staff? Can teaching, frontline staff put out their hands for a redundancy and yet I'm hearing you say that number one, is that the case, and if one of those staff members takes a redundancy, is that effectively a protected position you would guarantee would be then refilled in the wake of that staff member taking the redundancy?

Ms WEBSTER - There would be some positions within the organisation, including teachers and teacher assistants for example, who would not be eligible to be part of the volunteer conditions program.

Mr BAYLEY - It is not open to them? Is there a list of those positions that aren't eligible?

Ms WEBSTER - Teachers and teacher assistants -

Mr BAYLEY - That's the extent of it at this point.

Ms WEBSTER - I'm just giving you an example, Mr Bayley, but can I just say that someone may put in in those non-frontline roles, someone might put in a request for a voluntary redundancy. It doesn't mean that it would be accepted. We have to assess all of them against our needs.

Mr BAYLEY - But again, in terms of informing you about that voluntary redundancy program, do you have a list of those roles that are not eligible?

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Ms WEBSTER - We're currently working through what it will look like for our agency. We certainly know it would be where we are really aiming to recruit and retain teachers, and we know that nationally we have to work hard to do that. It's a fantastic profession, but there is a lot of complexity in that role, so we wouldn't want to be accepting redundancy from a teacher to then fill it the next day. A redundancy means that the position -

Mr BAYLEY - Exactly.

Ms WEBSTER - We would not be taking positions from teachers as an example.

Prof RAZAY - I have previously expressed my concern about Tasmanian year 11 to 12 retention and attainment, which is one of the lowest in the country. Data show that only 55 per cent of young Tasmania are getting Tasmanian Australia Certificate of Education and only 31 per cent an ATAR. According to research of 2021 census, which showed that people aged 20 to 29 who left Tasmania compared to those who stayed in Tasmania were more likely to have higher level of education, be employed in higher skilled job and better utilised in the labour market. More recently, Australian government 2024 report the [8.54.59] showed that by 2050 80 per cent of all jobs will require tertiary education qualification, either university or TAFE. So, what are we going to do to improve our retention of students beyond year 10?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. There's a number of ways we're doing that. Obviously, our reform around years 11 and 12 and seeing that as an opportunity for children regardless of where they might be, and what we know as high school that there is an opportunity for them to continue their studies in years 11 and 12.

Also, we certainly remain really dedicated to ensuring that all students are engaged in learning that meets their needs and prepares them for success. I was certainly pleased to see in the 2026 term 1 census data points to direct retention increasing in government schools, the percentage of Year 10 students into Year 11 up half a percentage point since 2025 to 84.8 per cent, while direct retention from year 11- 12 is up 1.9 per cent to 84.6 per cent.

The independent review of education made it really clear how important it is to develop a shared and inclusive definition of educational success, and that's actually acknowledging all learning pathways. Obtaining your Tasmanian Certificate of Education or that ATAR score is one way of measuring success, but there are so many other ways. That's part of the body of work we're doing about defining what educational success is.

Not every student is going to go on to a TCM. We absolutely celebrate the students that do. We absolutely do it's fantastic, but there are other ways that young people learn and we absolutely celebrate their achievements.

We are certainly investing in initiatives to increase engagement and retention. The Youth Participation Database gives us something we've never had before in Tasmania, a clear view of where our senior secondary aged young people are enrolled and the types of education and training they're participating in. It identifies those who have disengaged and may need more support. That is a really valuable database and really enables us to understand where our efforts should be going.

We also have this amazing team; they're called Back on Track. This is a statewide team that works to reconnect young people aged 16-18 who are identified as not being actively

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enrolled in any approved learning program. These are young people who, for want of a better word, have dropped off the radar, so our Back on Track team moves into that space.

These are often young people with some pretty complex needs, and this team actually works with those young people to say, okay, what do we need to do? What are the barriers to you engaging again? How do we step through this with you? How do we get you back into a learning program?

There are ways that we are redefining what educational success looks like but also acknowledging that there are some young people who have fallen off the radar for a variety of really complex reasons and we try to find them. The team's phenomenal, they use Facebook, they use social media all different ways to try and find these young people, meet them where they're at and help them to re-engage.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, I think I heard you right in saying you are progressing a new definition of success for the TCE, I think that's a quote. What I didn't hear, is you committing to making changes to the TCE. I am wondering if your prescribed set of standards for the TCE not only under review, how you're reviewing it, and if you do, commit to changing it.

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much. Of course, the defining educational success is not just about TCE, that is about looking-

Mr GEORGE - It is a piece of paper, isn't it?

Ms PALMER - It's part of it, but there are numerous ways that Tasmanians and particularly young people see the definition of success and TCE is, yes, absolutely part of it, but there are many other ways.

Can I just introduce to the table Jenny Burgess - she'd be familiar to most of you. Jenny's title is Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Performance and I might get her to speak to the work that we're doing in this area.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you, minister, and through you. The work around consultation for defining educational success is happening. It's an all-of-sector piece, for all students in Tasmania. The steps, once we get that definition, are to think about what the framework looks like over the top of that. Then to work through what success looks like at all ages and all stages of education, not just years 11 and 12.

But the piece on years 11 and 12: we will take the information and advice we get from the review. Then we will think about all of the elements, and I think the minister talked about this before: what does that mean for curriculum? What does that mean for vocational education? What does that mean for certification? Certainly, as part of that work, we will give consideration to is the TCE and the five standards that sit within the TCE still fit for purpose for the contemporary student cohorts that are coming through? Is there more that's required? Do we need to make adjustments? That's a policy piece that we work together with key stakeholders, including Tasmanian Assessments Standards and Certification, who's the regulatory authority that oversees this. Then work through what that might look like going forward.

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We also need to be mindful of senior secondary certification is also an element that has a national context and, where possible, we try to line up certification against the national parameters. There's a group called Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities that look to what that means for comparability across jurisdiction. Certainly that work is programmed to continue once we have the definition of success.

Mr GEORGE - When will that work be completed? What's the target date?

Ms BURGESS - We haven't got an explicit timeframe. We're working to a definition finalisation of August. Then we will work with our stakeholders to work out what that implementation process might look like. As you would appreciate, there is some timing complexity here with regards to the school year and the way the students move through schooling. Any change to recognition or attainment needs to think about the cohorts that are in years 9 and 10, as well as those that are in the middle of years 11 and 12. It's a staging process, and we wouldn't want to negatively impact on those students that are about to approach years 11 and 12. We'd have to work through that carefully.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I really want to applaud your work on violence in schools and stamping it out. If homes are ideally the safest place in Australia, then I'd hope that schools are our next safest places. You announced the action plan for I think 2026 through 2028 and, at the time, you said that violence has no place anywhere in our community, especially in our schools. Then you said everyone should be safe at work. I'm sure everybody at this committee would agree. My question is: would you please advise how the action plan is being rolled out and what can school communities expect in the future?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. You're quite right; violence has no place anywhere in our society and it's devastating when we certainly see it in homes, in our community, but especially in our schools, which we do want to be a safe and beautiful place for children to learn and grow.

We have invested significantly into supporting schools, and we certainly have taken action in this area. In February, I announced the Violence in Schools - Keeping Staff Safe Action Plan. This action plan is backed by a \$15.5 million investment, which is really important. It's not an action plan that's just out there for us all to think about; there's really solid resourcing behind this. It focuses on prevention. We have seen some incredible work being done by the department in the area of how to respond when there's an incidence of violence in schools. How do we support students? How do we support our teachers? But this action plan is actually really focusing on prevention - how do we stop it before we actually get to an escalated circumstance? It's responding clearly and consistently if violence does occur and ensuring that staff members affected receive appropriate support.

This action plan identifies five priority areas, targeted effort where it's needed the most, which is really just focusing on schools and areas of the highest need; increased training and support for staff in preventing and responding to violence; improve flexible learning options, for students who might be struggling to regulate their behaviour, say, in a traditional classroom setting; strengthen systems and data collection to deepen our understanding of violent incidents and identify effective interventions; and enhance system support and policy responses to ensure staff safety remains a core priority. Of course, my job now, as minister, is to see that implemented, which I'm delighted to say the implementation is well and truly underway.

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One of the earliest actions that we delivered was to establish two learning and support hubs in primary schools. These hubs are now fully operational and providing really intensive support for our students. Our students are remaining engaged in their learning while receiving that wrap-around support that makes such a huge difference to them. A really strong connection to the classroom is always maintained with communications, with families.

Another major focus of the action plan is equipping staff with the skills and confidence to prevent and respond to unsafe behaviour. Our funding is being provided for every teacher assistant to attend a tailored professional learning program. That's including training in those areas of de-escalation I mentioned before: how do we stop it before it starts? What are the indicators that a little person's or a big person's behaviour is starting to escalate? Because we know it's often our TA's who are working with our most complex students. It's training in a trauma-informed way and supporting students with disability and essential safety training.

We've also commenced professional learning networks across approximately 20 schools, again, really looking at those with the highest needs and these networks enable educators to collaborate, share effective practice and strengthen trauma-informed approaches to behaviour.

Also had a real focus on our early career teacher induction. We've really made sure that we've been able to strengthen that. Ensuring our early career teachers understand behaviour management, incident reporting and safe intervention strategies. The very first day that they walk into a classroom, as a brand-new teacher, they will already have had real investment into that. Some really important work being done there.

CHAIR - The minister's time has expired.

Ms PALMER - Thank you so much.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, the gifts, benefits and hospitality register from the department shows that, in the past two years, \$196,000 worth of sponsorship was provided to the department to embark on study tours to understand the multi-schools model.

Ms PALMER - Mm'hmm.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you went on a trip to the UK -

Ms PALMER - I did.

Mr WILLIE - and then on 9 September in 2025, mere months after \$150,000 of that sponsorship was handed over in May and July 2025, the Tasmanian government announced a trial of the Multi-Schools Organisation (MSO) program. Was your trip to the UK or that of any of your staff covered by all of the disclosed sponsorships?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I believe it was through the Susan McKinnon Foundation - and what an extraordinary opportunity to go firsthand with the Susan McKinnon Foundation but, primarily, with the researchers from the Grattan Institute. The huge work that was done by the Grattan Institute led them to an outcome that this was a model we should be trialling right across Australia. The study tour I went on, I also went on with members of the Victorian Labor Cabinet and I had deputy secretaries from our department joining other officials from Victoria.

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It was such an eye-opener and, particularly, in the turn around that we saw in schools in low socioeconomic areas. It was absolutely phenomenal. Everything was declared as it should be. And based on the research from the Grattan Institute, based on the personal experience that we had, the fact that the secretary also went on a study tour, who came back having, I think - well, I would never want to verbal her - but also truly inspired by what we saw. As I say, especially in those schools, in those low socioeconomic areas, the change was breathtaking and, at times, we were just left mouth wide open.

Mr WILLIE - You and I both know it hasn't worked in other areas.

Ms PALMER - That's actually an incorrect statement, Mr Willie. As I said, this has been rolled out in the UK over 20 years and we have the benefit of being able to see the areas where they didn't roll it out well, what we've been able to learn from that and you know one of the schools that I went to, it was actually the subject of a documentary six years before 2024 and it was the worst school in England. That's what the documentary was called. Six years later I visited that school and it was phenomenal. Do you know when their attendance rate dips below 98 per cent, they have an intervention. Their educational outcomes are stunning, their attendance is stunning. They have teachers wanting to work at this school. We saw it and it's formed part of the evidence from the thorough research that's been done by the Grattan Institute, and I was delighted to be able to have the federal education minister, Jason Clare, come to Tasmania, meet with our principals, because he is also interested in what we're doing here in Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - How much did your trip cost and were any ministerial staff on the trip?

Ms PALMER - I can confirm that my chief of staff came on that trip with me. I think I would need to take on notice the exact amount. No, I'd need to take on notice. I know that it was all completely declared, you might have it in front of you there, but I don't want to guess.

Mr WILLIE - So you'll take your costs on notice. How much will the McKinnon Foundation receive in return funding from the state government relating to the oversight, evaluation and monitoring of the trial?

Ms PALMER - No, not McKinnon. There is no return to McKinnon directly is what I'm advised.

Mr BAYLEY - I think in relation to Mr George's question, the secretary mentioned the Tasmanian Assessment Standards and Certification (TASC) component of the department, and we're hearing regularly from teachers that TASC is already pretty understaffed and is struggling to rewrite curriculum and courses, and it's been indefinitely extended. Sometimes we don't have updated curriculums. Can you talk us through how TASC is going to be treated when it comes to the efficiencies, because from what we hear and what we understand, it's already struggling to cope with the job of updating curriculum and courses, and as we know, some of our education outcomes are wanting. How are you treating TASC in the context of the efficiencies?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Mr Bayley, and through you, Chair, if I could invite the Director of Education Regulation, Mr David Tilley, up to the table?

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. Welcome.

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Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I'll hand firstly to the secretary.

CHAIR - Sorry, minister. Could you introduce the new person and title to the table for the benefit of Hansard?

Ms PALMER - Yes, sure. So, I've just invited to the table the Director of Education Regulation, Mr David Tilley.

Ms WEBSTER - So thank you, through you, minister. Mr Bayley, certainly all our areas will be expected to participate in the financial sustainability process that we'll be going through. We haven't directly spoken to the education regulation area yet, which is obviously a whole area, not just TASC, but I would be regularly engaging with the board chair around what savings we do need to find from all our areas. But again, that will be in a very sustained, measured way, making sure that we don't affect that service delivery. We know that they perform a really important function, but we would expect that they would be part of that process that we're going through.

Mr TILLEY - Thank you. Through your minister, the resourcing for TASC is provided through a framework agreement between the Board and the Secretary of the Department. In response to the independent Deloitte Review that was undertaken after the 2024 exam period, additional resourcing has been provided to TASC, an additional two FTE for two years, in addition to a one FTE project manager for a year, to undertake the implementation of those recommendations.

Mr BAYLEY - And so, that's for two years. Do you envisage TASC requiring additional resources to implement those recommendations beyond that or are you comfortable, and I guess this is a question also for the minister, is TASC expected to wear a 10 per cent efficiency or cut to its budget in line with what you're applying across the department?

Ms PALMER - I believe the Secretary referenced that in her answer that, yes, that is part of the work.

Mr BAYLEY - My question is, is it 10 per cent or are you evenly spreading that 10 per cent across everyone?

Ms PALMER - No. We've been really clear to say, we've been upfront and honest about that 150 mark, but where that comes from is the work that needs to be done now. Where is their duplication? Where is there not duplication? Where are the areas where we need it to remain exactly where it is? Where are the areas where we can use other means and get a better outcome and be more efficient?

This is not 'everybody look at your little silo, it's 10 per cent'. That's not how this is working and I think that's what the secretary was alluding to before. We know what the target is, but we have to be really careful and really sensitive in how we will do that right across that back office and that corporate side of the work we do.

Mr BAYLEY - The question to Mr Tilley about the two FTEs and the additional FTEs, through you, minister, are you confident that the roll out of the recommendations and the capacity of TASC will be completed at the conclusion of those two years for those positions?

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Mr TILLEY - At this stage, the project is underway to address those recommendations. As we close in towards the end of this year, we will have a better idea as to what it looks like as far as our resourcing needs are, because several of the recommendations relate to the processes that TASC undertakes and that may result in changes to the way we go about our work which may alleviate some of those constraints.

Prof RAZAY - I'm really concerned about what I heard this morning about how to measure success in education beyond year 10. As I pointed out in a previous question, according to an Australian Government 2024 report, the accord, found that by 2050 90 per cent of school students will need to go to university or TAFE. I feel part of our poor retention after year 10 is probably related to us failing them before that.

Just to give you evidence of some of the data, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority data shows a decrease in students attending school for at least 90 per cent of the time since 2019. For example, in 2024, only 53.7 per cent of year 1 to year 10 students at Tasmanian Government schools had overall attendance of 90 per cent or higher. This is compared with closer to 70 per cent in 2019, so what measures have we got to improve, even attending to school before year 10 because that's how we can motivate them to continue education after that.

Ms PALMER - So, your question is more around attendance? I just want to clarify.

Prof RAZAY - Attending to school even before year 10 there is quite a lot of lack of attendance before that.

Ms PALMER - Okay. Attendance is something that we have had a real focus on. It's certainly been a real focus in our schools. There are a number of different ways that we are certainly doing all we can to work in the attendance space. From a big picture aspect, investment in things like school breakfast program and the school lunch program is something that we hear anecdotally encourages parents to make sure their children get to school because it helps in that cost-of-living space. We also have student support counsellors in our schools that help navigate a range of supports. We have the Every School Day Matters campaign, which highlights the importance of that regular school attendance. So, that's a campaign that's running out across social media, digital platforms, also rolled out via free-to-air TV, it's got a website where it's actually talking to the importance of every single day does matter and it's talking to students, but it's also talking to families as well. You know, if you're a parent and your child's, like, 'I don't want to go today', well, that could be the day that they meet a new friend, that they learn something that sets them on a trajectory, you know, into a career that they hadn't thought of before.

But also, our schools have a responsibility as well, to look at their attendance data and we see some fantastic initiatives in our schools where they are rewarding children and celebrating children that do have that really high attendance, but also children who, you know, may have low attendance, but they're making improvements and that's celebrated as well. And I do think it is important to accept that there are some really complex reasons why some children don't attend school and we have to be really respectful of that as well. That's where we look at other ways of reaching those children; the Tier 4 work that we do where for a young person, going to school may just not be something that they are capable of doing. So, we look at how do we actually reach them so that we can continue their education as well? I think that answers your question.

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Prof RAZAY - Thank you.

CHAIR - Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - Thank you, Chair. I only have another 15 questions from teachers.

Ms PALMER - Okay.

Mr GEORGE - I noted that many teacher's assistants, in fact most teacher's assistants in Tasmania are not rewarded on the commensurate rate with the mainland, and teachers tell me they're struggling to maintain classes with students with disabilities and neurodiverse issues, mainly because they're not being offered enough support to cope and that's obviously a real worry. It's one issue that arises from the lack of teacher's assistants to provide support for teachers. Will you give a guarantee now that teacher's assistants will not be amongst the job cuts or efficiencies that the government's planning over the next few years? And when will you start paying teacher's assistants as a full-time job and not leave them short over school holidays.

Ms PALMER - Chair, there's a couple of elements, a couple of questions in your question. I'll start by saying no, teacher's assistants are considered frontline workers so that is not who we are looking at, so I'll answer that question simply with that.

With regard to their payment, I'll hand to the Secretary on that, but I will just say there are really differing points of views among teacher assistants about what some might like and what some don't want. There are some teacher assistants who I think do lobby that they would like it to be a full-time position. There are other teacher assistants who don't want that to be the case because they actually want to be -

Mr GEORGE - As in any profession.

Ms PALMER - they want to have, you know, the school holidays. We see that a lot with parents that that works for them to have all of the school holidays where they don't work.

We have also tried to put forward a really flexible option that I believe is open for teacher assistants to choose where they can actually be paid regularly over an entire school year, which for some, for budgeting for them, that works better, whereas others prefer to be paid in the weeks that they work and not have that payment over the school holidays.

So, as you can appreciate, there's such, you know, differing opinions about what teacher assistants would and wouldn't like. And as you acknowledge, we see that across all professions, don't we? But with regard to payment, I'll hand to the Secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, through you, minister, certainly the teacher assistant remuneration comes under the Public Sector Union Wages Agreement, so that's obviously recently been negotiated. What I will say is that the minister mentioned and I'll agree, that there is flexibility, requested around some of those teacher assistants and whether they're fixed-term or whether they're full-time.

Many of them appreciate that flexibility that they get with school holidays, having school holidays off. There has been a significant increase in our teacher assistants over a period of time, I think the figures that I've got for the last 12 months indicate that there's been an increase

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of around 363 commencements of teacher assistants. The most recent figure, and I have to confirm that, sorry, we have around 983 increase since 2014 and 2026 in teacher assistants. I think the most recent data I have was around 3000 teacher assistants. The minister mentioned that we're just undertaking the Training for Violence in Schools Action Plan. There's training happening on Friday. There's around 1100 teacher assistants enrolled in that training. We're also recording that training so that can be provided as an online option for teacher assistants in the future.

In my visits to schools, I would say I've seen the valuable work that teacher assistants do and you certainly mentioned that often they're working with some of our more complex students and I think we recognise that and we are working to provide them more training, but also we've been just recently working with the unions to make sure as we move forward with implementation of the Teacher Agreement that we acknowledge that teacher assistants play a vital role in schools. We need to make sure they're properly trained for that role as well. So that's what we're doing as well.

In terms of targeted funding for educational adjustments for students with a disability, in 2026 there was \$86 million invested by the department in relation to providing targeted adjustments and support for a whole range of students with various needs. We're aware that it is an area that we do need to invest in.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister and to your team, I'd like to ask in my two rotations of questions, first on literacy and then on numeracy. Starting with literacy, as I earlier expressed a view that I believe that you and your department are doing a brilliant job in the literacy space, in particular the Premier's particular interest in lifting literacy, which is of course whole-of-government and I'd like to ask you if you could share about the progress of lifting literacy in our system just generally and noting that as I discussed with the Attorney-General in his Estimates only yesterday, the extent to which there's some support being provided to the Tasmanian Prison Service, because as we know, literacy, or should I say illiteracy in prison inmates is so much higher than the statewide or national average. I would like to seek your update on the Lifting Literacy project in general and whether you had any information at the table or could take it on notice about how it might be going in supporting prison staff and the volunteers.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, your question is around how Lifting Literacy is supporting in our prisons?

Mr FERGUSON - More generally, but then I have been following with the Attorney progress of seeing the upskilling of volunteers and workers in prisons. Perhaps it's not available at the table, but I know that that was something that Libraries Tasmania had as part of their role to take that lead.

Ms PALMER - I invite the Executive Director of Libraries Tasmania to the table, Mr Patrick Gregory. We are doing a lot of work in the adult literacy space. In fact, we have a new iteration of the adult literacy strategy that is under development now, which is exciting to see. I might ask Mr Gregory if he would comment on the specifics of your question.

Mr FERGUSON - And if it's OK with the chair, I'll just mention as well so that not to be fair to your colleague, this of course relates to the implementation plan. There was one of

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the recommendations that talked about prison work. I think it might have been No. 15 and Libraries Tas is the lead.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you, and through you minister, on the adult literacy front, yes, there's been a lot of really good work done in the last couple of years in that space. There's been additional funding through the Tasmanian Prison Service for 2.4FTE Adult Literacy Support Officers to implement a new program working with prisoners. I understand there's a review of that program happening at the moment, but certainly the results have been really positive to date and I'm hoping that review will be completed soon.

There's been a wide range of work done in the in the prison library area. We've improved the collections over the last couple of years. Historically, prison libraries unfortunately tend to get a lot of donations, but we've taken a much more intentional approach to providing the library there with the sort of reading materials the people in Rison Prison would want to read. I know there's a lot of work going on at the moment to find space to establish a library service in the women's prison at Risdon to increase the reading opportunities for people there.

Mr FERGUSON - That's tremendous. Could I just please clarify, Chair and ask if it would be okay to just clarify on one point. Is the work that's happening through the Lifting Literacy that deals with the engagement between Libraries Tasmania and the Tasmanian Prison Service. I hope it is also undergoing the kind of upskilling in line with what's happening in our schools structured literacy, explicit instruction and phonics? Because that's what's making such a big difference with our children. Is the same kind of change in practice happening in the prison?

Mr GREGORY - I think the approach that we take with the adult literacy services, yes, still based on that explicit instruction approach and that's something that's being worked on across the entire adult literacy service, not just in the prison.

Mr FERGUSON - I am so pleased to hear that.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. I'm just going to ask one question and then hand over to my colleague Ms Haddad. It's the last question on the MSO. Will funding from the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement be used as part of the MSO and what's the total cost of the trial?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. We will get that information for you. I can confirm that funding is coming from the BFSA around the work that we're doing with MSOs as it certainly aligns to the pillars that are set out for the use of that funding in consultation between states and the federal government. But for further details, I will hand to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. We have had seed funding allocated from the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and that allocation was \$600,000 in 2025, which was the development phase leading up to the launch of the first MSO. And there's \$500,000 allocated per calendar year for 2026-2027, and the majority of that funding allocation is for the evaluation of the MSO.

Ms HADDAD - Minister, I wanted to return to the topic that Mr Bayley asked about earlier, and you read from a prepared statement in response to Mr Bayley's question. I do hope that you might be able to not repeat the written statement in response to my question. In that answer you did reference the guidelines the Premier has talked about earlier in the week.

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Those guidelines include the need for Cabinet approval when a minister requests their legal fees to be paid by the state. We've asked questions of each of your Cabinet colleagues this week. As far as we can tell from the answers that have been provided, there was a Cabinet decision prior to 2024 for Ms Ogilvie's legal fees to be paid for a matter that she has initiated in the Supreme Court. Then in November last year when she was asked in Estimates if she was a party to any Supreme Court matters, she answered with very clear one word answer, 'no', and that was a misleading statement. My question, minister, to you is, when did you become aware that Ms Ogilvie misled parliament with that statement?

Ms PALMER - Ms Haddad, these are complex matters, particularly given confidentiality requirements, and I won't be commenting any further.

Ms HADDAD - Okay, I understand. I do want to be really clear. I am acutely aware that there's a broad suppression order placed by the Supreme Court on whatever the matter that Ms Ogilvie has in the court, and I don't intend to go anywhere near anything that would breach that suppression order. My question is not about what is happening in the courtroom and it's not about even when that cabinet decision was made to cover legal fees. It is about when it was known that Ms Ogilvie misled parliament in November last year, because all of us as MPs do have an obligation if we do mislead to correct the record at the earliest opportunity. But from what we can garner from Estimates this week from your colleagues, Ms Ogilvie misled parliament six months ago and nothing happened, nobody did anything about it. Were you aware in November last year or at any time since then, that Ms Ogilvie's statement was a misleading statement and that the Premier and other Cabinet colleagues didn't do anything about that.

Ms PALMER - Ms Haddad, as I've already said, with the greatest of respect, this is a complex matter, and I won't be commenting any further.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, we've spoken about the redundancy program, and we understand the extent or impact of the cuts and efficiencies identified for the department to 10 per cent. I think I heard 145 roles or so within the department, if that's correct. One of the things that's missing in the Budget is an explicit line item that deals with redundancies and how we pay for redundancies and how that all kind of levels out across the years, especially, the early years. In really layman's terms, given the figures that are in the Budget, could you talk us through how you expect the budget line items for appropriation to be able to deliver both the services and then also, obviously, pay for the redundancies. From a layman's perspective, it would involve greater payments in the early years, with savings in the outer years. Can you talk us through exactly how, from a budget line-item perspective, as is published, how that redundancy program is going to roll out?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. In a previous Estimates committee, the head of the State Service said her expectation was that was for individual secretaries of departments to manage. With that in mind, I'll pass to my secretary. Thank you.

Mr BAYLEY - I mean by the numbers in that context, not necessarily the process, but the numbers as they're written in the budget.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. It will be up to us, as an agency, once we understand what the quantum is because it will need to know how many redundancy applications, we actually receive. Some of those people will have been in the organisation for

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longer periods than others or shorter periods than others. We will need to work through that in some detail. The earlier in the financial year that process is undertaken, the easier it will be for us to know what that quantum is. But we will have to work through that as an agency to determine what the quantum is and then how we fit that within our budget.

Mr BAYLEY - Does it mean there's an element of sort of rubberiness in the figures here because of the uncertainty around the redundancy program? Would you accept that?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister. I would accept that we don't know what that figure is yet and we will be working through that as we get the redundancy applications. As we said, we don't know what that looks like yet.

Mr BAYLEY - In relation to these roles, I'm really interested in AI and the rollout of AI across government. There's \$4.5 million in the budget for AI rollout across the public service. The AI initiative register that was promised 18 months ago still hasn't been stood up and established. It is difficult to understand and track this. My questions are explicitly: how is the department going to integrate AI into its work? How many jobs do you expect it to be able to replace? In the absence of that AI initiative register, how are you going to be transparent about the use of AI across the department in relation to employment and also fulfilling the functions of the department?

Ms PALMER - Yes, really good questions. It is such a rapidly emerging area of focus right across community, but certainly across education departments across Australia. Governments and schools are really actively exploring what the potential is to enhance teaching, learning and, of course, administrative efficiency. For someone of my age, I find it all quite confronting, to be honest. I'm a bit of a sceptic in this space. If you ask any of my four children, they think it's absolutely brilliant. We have to come at this with really careful consideration, which is certainly my expectation.

Mr BAYLEY - Absolutely concur with that.

Ms PALMER - Concerns on data privacy, academic integrity are some of the things we have to be looking at - also ethical use. The department is preparing to launch a range of proof-of-concept pilots this year, exploring the use of AI tools for teachers and students in personalised learning, curriculum design, workforce support and efficiency. These pilots form part of the department's response to the Independent Education Review, recommendation 7, which is;

Consider partnering with other organisations and education jurisdictions to inform Tasmania's position on expanding the safe and effective use of digital teaching and learning tools, especially to improve outcomes for disadvantaged and special needs students.

Also, from that same report, finding 11, which was continuity of curriculum and consistent teaching practices are crucial to support student engagement across key transition points. They're also aligned to key priorities such as lifting literacy and making time for teaching.

The department has an artificial intelligence working group established to progress that work, and my understanding is that the group is represented on the whole of government AI

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working group to ensure visibility and coordinated oversight of AI projects through the government digital and data committee. I will see if there's anything more that the secretary would like to add.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, one thing - AI definitely has a role as does emerging technologies in as we look at avoiding duplication, making sure we can be financially sustainable, but I did hear the Department of Justice Secretary make the comment yesterday that people are accountable, not AI. I think that's the approach we will obviously be continuing to take. Our people are accountable. We have the added complexity of schools and students often knowing more, certainly more than I do, around AI. We will be taking a really cautious and careful approach, but we do need to acknowledge it is part of our future.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you see that part of those 10 per cent of roles that will be 'lost' within the back office? Do you see some or many of them being taken up or the functions they were delivering addressed by AI? Is that a sort of strategic intention of the department?

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, It's far too early to speculate on what they might be. We do have to look at what technology can help us with, but what also is important that the humans remain doing. As I said, it is about people being accountable for their roles. We do have a lot of accountabilities within the department, so taking a really cautious approach, but we're certainly not at that stage.

Mr BAYLEY - Transparency in the AI initiative -

Prof RAZAY - Worker compensation claims are rising and rising rapidly. It cost our Tasmanian government, in 2024-25, \$373.3 million. Of these, \$24,760,000 were in the education department. Could you please update us on the current budget claim cost? What is the number of active workers compensation claims in education and what proportion are due to psychological injuries? How many teachers are completely off work due to worker compensation and what proportion of them went back to work?

Ms PALMER - I think there're nine questions in your question there. I will start off and get the department to do their very best to answer. If we miss any, let us know. I got up to nine. One of the things we're doing at a really high level is looking at how do we prevent ourselves from getting to that position.

Chair, could I welcome to the table the Acting Deputy Secretary People and Culture, Cameron Dinnessen.

A lot of the initiatives we're putting in place are how can we actually support teachers in improving their wellbeing and reducing those workers compensation rates. I've already spoken about the violence in schools, Keeping Staff Safe action plan, looking at what can we do in that preventative area. We also have our School Staff Wellbeing Response team now, a dedicated team to support staff. They work really closely with principals to build a proactive wellbeing culture, strengthening each school's capacity to support its workforce now and into the future. We also have the department's Wellbeing Connect service and it offers a range of wellbeing supports for individuals, teams and schools. That's including individual counselling, traumatic incidents, response and recovery, as well as proactive workplace mental health and wellbeing programs. There is a lot that is happening in that preventative area, which is really important. Now, a number of your questions went to some dollars and figures. I will pass to the secretary.

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Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, through you minister. I would just make an overarching statement that we are really wanting to make sure we don't injure our workers. The most important thing when our workers are injured at work, we want to make sure we work with them to get them back to work as soon as possible because that's the best thing for them and the best thing for us as well. We have a new program of Wellbeing Connect, which launched in August last year, that's provided to all staff within the agency, including our staff in schools and that's approximately \$1040 million per annum we invest into that program. We're really keen to make sure that we invest in those proactive counselling sessions. What do we need to do in our workplaces to make them safer from physical injury, but also, psychosocial injury. Cameron has some more up-to-date figures than I have on that basis.

Mr DINNESSEN - Yes, I do. In regards to education claims themselves, as of 31 March 2026, there were 297 open claims within the education portfolio: 147 claims were from teachers, principals and assistant principals; 36 staff are back at work or receiving medical treatment only, but the claim remains open for other reasons; 100 are either totally or partially incapacitated, and/or participating in a graduated return to work; and 11 are no longer employed with the department, either retired, resigned or contracts have ceased.

Mr GEORGE - Thank you very much Chair. I think this develops a little bit on Prof Razay's questions. In my conversation with teachers, they tell me Tasmania struggles to retain experienced teachers as well as to attract young graduates. My own reading of surveys of principles, vacancy data, industrial disputes, government workforce planning, everything seems to point to ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. One issue is obviously burnout, another is accommodation and a central one is salary structures. Now, from what I can assess, graduate teachers are paid well below the average of mainland states. I am informed that there is a gap of about \$12,000 to \$70,000 at the senior classroom teacher level. Can the department give me some data about schools: Which schools have staff shortages and what levels of staff shortages are there? Can they give me some data about staff retention? Student graduate levels of employment? In other words, a comprehensive picture of where losses and gains are made.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Through you chair, I'd like to call to the table Trudy Pearce. Trudy is the Deputy Secretary for schools and early years. Thank you very much for the question, I will just make some opening comments before I pass to the secretary and the deputy secretary. Our government has employed record numbers of staff to provide in-school support, including more than 484 teachers and 983 teaching assistants. That's additional staff since 2014 and allocated \$3.5 million over four years in the 2024-25 budget towards actually attracting and retaining teachers in schools that have historically faced staffing levels. I've talked to you a bit about the Violence In Schools Action Plan, which was as a direct result from communications and consultation with our teachers about what they needed to support them better in the classroom. But we also recognise we have a collaborative partnership with the University of Tasmania to ensure students are being trained today and have the knowledge and skills that set them up for what teaching is in 2026 and beyond. It's been really good to work with the university to say we need to have a better connection and understanding of ensuring the people who are coming out of the University of Tasmania and into our classrooms are actually classroom ready, which has been really good.

We certainly are doing all we can to attract teachers to our schools in Tasmania. We know there is a teacher shortage right across the country. A couple of initiatives in particular that we have put in place is a financial incentive, for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools.

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Some of those schools that have some extra complexities, there is a financial benefit for teachers who stay working in those schools.

We also have a financial incentive for teachers who commit to working in some of our more remote and regional schools. We're also investing quite heavily in our teacher accommodation, especially in those remote areas. Fantastic to see I think it was 21 upgraded units in Queenstown. We have four homes in Smithton being built. Because we know, especially in those hard-to-staff schools or in those really remote areas, for teachers to come home at the end of the day and have good, warm, nice, new, contemporary upgraded facilities or new facilities is really important. We're doing a lot in this area to ensure we are attracting teachers through a number of different ways. I will pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. In terms of a couple of the questions, Mr George. In terms of retention, as the minister mentioned, it is a priority for us. We have a Tasmanian education workforce round table that includes the unions, the university, the Peter Underwood Centre, for example. We also have targeted investment in reduction in violence in schools, increasing support for school wellbeing, for staff wellbeing, strengthening those career pathways and early teacher career development.

In 2025-26 fewer teachers did leave - I'm talking about state government schools, obviously - 353 teachers left the workforce in 2025, which is a smaller number than 2024-25, where it was 370, and in 2023-24, the number was 402. Whilst we don't want to see any of our teachers leave, we know that career progression, for example and moving on to different roles, whole range of reasons, it is less than what it was.

The minister also mentioned the hard to staff and school incentives. Whilst it's not ratified in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission yet, the new teacher agreement retains the hard-to-staff school incentives and expands eligible schools by three, and there will be a 12-month pilot for all educational support personnel as well at those schools.

We acknowledge that there is work to do. The minister also mentioned the teacher residence program, which has invested \$15 million from 2024 upgrading those teacher residences. In terms of the number of vacancies, the deputy secretary has more up-to-date data on that.

CHAIR - Sorry, minister, just in lieu of time, we will just keep things moving. We can come back to answer the rest because this has gone nearly five minutes now - this answer. We can swing back to it.

Ms PALMER - We do have the answer for you.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I want to remind you about a wonderful visit we took to Summerdale Primary School about a year ago. We saw structured literacy and explicit instruction being delivered in a classroom. We heard directly from literacy specialist teacher Emma - who, by the way, I taught in high school, I'm very proud of that. We also caught up about the benefits of evidence-based teaching. I won't have to remind you about sitting in on that lesson that we did and see that approach in practice. For the benefit of others in the room, let me tell you, the kids were so focused; the cameraman dropped his tripod, made a great big noise at the back of the classroom and not a single child turned around.

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Mr GEORGE - They were bored?

Mr FERGUSON - That's how focused they were. Given the success of the government's Lifting Literacy initiative - they were not bored; they were focused, Mr Willie.

Ms PALMER - They were certainly not bored.

Mr WILLIE - I didn't say that.

Mr FERGUSON - Whoever said that.

Ms PALMER - I think it was Mr George.

Mr FERGUSON - Mr George. My word, you should focus here.

Ms PALMER - Teaching's changed since you were at school.

Mr FERGUSON - That right - practice has changed. I understand that from next year our primary schools will be required to teach at least an hour of structured numeracy each day as part of the Strengthening Numeracy initiative. I'd like you to please explain the initiative, how schools will be supported and what benefits you expect to see.

Ms PALMER - That was a beautiful day at Summerdale Primary School, wasn't it? We are firmly committed to improving student outcomes and ensuring every child has access to high-quality evidence-based teaching. We're also committed to ensuring teachers and leaders have the tools they need to deliver high-impact teaching, building their confidence and skills and reducing workload, which is important.

Recommendations and findings from the Independent Education Review said to stay the course with literacy whilst also undertaking smaller-scale evidence-based initiatives like numeracy for schools that are ready to do that. The report highlighted that being literate and numerate increases a young person's ability to engage in their chosen field of learning and sets them up for future success. Our structured literacy and numeracy reforms are backed by significant investment and strong support from teachers and school leaders.

Schools received \$12 million in literacy resources in 2025, and our 2026-27 Budget allocates a further \$16.7 million over four years. We're keen to leverage on the success that we've seen with literacy and our newly released Strengthening Numeracy Implementation Plan outlines an evidence-based structured and systematic approach to mathematics instruction within a multi-tiered system of supports, and that's important.

This plan will provide the strategic direction for improving numeracy outcomes and it certainly aligns with the work we're doing in lifting literacy. As I say, the plan will be supported through our investment of \$16.7 million over four years. This investment is giving teachers and school leaders the confidence, capability and support they need to deliver that real lasting change in our classrooms.

Structured numeracy follows a carefully designed progression. Skills are introduced in an order that reflects how children actually learn mathematics, with each new concept building on what students have already mastered. For example, students develop strong number sense

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before moving into the more complex operations, and they practise foundational skills until they are automatic. The concepts are clearly explained. Teachers model how to solve problems step by step, giving students thorough practice and then gradually releasing responsibility as students gain confidence to work independently in that space. What we absolutely know is that explicit systemic, evidence-based teaching works. We are certainly seeing that success across literacy and we want to see those gains mirrored in numeracy as well.

CHAIR - It is the end of the rotation, so if the committee happy we will take a short break now and then we'll return with Mr Willie.

The committee suspended from 9.58 a.m. to 10.07 a.m.

CHAIR - Just before we get back to Mr Willie, I remind members that if you ask questions that have four, five, six, nine different answers in one, it's very hard for the minister to answer in the allotted timeframe, so please keep that in mind. I am happy to allow that to continue. It's been very cordial and respectful as long as everyone is happy with that, but obviously don't abuse the privilege. I do ask members to try to keep their questions short. Mr Willie was very fast; in fact, I think it's the fastest question I've ever heard someone ask in Estimates, it was nine seconds, so that was a record -

Mr FERGUSON - It's not a record to be proud of.

Mr WILLIE - It's called being direct.

CHAIR - Yes, so I ask that all members keep that in mind. Minister, I understand you want to add some additional information to an answer?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you, Chair. I took a question on notice from Mr Willie around the UK tour looking at the MSO study tour. The value of that was \$26,000. It was for myself and was sponsored by the McKinnon Foundation and I believe it was, in its entirety, declared through the proper process.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, there's been a lot of talk about literacy this morning, so I'll jump in on that and say that I've been a strong supporter of evidence-based literacy reforms for many years from opposition, and my own children have benefited from strong instruction in public schools, and a shout-out to the teachers and support staff working in our public system who are doing a great job. However, it is curious to me that the six-monthly reports from the Lifting Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group are no longer being published on the government website. Why is that the case?

Ms PALMER - I wasn't aware that it wasn't being published, but it is the Premier's group, so I'm not sure if that's a question that you might have to put to the Premier. I'll just see if I can get any more information.

Mr WILLIE - The last one was published in December 2024.

Ms WEBSTER - That would be published through the DPAC website. We can certainly endeavour to get some information for you, but that would be a responsibility of DPAC because it currently sits within their portfolio.

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Mr WILLIE - Okay.

Ms WEBSTER - They monitor literacy and it's run through the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Mr WILLIE - Would it be possible to get a copy of the reports from last year that aren't published on the website if you take that on notice?

Ms PALMER - It's not for me to make that commitment, but I'm happy to take that on notice and see what I can get for you.

Mr WILLIE - It is curious to me because it's been put to me by a number of people that whilst there's great work happening in some schools and very strong instruction, it's not consistent across schools and there are some issues with implementation and consistency. Do you have any comment on that as Education minister?

Ms PALMER - Well, that's what we're trying to do with our Lifting Literacy strategy, which is that regardless of postcode, children will have that one hour of structured literacy teaching each day. We're now moving into that space of numeracy as well. One of the things that I think I've already mentioned is making sure that we're sending the same resources to every school, putting the same resources in the hands of all our teachers, and in particular, into the hands of all of our students, no matter the size of the school or where it might be, whether it's on one of our islands or in the centre of Hobart.

We are seeing some really great outcomes in the literacy space and we're really proud of the work that is happening there. We're also getting really great buy-in from teachers, which I think is really important. I think the secretary mentioned a number of those results that we're seeing with regard to phonics levels and the Progressive Assessment Tests (PAT), which show increases in achievement across prep to year 10. In 2025, student achievement in reading increased by 1.3 percentage points from 2024, and interestingly, comparing Tasmania against like settings in NAPLAN testing, Tasmania is inner-regional, so when you look at other inner-regional school students, we're actually outperforming national counterparts, which is a great testament to our teachers and our kids as well. One of the things we have a real focus on is making sure that we are getting those resources to every school and into the hands of every teacher and every student consistently.

Mr WILLIE - We've had some talk today about violence in schools. I often ask these questions, and there's a series of them around suspensions and incidents. Would you like to take those on notice?

Ms PALMER - No, we have come to the table with the information, so ask away.

Mr WILLIE - I'd like the figures relating to the level of bullying in Tasmania schools for 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date; figures relating to the number of student-on-student assaults or other incidents of physical violence that occurred in Tasmanian schools in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date; figures relating to the number of student-on-teacher assaults or other incidents of physical violence that occurred in Tasmania schools in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date; figures relating to the number of workers compensation claims, including the category, for education employees in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date; the number of suspensions for bullying, harassment or stalking of another student in 2023, 2024, 2025 and

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the year to date; the number of suspensions for bullying, harassment, stalking of a teacher or other staff member in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date; the total number of suspensions in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date broken down by each grade; and the total number of suspensions for students in out-of-home care, the learning adjustments model, Tasmanian Aboriginal students and any other recorded cohorts in 2023, 2024, 2025 and the year to date.

Mr GEORGE - There are about 15 questions there.

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - Well, that's why I offered to put it on notice.

Ms PALMER - No, we've tried to come to the table with all the information.

Mr WILLIE - You knew I was going to ask.

Ms PALMER - I certainly did. My job is to stay one step ahead of you.

Mr WILLIE - Are you going to answer each of them or can you just table the answer?

Mr FERGUSON - It should be asked in a way that allows the minister to answer them in the time available.

Mr WILLIE - No, to be fair, you're allowed to ask whatever questions you like, and I'm not going to be dictated about that by you.

Mr FERGUSON - You can't expect all of that in three minutes.

CHAIR - Order, Mr Ferguson.

Ms PALMER - Mr Willie, do you have that in writing?

Mr WILLIE - I do, I can email it.

Ms PALMER - Could you email it through? We have brought all the data to the table but the secretary and I have been frantically trying to write each one down to make sure we didn't miss them, but there might be some that we can address immediately.

We're certainly committed to fostering a culture of safety and respect in our schools and our school staff work incredibly hard to try to understand the drivers causing unacceptable behaviour and they aim to reduce or remove harm and risks and also to really restore relationships. It is pleasing to note that the number of overall suspensions is reducing and multiple teams work with schools to provide support and expert advice. I'll turn to the secretary to start. Can I just check where your emailing that to, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - I'm just emailing our secretary.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. We'll make a start with some information here for you.

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Ms WEBSTER - Overall, suspensions across our schools have declined over the past three years. In 2024 the number of suspension incidents was 10,330, which was a decrease of 1020 incidents from 2023. Most of this decrease was for students in years 7 to 10 where there were 830 fewer incidents. For students in years 7 to 10, most of the decrease can be attributed to the decrease in the number of incidents for vaping, which was down by 546 incidents.

I know you asked a question around students in out-of-home care. We released the Sure Start Action Plan in 2024 to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. In 2025, 23.7 per cent of students in out-of-home care had been suspended. We would say that this information should be interpreted cautiously because that involves relatively small numbers, and even modest changes in student numbers can have a noticeable effect on the proportion reported.

In terms of the other information, we'll get that data for it. You wanted suspension data by cohort, I think.

Mr WILLIE - I've sent all the questions through.

Ms PALMER - That's all right. We'll keep going, we've got this here.

Ms WEBSTER - All DECYP students for 2025, 9601; First Nations students, 2520; students in out-of-home care, 396; and students with a disability, 4514. That's the total number of suspensions.

Ms PALMER - Not the actual students.

Ms WEBSTER - And that figure for students with a disability includes all students with an educational adjustment across all our schools.

The number of suspensions by year level were kindergarten, 8; prep, 164; year 1, 232; year 2, 329; year 3, 367; year 4, 509; year 5, 537; year 6, 684; year 7, 1612; year 8, 1974; year 9, 1604; year 10, 1368; year 11, 159; and year 12, 54. Again, that was the number of suspension incidents. Did you ask for students, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - I asked for a number of categories including the types of incidents and other things. To get all of the detail and the trend over the three years, I'm happy for you to take it on notice and provide it.

Ms WEBSTER - We can table it.

Mr WILLIE - But I'm not getting the previous years there, so we're not seeing the trend.

Ms WEBSTER - Okay, that's what we can table today.

Regarding physical abuse of another student, number of suspensions to give you an indication, in 2024 there were 2502; in 2025 there were 2304, so that's a slight reduction. You asked about physical abuse of a teacher or another staff member: in 2024 there were 274; and in 2025, 317.

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Mr WILLIE - Thank you. The last thing I'll say is that nobody expects this to stop because all society comes through the school gate. I ask these questions because it was trending up for a very long time and that's the feedback you get from teachers and school staff, so it'll be interesting to see how the Violence in Schools plan is actually having an impact.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely, looking particularly at those incidents of violence against teachers, which is you why we've done that big investment and that policy position on the Violence in Schools action plan.

Mr BAYLEY - I'd like to turn to literacy. We've had a conversation about student literacy a bit across the committee today but this is about adult literacy and particularly acknowledging 26Ten and the work they do. In many ways this is on behalf of Dr Woodruff who has been writing to you about the Geeveston Community Centre. Previously the 26Ten Communities pilot program was provided funding of \$145,000 per year for up to five years to participate in communities, including the Geeveston Community Centre and Neighbourhood Houses. It looks like under your Budget this is finished. During the extension period, DECYP and 26Ten worked closely with host organisations, including Geeveston, on continued pathways for community-based adult literacy support in 2026 and beyond.

Dr Woodruff asked your office about continued funding for 26Ten programs at Geeveston Community Centre for 2026 and beyond and you replied to say that the government would introduce the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Strategy 2026-35. You wrote:

26Ten is working on implementing activities and arrangements which will support the ongoing adult literacy services in the Geeveston community for the period of 2026-29.

Despite this, we see no mention in the Budget of the strategy, Adult Literacy or 26Ten at all, so my questions are really around when is the strategy going to be released, how much funding is attached to it and when will community centres expect the 26Ten program to commence this year?

Ms PALMER - Great. Again, a number of questions there. I might just ask Deputy Secretary Development and Support, Jodee Wilson, to come back to the table.

What I can say is with regards to the Geeveston Community Centre, manager contacted 26Ten on 20 May to advise they actually had an underspend of approximately \$80,000, and they were asking whether it was possible to extend the program until those funds were fully extended. And 26Ten is working with this community to determine how the funds can be best used in that community to support adult literacy.

But I'll ask the secretary to answer questions around the strategy.

Mr BAYLEY - So no resolution to that question of what happens with that funding, that underspend? Still working it through?

Ms PALMER - I understand 26Ten is working with the community in how best to use that.

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Ms WEBSTER - Just to commence, through you, minister: my understanding is that Tasmanian Adult Literacy Strategy will be launched in June, I believe, so I might hand to the Deputy Secretary for some of that detail.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister: Geeveston Community were advised that the underspend would be available to continue to support the literacy services for the remainder of this year. And then in relation to ongoing services to support adult literacy development, it'll be in line with the new Adult Literacy Strategy, which will be launched, I think, on 16 June.

Ms PALMER - It's certainly in the final stages of completion.

Mr BAYLEY - And funding - and the community centre's expecting the program to commence? Funding attached to the strategy?

Ms WILSON - There won't be the ongoing funding for the communities programs as they existed over the last five years. That was a time-bound allocation of funds. We've certainly been working with the communities, and each of those five communities had significant input into the development of the Adult Literacy Strategy going forward and the associated implementation plans.

We are working on transitional arrangements and we have been, over the course of the first part of this year, meeting with them regularly to determine their transitional plans. Through the work of the minister's 26Ten coalition, they've been involved in working with us and the communities to determine what's worked really well through those community programs, and what aspects of the learnings that we can take forward in the next iteration of the strategy.

Mr BAYLEY - Sorry, I'm a little confused. So, the strategy will be released 16 June. Is there explicit funding attached to implementing it?

Ms WILSON - There is existing funding within 26Ten that will be reassigned, to ensure that the implementation plan can be delivered in line with the objectives of the strategy.

Mr BAYLEY - But there's no funding in the Budget for this year or the forward Estimates for implementation of the Adult Literacy Strategy or 26Ten as a program rolled out through neighbourhood houses?

Ms PALMER - It's within its current budget. There's no additional funding.

Mr BAYLEY - So within its current budget as in what has been committed? For example, the \$80,000 underspend for Geeveston will have to fund the program going forwards. Is that what you're saying, effectively?

Ms WILSON - The support for Geeveston will continue until the underspend has been exhausted, and that will give us sufficient time to work with the resources that are available to us. The adult literacy services currently will undergo a review, and the outcome of that review will be looking to see in what way communities can be supported to deliver adult literacy supports to learners.

Mr BAYLEY - But you're confirming to me that there's no new money in the Budget? I'll take that as a yes.

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Prof RAZAY - Learning music, whether it's learning an instrument or memorising a song, is of great benefit, especially for children. We know that learning music improves their ability to learn, improve verbal memory, literacy and problem-solving. It improves engagement and bonding amongst students. It makes them feel great and motivated, and reduces stress and anxiety. Studies have shown it also reduces absenteeism from school on the music days, apart from improving their numeracy and literacy.

But I really feel there has been a lack of support of music teaching, in our public schools especially. There is a lack of providing a variety of musical instruments. And when there are budget cuts, the first thing probably you might cut will be music teachers. What I feel we need, really, is to motivate our kids at a time when they are under so much stress in our society, and that, I feel, is a way we can improve our education standards, too.

Ms PALMER - A couple of things there. First of all, I absolutely agree with your comments about the power of music, as someone who gave up one year before she fully qualified as a music teacher. If only my parents, my mother, had insisted, but I was a rebellious teenager. There were no budget cuts to frontline services. So, music teachers that are in our schools, there are no budget cuts. I want to put that on the table straight up.

One of the really exciting programs that we actually have, that we have invested in this year's Budget, is \$8.5 million over four years for Change2Teaching. This is a really exciting new initiative in partnership with the University of Tasmania to actually strengthen our teaching workforce and support our schools. So, Change2Teaching aims to attract mid-career professionals from other industries and other sectors who want to use their skills and experience to shape the next generation by switching into the teaching profession. Some of the examples I had here is it might be an accountant that could be a maths teacher; it could be a lawyer who wants to transfer into teaching; it could be a scientist who wants to come and do that. This new and innovative program mixes real-world classroom teaching as well as structured learning time. It provides a part-time teacher's salary, so it's reducing the financial barriers for participants. The Change2Teaching pilot is scheduled to launch in January of 2027.

I think that's possibly an area where there could be real opportunity for someone who has those qualifications in the music space who would then like to use those skills in schools. We really have a focus on trying to ensure that we can get some of those specialised teachers into our schools and I certainly agree with your comments about the power of music.

Prof RAZAY - That's great. I'm really pleased to hear that, and I think having people with a musical background or dancing background will help greatly in our education system.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, will you circulate that data that Mr Willie has requested to all members? Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Would you like us to answer your previous question?

Mr GEORGE - I was just about to come to it. My last question encompasses salary imbalances between mainland and Tasmanian teachers, but we stopped short on the data. Just to refresh, can you deliver some data about schools with staffing shortages, staff retention rates, student graduate levels? In other words, a comprehensive picture that provides a trend over recent years - much as Mr Willie has sought on another subject.

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Ms PALMER - Yes, I will ask Trudy Pearce to come back to the table. Trudy is the Deputy Secretary Schools and Early Years. She can answer that question with regard to the information around teaching levels in schools.

Ms PEARCE - Through you, minister: we're certainly aware of the pressures in relation to teacher recruitment and maintaining teachers in front of our children and young people every day. This year we started with a larger workforce in our teaching area than the year before, which is a positive start. And we're continuing to monitor that - so I have a live feed at all times in relation to our vacancies across the state, and where we need to provide extra support, we escalate that. We do have a number of schools currently at the moment where they have two vacancies or more. We are working with the leadership teams in those schools to ensure that we're looking at different strategies, including recruitment, including access to other staff who are in neighbouring schools, and supporting increased workload for people in part-time positions. We work with them in relation to their context to ensure we are providing a short-term teacher in front of every class, as well as the longer-term approach to that staffing situation, monitoring and tracking all our schools at all times.

Mr GEORGE - I'm looking for some raw data - trends.

Ms PALMER - Your question asked about the number of teachers at this point in time, positions?

Mr GEORGE - Yes, sure. You say that there are now more teachers than there were last year. That would be good to hear, but I'm asking for some data about staff shortages, loss of staff, as in retention rates, and student graduate levels.

Ms PEARCE - Currently at this point in time we have 23.5 vacancies across our schools, and that's this week. Last week at this time it was 17.5, so we do have that on a weekly basis that we can provide. I'll hand back to the secretary for the other data you require.

Ms WEBSTER - For the teacher attrition rate, in 2024-25, the average headcount was 370 and the attrition rate was 8.38 per cent, and in 2025-26 the average headcount was 353 and that rate is 6.23 per cent.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, we discussed some workload pressures in an earlier number of questions and as you've acknowledged, it is an issue for schools. I'd like to ask what you feel the government can be doing to relieve pressure on teachers and principals, whether that's removing some of the burden or providing additional support.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly, and thank you very much. We know that workload is probably one of the most significant challenges facing our teachers and school leaders right across the country. There's certainly been a national focus in this space, but here in Tasmania we have put a quite a huge emphasis on ensuring that anything we're asking of them has that lens of workload reduction over it. We really value our workforce and we continue to take strong and practical actions to relieve pressure that could be on our teachers and principals. Our focus is on ensuring that school staff have the time, support and resources they need to concentrate on what matters most, and that is of course being up the front of a classroom teaching, leading and supporting our students in their learning and wellbeing.

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Over the past decade we've invested heavily in Education. We've seen a 76 per cent increase since 2014, and this is now a \$2.2 billion Education investment. A recent Report on Government Services, ROGS, shows that Tasmanian schools have some of the lowest student-to-teaching staff ratios in the country, and it certainly remains below the national average, which is really fantastic.

Making School Time Count is an initiative we started which was all about improving workload reduction across our government schools and the work was really guided by the voice of our teachers and principals, also our school business managers. The AEU fed into this body of work as well, which was great. The initiative targets four key areas: stopping tasks that are no longer required; simplifying and streamlining processes; improving the way central staff work to minimise impacts on schools; and coordinating work across systems so that schools are not overloaded with competing demands.

Already our schools are seeing tangible benefits of this. Principals no longer receive daily email alerts for individual students' non-attendance. Instead they receive a single weekly summary. Unnecessary programs have been discontinued. We're reducing duplication and trying to free up teacher times. Major excursion forms have been digitised, enabling schools to communicate more effectively with parents and carers. Staff performance and development plans, PDPs, have been streamlined and a new learning plan module has been developed to simplify planning for teachers. We're also trialling an electronic student validation process that's replacing a nine-page paper form with two digital forms, and these changes are reducing that paperwork, improving efficiencies and giving teachers and principals time back in the day to be doing what they trained to do and what we know they love to do.

System-wide coordination is also delivering results. In term 3 of 2025, there was a 33 per cent reduction in the number of requests sent to principals compared with the same time in 2024. This is a direct outcome of improved planning, prioritisation and communication across the department. This is where -

CHAIR - The minister's time has expired.

Ms PALMER - I had so much more.

Mr WILLIE - We haven't really touched on infrastructure that much this morning. There are a number of projects around the state where communities are concerned, and with this one, I feel sorry for you, minister, because it's your boss who will say anything in election campaigns without thinking of the consequences that has caused this, which is the North West Support School hydrotherapy pool and community access. There are concerns around student health, scoping of the project and losing learning spaces because there's no additional funding to do this. What do you say to that community? I've been there and engaged with the school community and I know you have too -

Ms PALMER - I have.

Mr WILLIE - and they are very frustrated.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It's an extraordinary investment, \$62.15 million in funding for the North West Support School. It's actually the largest ever investment in upgrades to an existing government school, and we know that these new and

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upgraded facilities are much needed for our learners and families in the north-west. It was a commitment that with such a huge investment and the fact that there is going to be a hydrotherapy pool there, when the school is not using that facility it will be available to the public.

Mr WILLIE - After school hours?

Ms PALMER - That's being worked through at the moment. We are working through a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health on that, but we will always 100 per cent prioritise the school's use of that hydrotherapy pool for those students. This is a great opportunity for this amazing facility, that will be unused by the school in the school holidays and on weekends, to be available for people with disability and people in rehabilitation to be able to use that facility.

One of the other things that really resonates with me around this is that for children who go through the support school and have the use of the hydrotherapy pool, it's a really familiar place for them, so when they finish their schooling years, if that pool is being able to be used by the community, they can continue straight on; after they finish year 12 the very next year they can be back using that hydrotherapy pool. Also looking at it holistically for the community, there's some really great benefits as well for -

Mr WILLIE - You should fund it so they're not losing learning spaces. They're losing classrooms to provide the public access. That is what was reported in *The Advocate* the other day. They're having to rescope.

Ms PALMER - I believe there has been some rescoping, but that was done in conjunction with the school and was around ensuring that people didn't have to go through the school to access the hydrotherapy space. That was really important to the school and the conversations I've had with the principal that it needed to have its own security system. We didn't want people going through the school to access this facility, it needed to have an access for when it's used outside of school hours. I don't know if Kane has anything he wanted to add to that.

Mr SALTER - Just supporting what you're saying, minister. There hasn't been any major rescoping as a consequence of putting the pool in a spot where it has community use. More broadly, I would say there is a policy for all schools around being able to use facilities where it serves dual purposes. The minister and the government have been clear that where it's being used outside hours, there's no admin burden on the schools, hence we're negotiating the MOU with Department of Health.

Mr WILLIE - I'm aware of the time. I've got a couple of other ones that communities are frustrated with, one being Dodges Ferry Primary School Association. I've also visited that school and the infrastructure is under a lot of pressure there. They wrote to you saying they would like to thank you for your visit to their school on 15 May to hear about the opportunities and challenges facing their school. They say:

This included our concerns regarding appropriate funding of the school redevelopment and out-of-school hours care. We were dismayed this morning to see the announcement of the schools who would receive outside-school-hours care upgrade funds and Dodges Ferry Primary School

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was not among them when we had been assured from the outset that the OSHC upgrade would be integrated with the school redevelopment through specific after-school-hours care funding.

Ms PALMER - I've had a number of visits to Dodges Ferry and it's a beautiful school with a wonderful principal and I met with the school association as well. With regard to your comments about the out-of-school-hours care funding, that's only the first tranche we've announced. I can't remember if it's two or three schools. That's actually a \$10 million bucket of money and this was just the announcements of the first schools. I believe that we either have already or are responding to Dodges Ferry around that. The first three schools, the first three cabs off the rank, have been announced, and there are further announcements to be made in that space.

It was really good to tour the school - I've been there a couple of times - and to hear their concerns. There is a budget that has been allocated to that redevelopment. It's going to be a wonderful \$25 million upgrade to the school, and it was really good to be able to walk around with the principal and a member of the school association to see where they're going to be demolishing some areas and building some new beautiful learning spaces. It's really exciting that there's going to be that \$25 million investment.

Mr WILLIE - You made a commitment that they'll get after-school care as part of that \$10 million fund.

Ms PALMER - No, we have the \$10 million fund and there is a process that we go through and all we've announced is the first three schools. Howrah is actually the only school we made a commitment to and that's been announced.

Mr WILLIE - After your visit they clearly thought they were going to be included.

Ms PALMER - No, there was no such commitment, but that doesn't mean that's not going to happen. I'm just saying that there's a \$10 million bucket of money and we've only announced the first three schools. We're really excited that they are going to have this \$25 million upgrade, but there was certainly no commitment made that there was going to be an imminent announcement about further funding. They would be in the process along with other schools.

Mr WILLIE - This is my third question; I've done two schools and we're on the third. The other one which I've raised in the House is the Scottsdale Child and Family Centre. You initially said that the childcare part wasn't part of the original commitment, but you've now directed the department to consult again with the community. Do you have an update in terms of that long daycare service that's attached to that?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I certainly do. This is really exciting for the Dorset community and in particular the community in Scottsdale. I visited them personally and spent some time with some members of the Local Enabling Group (LEG). There are some very loud voices in that LEG and also some very quiet voices in that LEG as well. The LEG is the local enabling group. No one voice has more weight in the work that we're doing there, but having gone there and spent some time primarily talking with mums around the table, I felt that the need for child care was probably more than what the initial assessment had looked like. I was also really concerned that I was talking with mums who had extraordinary qualifications. One of the issues we have

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with child care there is actually getting workers in that space, but I was talking with mums who had qualifications but couldn't work because they couldn't get child care. I also met a mum who has a social worker qualification. I mean, we would love to have another social worker working across that community.

It's been really great. We're now in a position where we're able to go back to the community following the extensive work the department and my office has done. I came back from my meeting with the LEG and really challenged the team to say, 'I think you need to think outside of the box', because what the election commitment is able to offer, which is eight more long daycare spaces - because the community wants zero to five, they were very clear about that - I felt that was going to fix the problem for right now, but certainly not into the future, so we're going back with the option that is true to the election commitment, but also a further option which will see almost a doubling of long daycare places, plus out-of-school-hours care for that community. We take that back to the LEG and we want to get their feedback on those options, and that's in the process of happening now. It will be a really exciting outcome, I hope, for that community by trying to be flexible and identifying that perhaps there's a greater need than we initially thought.

Mr BAYLEY - I've got a couple of questions that relate to some of our more vulnerable student cohorts, namely Aboriginal students and some of our less able students. Firstly, in relation to Aboriginal Education Services and the business unit, I was at a fantastic event on Friday where a block of land was returned to the Aboriginal community under Kunanyi/Mount Wellington and it was truly uplifting, but I got feedback from a number of Aboriginal community members there around the fact that the position of manager of the business unit for Aboriginal Education Services is unfilled and has been for several years. What other business units have their management positions unfilled and why is it, if it is true, that the manager of Aboriginal Education Services is unfilled and has been for two years? What is the hold-up there? Why hasn't the department been able to fill that position to give that incredibly important unit the support it needs from the top?

Ms PALMER - I will pass to the department to answer the specifics on that, but will just say that we are committed to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student has a learning plan that is developed in partnership with their family and teachers. While we absolutely accept there is more work to do, it is worth noting that NAPLAN results for Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all year levels shows a smaller gap to their non-Aboriginal peers than the rest of Australia. The RoGS data actually shows Tasmania has continued to improve its attendance rates since 2022, and attendance rates for indigenous students in Tasmanian government schools are amongst the highest for all states and territories and above the national average, which is fantastic.

I would have to say one of the absolute highlights of my time as Education minister was a trip I took to Flinders Island where I had the extraordinary opportunity to go to the Cape Barren School. My gosh, it was absolutely beautiful. It was just a wonderful school to go to and I was so impressed with the young people and particularly with the staff member there - such commitment.

Mr BAYLEY - I concur with that. I've been there a number of times.

Ms PALMER - It's quite a moment, for sure.

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Mr BAYLEY - But to the manager position.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I'll pass to the secretary for that.

Ms WEBSTER - We have a staffing profile in Aboriginal Education Services of 20.8 FTE. A total 16.4 FTE is for identified Aboriginal positions and 17 Aboriginal employees are currently employed in Aboriginal Education Services. All of the FTE are permanent employees; there are no fixed-term. My advice is that the vacancy level reflects our normal workforce pattern, but I'm not aware of the issue you raise. I might ask Ms Wilson.

Ms PALMER - Chair, I've asked Jodee Wilson to return to the table - deputy secretary, development and support.

Ms WILSON - Yes, the manager position has remained unfilled for some time. Going back, we undertook a review of Aboriginal Education Services to ensure that the service to children and young people was fit for purpose. With the announcement of the establishment of the Office for Aboriginal Partnerships and Projects we deliberately deferred filling the manager position until that role is complete and once that office is established, the manager position will be recruited for.

Mr BAYLEY - When is that expected?

Ms WILSON - It's in train.

Ms WEBSTER - I think we're just finalising the statement of duties at the moment.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. To disability access and funding. There's \$5.5 million in the Budget for educational adjustments for disability funding model in the papers for 2025-26, but not in 2026-27 or beyond. This funding usually pays for teacher assistants and support staff for students living with a disability. Will there be funding in the future years? This is in terms of support for those students. I guess the other element of disability support is disability access. I understand that disability access in some of our schools and colleges is significantly wanting and interested in what you're doing to improve that.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. We have an investment of \$182.3 million this year that's going into educational adjustments. There have been budget requests I certainly made where we've seen a need to boost that funding, which would be the amounts you're referring to in the budget papers. But we get information about those students from our teachers. We can't pre-empt in the budget, moving forward, what that might be because that information comes in, obviously, as some students leave the system, other students come into the system.

Mr BAYLEY - How do you account for it then? How do you deliver out of the pool of funding that's already allocated? Is that correct?

Ms PALMER - Yes, the \$182.3 million is allocated through the educational adjustment model. But when you're talking about is there funding in further years, that's going to depend on the information that comes from teachers about who are the kids that are two- or three-years-old now and in a couple of years they will be coming into kindergarten and what might that need be or what might not that need be.

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With my Disability hat on and the work that we're doing in the delivery of Thriving Kids now. That's going to be working with children zero to nine, in that low to moderate developmental delay and autism area. That's going to mean that children who may be looking for a diagnosis, which could take up to a year, are actually going to be getting some of those supports for themselves and families from as early as the age of one, if not earlier. Through play groups, CFLCs or CHAPS nurses identify there might be a developmental delay. This is a pretty extraordinary investment. It's certainly a nation-leading investment and \$182.3 million is in this space just for this year.

Mr BAYLEY - And capital for physical? I did ask about the disability access in schools as well - sorry, Chair.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Chair. I will pass to Mr Salter.

Mr SALTER - For disability access, there is an annual fund, but not a huge fund.

Mr BAYLEY - How much is that?

Mr SALTER - I will have to check what the amount of that fund is. I might just get Jodee Wilson here as well. Just whilst we're checking on the amount of the funds - an annual program, which applications get reviewed against. In the broader capital program when there's new refurbishments, certainly increasing the disability access is at the core of new builds with an infrastructure. Where a lot has been built in the 60s and 50s were compliant at the time, then as we do new builds and upgrades then that is a key focus. Might just have to come back on that.

Mr BAYLEY - Are you happy to take it on notice?

Ms PALMER - No, we will get the information for you.

Mr BAYLEY - You will get it before the end of the session? I may not be here, but I will look at the *Hansard*. Thank you.

Ms PALMER - Sure.

Prof RAZAY - My question is on suspension incidents for 2025. In 2024, you reported 10,330 suspension incidents from kinder to 12 years with 25 per cent of them were due to physical abuse and 14 per cent were due to disobedience or defiance. The suspension incidents are much higher than 2022, but slightly less than 2023. This is an incredibly very high suspension rate, and they reflect on the pressure on our education and support system. What's the suspension incidents for 2025 and what specific intervention policy do we have to address it?

Ms PALMER - There's probably a couple of things I could refer to there. The first would be what we've just been discussing about the extraordinary investment each year into educational adjustments. We know some of our more complex students need that extra support in the classroom, so schools are able to apply for funding to support. A lot of schools actually use that resource to have extra teacher assistants in the classroom, to work one-on-one or one-on-two with some of our more complex students.

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I would also refer to the work we've done in the Violence in Schools Action Plan, looking at how we better support schools in the preventative space. And one of the really key elements of that is the professional learning we are providing for all of our teacher assistants right across Tasmania. Because as we know, in a classroom, that's often the person engaging most closely with some of our more complex children.

It's really making sure they have the knowledge and expertise on how to engage with a young person that could have escalating behaviour, how to do that in a trauma-informed way, what are the signs of escalating behaviour, what can you do to have an intervention in that space? We're really doing a lot in that preventative space. Two examples of where we have a real focus on trying to see those suspensions come down.

Prof RAZAY - Just see what the 2025 rates of suspension incidents is.

Ms WEBSTER - In 2025 number of suspensions were 9601.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you.

Mr GEORGE - This comes from another teacher. It's one issue that's been raised with me by several teachers in fact is that schools in less privileged or lower social economic and rural schools are missing out on the most experienced teachers while preferred schools, like Taroon, get teachers with more experience and better pay. If that's the case, that's a real developing inequity and can only lead to making the education gap even greater. Can you confirm that is an issue with schools and tell me what's been done to address it if it is?

Ms PALMER - Yes. We have some real strategies which are really exciting. One in particular is incentives for our hard-to-staff schools and our isolated schools. I can get you some more information on this. In our hard-to-staff incentive package there was an allocation of \$3.5 million in the 2024-25 budget over four years to attract and retain teachers in schools that have historically faced staffing challenges. The Hard-to-Staff Schools Teacher Incentive Pilot Program Agreement 2024 came into effect from 3 February 2025. Under that model, an incentive payment of \$1000 is paid six weeks into term 1 and a second incentive payment of \$2275 six weeks into term 3.

The model considers but does not compete with existing incentives we also have for our isolated schools. I will tell you a lovely little story. I went to visit one of our hard-to-staff schools and there was a young teacher who had received this incentive. They said thank you so much, I've actually been able to paint my house with the incentive provided.

And then if you look at what we're doing for our incentives in our isolated schools - so they're on the west coast, some of our island schools - the 2023 teacher agreement provided for an increase to the year 2 and 3 isolated schools incentive payment to \$3275 per annum, which is up from \$2759 per annum. This increases to \$6281 dollars upon completing four, five and six years of continuous service in targeted schools.

We also have a settling in payment of \$5000 which is available to staff who commit to a minimum of two years at an isolated school. The commencing salary for beginning teachers in an isolated school is to be band 1 level 8, where the usual beginning salary outside of an isolated school is band 1 level 5.

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Some of those additional benefits include being eligible for a total of eight days of paid time over a two-year period to attend urgent business, which might not be able to wait to school holidays, and that can include medical appointments as well. Meals and accommodation expenses are covered for those specialist medical appointments that might not be able to wait.

We also have staff working at Mountain Heights School, Rosebery District Schools, Strahan Primary School, Zeehan Primary School, that only pay \$10 a week for Tasmanian Government-owned school accommodation, which on the west coast we've just upgraded 21 of those units. So, this is a focus for us. We are doing all we can in this space to ensure that the teachers that we have there feel really valued. We are acknowledging where schools are in isolated places. We are acknowledging schools that are hard to staff and doing what we can to incentivise teachers to go and work in those areas.

Mr GEORGE - I accept the efforts that you're making. The real question is, nevertheless: is it true that, in fact, schools like Tarooma, or the better off schools, are actually attracting the more experienced teachers and getting more than their fair share of experienced teachers?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I don't know that I can answer that question. What I can say with confidence is that we absolutely have, front and centre in our thinking, the schools where we do want to see, you know, continuity of teaching, where we want to see experienced teachers and where we want it to be a great experience and opportunity for teachers. We are really focused on ensuring that the package we put forward for those isolated schools and hard-to-staff schools are attractive to teachers.

Mr VERMEY - Minister, cost-of-living pressures happen everywhere around. Libraries - how do they help the local families and others to manage these pressures in the school areas?

Ms PALMER - Yes, beautiful. Thank you very much for that question. Libraries Tasmania certainly remains one of our most widely used public services. I believe it's 6-in-10 Tasmanians we see accessing services each year, and lovely to say it's a 95 per cent approval rating with user satisfaction, which is great. I must say, my childhood memories are absolutely wrapped up in many, many weekends and school holidays in my own library in Launceston.

When you do look at cost-of-living pressures, it's not surprising to see that more and more people are taking advantage of those free services and those wonderful free activities that we see rolled out through Libraries Tasmania. In February 2026, a survey of public library users found 66 per cent said that libraries helped with the cost of living, and that's up from 49 per cent in 2024, which is really fantastic.

So, of course, libraries offer so much more than books. They're beautiful, welcoming spaces. We see cafes now set up in our libraries as well, and it's just a great place for Tasmanians of all ages to have a lovely, safe, warm space to go to.

Their Rock and Rhyme and Storytime are wonderful free sessions - they're for young family members. Mr Razay was talking earlier about the advantages of rhyming and music, so it's wonderful to see that rolled out across our libraries.

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Our school holiday programs are another economical way to keep older children entertained and engaged with learning. You know, there's the usual craft activities, to games. I went to visit the Launceston Library and there was a cartoonist that was there working with older-aged children, and gosh, that was fascinating to see.

Libraries Tasmania also hosts regular events including Tasmania Reads, which is a week-long celebration of reading and stories in all forms, held in March. We saw people right across the state engaging in free reading-inspired events and activities for all people. A highlight of this year included Our Island Stories and Story Walks. That was led by local Aboriginal writers and storytellers, which was fantastic.

There's also, of course, e-services available, including 24/7 access to online books. Newspapers - you often see some of our older citizens sitting in the library with a cup of tea reading the papers.

Mr VERMEY - Creating that social engagement.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it's really fantastic. Language courses, there's even access to independent films and documentaries. So, I'm really grateful for the roles that our libraries play right across Tasmania and for the amazing staff that we have in them. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Can we please have the school infrastructure priority list, the current one?

Ms PALMER - I will get to that question. Through you, Chair: I have an answer from the Department of Premier and Cabinet in regard to a question you were asking earlier. DPAC have confirmed to us that the April 2025 and November 2025 six-monthly reports from the literacy outcomes monitoring group will be published this afternoon.

Mr WILLIE - They just needed a nudge.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, we also have some further data that you asked for, which we have the answer here, if you're happy to take that.

Ms WEBSTER - One question was around the workers' compensation claims and the psychosocial. I think Mr Dinnessen said that there were 297 open claims within Education - 143 of those are for psychosocial reasons.

I think you asked for the reason around the number of student assaults, and year-on-year. These are all for the year ending 31 March. For 2024, student assaults was the key reason for 14 claims. In the year ending 31 March 2025 it was 13, and in the year ending 31 March 2026 it was 21.

I think you also asked about suspension reasons. For the three years, bullying or physical harassment of a student - this is suspension data: 160 in 2024, 120 in 2025, and 32 in 2026. For harassment or stalking of another student: 77 in 2024, 71 in 2025, and 16 in 2026. Those figures may be year to date, I think, at the moment. The harassment or stalking of a teacher or another staff member: 27 in 2024, 32 in 2025, and five in 2026.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired.

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The committee suspended from 11.09 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.

Disability Services

CHAIR - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the Order of the House establishing Estimates Committee, which provides: questions must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to the issues of public concern in relation to former minister Ogilvie, if the minister chooses to answer them.

The scrutiny of the Disability Services portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I now invite the minister to introduce persons at the table - names and positions, please - for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. Thank you very much, Chair. I would like to introduce Mellissa Gray, who is directly to my left. She is the Deputy Secretary Policy and Reform; Ingrid Ganley, Director Disability and Reform. Of course, we have other members of our team who can come to the table, if need be. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Disability Services is one hour. Would the minister like to make a short opening statement?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Well, 2026-27 marks another year of significant change and reform across the Disability Services portfolio. In the past year, we've established the Office of the Disability Commissioner. The Office of the Senior Practitioner is up and running, regulating the use of restrictive practices. Work is well progressed to prepare our inaugural four-year Disability Inclusion Plan by 1 July 2026, and this is another key deliverable of the act.

A lived experience reference group informed the consultation phase, which ran from November last year to March this year, and significant feedback provided through more than 60 written submissions and 55 surveys received. There were webinars, there were face-to-face community forums, and several targeted and specialist consultation sessions that have actually helped to shape the plan.

As well as legislation, the Disability Services portfolio covers disability-related policy, funding for advocacy organisations, national and state-based disability strategies, the Disability Royal Commission and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which is inclusive of the NDIS Review. This year has certainly seen significant national reform arising from the NDIS Review, and we continue to work with the Australian Government and other states and territories in the design of a system to support those outside the NDIS.

A key focus of this work has been the design of Thriving Kids, and we are currently undertaking extensive community consultation about how this should be delivered. We heard some pretty amazing things through that consultation, from parents saying things like:

There's brick wall after brick wall being placed in front of my little boy. It just kills you as a mum. What you need is support and skills,

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not a diagnosis. This means something for funding, but what I need to know is, what are the expected learning parameters for my son, and what are the skills for my husband and I to use with him?

The consultation has been held across Burnie, Launceston, Hobart, with two online sessions as part of that. Thriving Kids will begin to roll out in stages from 1 October with the full roll-out expected by January 2028.

Further changes to the NDIS were announced by the Minister for Disability and the NDIS, Mark Butler, in his recent address at the National Press Club in April. Our government continues to work with the Australian Government and other state and territory governments to secure NDIS for future generations of Tasmanians to come. However, our priority is, and will always be, ensuring that people with disability and their families and carers have access to the high-quality supports they need, where and when they need them. I will continue, along with our team and this government, to fight hard for this.

In summary, 2026-27 will be another very busy year for Disability Services and reform portfolio. It is an opportunity to deliver real change at better outcomes for Tasmanians with disabilities, for their families, their carers, the people, and services and organisations who support them.

Thank you, Chair. We're happy to do our best to answer all questions.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, as you've outlined in your introduction, Thriving Kids will be rolled out progressively, in stages, over the next few years. Can you outline the eligibility criteria for children and the key implementation milestones over the next two years?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I certainly can. Of course, it was the NDIS Review that recommended that the NDIS should be one part of a strong connected ecosystem of supports for people with disability. On 30 January this year the Australian Government and state and territory governments agreed on what the supports for Thriving Kids, a national system of foundational supports for children aged eight and under with low to moderate developmental delay and autism, should be like to meet their needs and the needs of their families. Thriving Kids will help give children the best start in life by identifying some of those developmental needs earlier and connecting them and their families, importantly, into supports. Children with permanent and significant disability will remain on the NDIS. This is about children zero to eight with low to moderate developmental delays.

It's a matter for each state and territory as to how they want Thriving Kids to work and how it will be best delivered, especially across our regions. For Tasmania, we know that's going to work differently in some of the regional areas to how it will work in some of our cities, so we have to make sure that as we're designing Thriving Kids we're ensuring there are statewide quality services for Tasmanian children.

The development of that is what we're doing now and there's been extensive consultation, as I mentioned in my opening comments, with families, organisations, service providers and people with disabilities right across Tasmania to really look at what they need from Thriving Kids. What does it look like on Bruny Island compared to Launceston? How do we ensure that, especially where we've got thin markets, that we are able to roll out these supports for these children and their families? I might get Ms Gray, our deputy secretary, to expand on that.

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Ms GRAY - Thanks, minister. As to the question of eligibility, to answer that directly, Thriving Kids is designed to have a very low barrier to entry. Some of the national work on the Thriving Kids Advisory Group led by Professor Frank Oberklaid talked about the fact that with the establishment of the NDIS there has been a move to individualised support and a medicalisation of children with low to moderate support needs. Historically, we've had a more robust community-driven, ground-up system in place where children's support needs have been identified earlier.

For the key components of Thriving Kids, which are navigation, information and advice, group supports for parents, carers and kin and supported groups for children, personalised family supports and therapy supports, as minister said, we're still co-designing with the sector and with families and communities themselves about how this model is best delivered in Tasmania, but very much with the philosophy of a low barrier to entry. For some of the more targeted therapy supports, we're still working with service providers and others to work out what that eligibility threshold would be.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Can you outline or table, perhaps, how many families or individual children you think you'll be needing to support through Thriving Kids over the next few years?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I believe there has been some modelling done on this. I will pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms GRAY - We've done some intensive work with consultants in relation to this and with our own fantastic disability services and reform data team and the indicative numbers we have based on our modelling are a total of 5854 children. As the minister outlined, Thriving Kids is for the age range between zero and eight with low to moderate support needs. We have a very good service system, I must say, for the zero to five range. We're looking particularly also at the six to eight age range. It might be a bit of a different setting or offering that we need to have for those children, we're still working through the design of that, but for those particular numbers I can be a little more granular. In the zero to four age range, there are 3322 children; in the five to eight age range, 2532 children - and, of course, these are estimated numbers. In the zero to four age range in the low category, 1540 children; in the moderate category, 1807 children; in the 5 to 8 age group in the low category, 1168 children; and in the moderate category, 1339 children.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Minister, because the reform's being rolled out over time and relies on a workforce already under pressure, what assurance can you provide to families in regional Tasmania that children won't be waiting years to get the support they need? You did mention what a young person might need in Bruny Island, for example. There might not be those supports there and I don't think it should rely on your postcode for getting the support you need to support a little person.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Consultation with the sector has been a really big part of the work the department has been doing to get a real understanding of that and how we can utilise the existing workforce we have is obviously part of that conversation as well. I think one of the real benefits of Thriving Kids is the fact that it is that very low threshold into entry. It is not dependent on a diagnosis. Where we see some of those waiting lists right across Australia it is in that diagnosis space, whereas Thriving Kids is not. If I could just give you a hypothetical, say a child presents to a CHaPS nurse, it's identified that there could be some

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issues, so they are linked in with Thriving Kids support in their area, so while they might be waiting for a diagnosis that child and that family is already getting that intervention support and I guess the village around them as they wait. If it goes through to diagnosis and it's far more significant then that pathway is to the NDIS. We see Thriving Kids as a real opportunity to see really early intervention in that zero to eight category and obviously consultation with the sector is a huge part of the work that we're doing.

Mrs GREENE - Particularly around workforce modelling, where are the gaps?

Ms GANLEY - We're aware of workforce gaps in our rural and remote communities, but as the minister was saying, it's early intervention and we're looking across the workforce including peer support, which is a key element of the model, and also that light touch access to information either online or through other groups people are already connected to. We're looking at what we already have in place and how to build extra capacity with the funds that are coming through, and what new services we need to purchase through a commissioning model. We're conscious of gaps in our rural communities but we want to look at ways we can bring services into those communities.

Ms GRAY - Lots of great ideas have come through six statewide consultation sessions. It really is a blank slate and an opportunity to map and look at where those existing service deserts might be and respond in some innovative ways that are parent, family, carer and kin led.

Ms ROSOL - Following on from the questions about Thriving Kids, I've got a question about the funding. It's due to commence rolling out from October and fully implemented by January 2028, so it's not reaching full service provision until January 2028. Service provision would increase over time, but when we look at the Budget figures, it's \$8.3 million this year and each year. Could you explain that equal funding across the years, even though the service will be growing, and whether money will be carried over, how that works and also what the federal funding is that's been matched to this too, please, per year?

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. I guess with regard to what you see in the Budget and that equal funding, we're still designing the program. We are in those really early stages of saying, well what are we going to need to roll out phase one? What will phase two look like? And so, we have that resource available to us. It is committed to thriving kids and where we need to adjust that over the years, I have no issue with that happening. You've got the 8.3 over those four years matched by the 5.9 which is the Commonwealth contribution. So again, that's mapped out over the forwards as well.

Nationally, there's \$4 billion that is available for foundational supports and thriving kids and that is on a 50/50 basis with states and territories and the Commonwealth. To help you understand why the state's putting in \$8.3 million for in one year and the Commonwealth's only putting in \$5.9 million, that's because the 50/50 match is at that big amount of \$4 billion, but the Commonwealth is actually taking a portion of that. They are going to undertake certain areas of work at a national basis as part of their contribution. That's looking at things like the national phone line, a national autism information and advice helpline, national workforce development and also Medicare funded 3-year-old GP health checks. The Commonwealth's actually providing \$1.4 billion to states and territories. That's why you see those differing amounts even though it is a 50/50 contribution.

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Ms ROSOL - Before I go on to my next question, can I just clarify something you said there? I think you said that you would look at adjusting the figures. Does that mean that if the rollout shows that more funding is needed, you would commit more funding and seek more from the federal government to ensure that services are covered as the phases roll out?

Ms PALMER - I would love to go to the federal government and ask for more money, and I can assure you I've already done that and I didn't get a great response. Look, the bucket of money has been agreed to and so that's the funding that we are working to. I might hand to the deputy secretary for more on that.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister. The funding profile reflects the profile in the agreements with the Commonwealth. In the National Agreement for Foundational Supports, both with our Treasury and both with the Commonwealth, we can adjust those profiles or roll over from one year into another in negotiation with the Commonwealth in the same way that we've had significant funding for disability reform and we've had to move fundings from one year to the next in the implementation of the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024*. Similarly, we will be able to do that with Thriving Kids.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. A question around Foundational Supports. I know that the focus is very much on Thriving Kids as the bit that has to start soonest for that, but I know that that's only one aspect of the planned foundational supports and only covers children up to eight years old and we can expect many children over the age of eight and adults to be refused access to the NDIS or removed from the NDIS with the slashes coming from the federal government. So, before too long, those people are going to be relying on Foundational Supports.

What work are you doing to prepare for that and when do you anticipate that funding for Foundational Supports beyond Thriving Kids will be reflected in the Budget?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I think even your question you are raising you can see such anxiety for parents and families across Tasmania, across the country, about children who are on the NDIS who may be removed. We have been told by the federal government there will be a large number of people removed from the NDIS. We don't know a lot about who they are or where they will come from, which is certainly adding to that anxiety.

For more around the work that we're doing with Foundational Supports, of which Thriving Kids is part, I will pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms GRAY - Yes, thank you and through you, minister, you are correct to note that this is the first tranche of the significant changes that are being made through legislation to the NDIS. We negotiate with the Commonwealth Government about definitions, about future cohorts -future cohorts where new federal funding agreements are up for negotiation as well. We're watching quite closely now the next agreement to be negotiated is the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. There's quite a lot of concern in the sector about psychosocial supports that are required, so our wonderful team is doing modelling on psychosocial disability. We take time to be as prepared as we can for those negotiations as they roll out through Disability Reform Ministerial Council meetings, but also through the first ministers and the first deputies through the Council for the Australian Federation, of which Tasmania was the chair last year. The Premier of Tasmania was the chair as we negotiated the National Health Reform Agreement and the National Agreement on Foundational Supports. There's quite a lot

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of work that goes on in the background to anticipate and negotiate because we're co-governors of the scheme - disability ministers - and lots of negotiations happen through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council meeting.

Ms PALMER - I think it would also be really fair to say that a lot of the work that has been done by this team over the past three years I would classify as 'designing in the dark,' not really knowing what's happening, not necessarily getting information from the federal government, having announcements made through the media, and every time that happens, we are looking at the work that we've got and going, 'Okay, how can we pivot this to make that work?' Designing in the dark, I think, is the best way to say what we have been doing. I have to commend this team. It's a small team, but they've done an extraordinary job going, 'Well, if this happens, we could do this. And if it's this, we could do this. Let's just make sure we understand who this cohort of people might be.' A lot of scenario planning and we hope that puts us in a really good position that as we do get more information, we are ahead of the game.

We're also spending a lot of time talking with officials in other states and other jurisdictions. I spend a huge amount of time talking with other disability ministers right across the country. We're learning from each other. 'What are you going to do in this space?' 'Oh, I wonder if we could make that work in Tasmania?' 'Your CFLCs, that's amazing, I wonder if we could do that over here.' There's a lot of that going on in the background, which I think just goes to show how committed states and territories are in trying to support what the federal government is trying to do, which is to ensure that the NDIS is a sustainable scheme into the future.

Ms ROSOL - That funding would show up after those agreements, for the extra things?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you for that.

Prof RAZAY - The Thriving Kids Initiative (No Child Left Behind) represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape early childhood intervention. It sets out improved identification of development concerns, family centre services and better access to supports in the environment where children live, learn and play. Now, given that around one in five Tasmanian children start with a developmental vulnerability in at least in one domain, what specific outcomes and performance measures will be used to determine whether Thriving Kids is improving child wellbeing and reducing developmental vulnerability across the state?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. I think I would have to go back to the fact that Thriving Kids is still in its developmental stage. We are still consulting and ensuring that the voice of parents, the voice of children, the voice of communities and service providers are really helping us to deliver a Thriving Kids model that is purpose-fit for our families, for our children in this age bracket. As with most things that we do, we are always looking at how do we evaluate the work that we are doing, but at the end of the day, Dr Razay this is a national body of work. We have to respond to what the federal government is telling us must be done, how they see service delivery being rolled out across states and territories, so we have to respond accordingly to that.

I think the great strength that will come with the model Tasmania will deliver is coming from the extraordinary work the department is doing in its consultation process. This is such a

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deep dive and so extensive, it is reaching families from right across the state through so many different means and that is going to be the absolute strength of the service we are able to provide, because this is family saying to us, 'Well, I'm living this and this is what I need, and this is what I don't need, my child doesn't respond to this, my husband won't respond to this'. That's how deep we are going to ensure that the voices of our families and our little people are loud and clear. We believe that by putting the hard yards in now through a very extensive consultation process we will end up with a Thriving Kids model that will be of great benefit to children across Tasmania.

Let me say, if we get a few years into this and we can see there's issues and problems, we'll pivot. We want these outcomes for these children. We want to set them up for a lifetime of success and we know that Thriving Kids is an opportunity - even though it's been interesting how it's been rolled out by the federal government we are viewing it as an opportunity. That's the space we're moving into.

Prof RAZAY - Do we have basic measures? It's a great project.

Ms GRAY - We will work with other states and territories and the Commonwealth government. We have to have a nationally agreed evaluation framework for Thriving Kids. We have reach data at the state level as well - I think the Australian Early Development Census were some of the statistics you were talking about - and our approach to evaluation, as the minister has outlined, will be based on lived experience of Tasmanian families and communities as well. What we've heard in the consultation is the absolute importance of not treating a young person as an individual but understanding that young person in the context of their family and their community and empowering their family and their community is essential to success.

Mr GEORGE - It's a complex area. My questions come from people with disabilities or with great knowledge of disabilities. The *Anti-Discrimination Act* of Tasmania does not effectively address digital discrimination in relation to access to information. It puts the onus on the person with disability to request documentation or communication to be provided in an accessible manner when it's not initially meeting digital accessibility standards. Is an amendment to the act something you can commit to looking into and enacting?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. It's something that we're really heightened about with regard to any of the work that we do from a government perspective. Whether it's the work we did around the new legislation, whenever we go out for consultation we're always making sure that is being done in a really accessible way. Sometimes that means we take a lot longer to consult and take a lot longer with feedback because we do it through a number of different mechanisms. Indeed, when you look at the disability legislation that passed the parliament in recent times, that was a number of years in that consultation space because we were ensuring we were engaging right across every level of accessibility. I might pass to the deputy secretary for more on that.

Ms GRAY - That's a really good question and, as the minister said, part of the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act* was the creation of a new disability inclusion plan for Tasmania. That's due to be developed by 1 July and is in its final phases of development. Part of that is to look at the systems reform and systems change that we need to undertake on this island for people with disability to be included and live a full, rich and participatory life in Tasmania.

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Part of that has been working with what's called defined entities in the act, and that's all government GBEs and departments. Each department is required to have a disability inclusion plan and there are requirements in that act to consult with people with disability on any major policy reform or new project for any of those defined entities.

In response to your specific question, we would work with that defined entity group and we would talk with the Department of Justice about any proposed legislative changes in that or any other act that would advance the purposes of the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act*.

Mr GEORGE - This is something that is quite urgent. I mean, we're talking about maybe 30 per cent of the Tasmanian population with some form of disability or another. Ministerial offices continue to send letters that are not accessible, they're flattened PDFs. This is something which surely should go to Cabinet and be legislated for. Can you tell me when you're going to roll out this disability access for digital communications?

Ms PALMER - Yes. This was part of the legislation that went through, the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act*, which makes it a legislated requirement for defined entities, all of our departments and our GBEs, to ensure that the work they are doing reflects the needs of Tasmanians living with disability. To ensure that there was a real understanding around what we were trying to achieve and what we have mandated in this legislation, I went and addressed the secretary's board, which was the heads of every department, and spoke to them about the importance of this and how when you don't do this, people with disabilities are excluded. At the end of the day, about a quarter of Tasmanians actually identify as having some sort of a disability, so we're very passionate in this space. We have put it in legislation and it is a requirement. I'm more than happy to undertake a commitment to talk to my Cabinet colleagues and ministerial officers to ensure that when we are communicating that that is done it is done in an accessible form, as a further step.

Mr VERMEY - Minister, in recent budgets \$300,000 has been allocated to the Changing Places program, with \$200,000 available in 2024-25 and \$100,000 in 2025-26. Although you touched on this briefly during Estimates in 2025, can you provide the latest update on the facilities funded through this program?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for this. It's a fantastic program, Changing Places, and we're really excited about what we've been able to deliver across Tasmania. Changing Places is about specialised accessible public toilet facilities, so they're not just an accessible toilet, they actually go beyond the standard of what an accessible toilet is. They come with extra space, there's height-adjustable change tables, there's hoists and other similar-type equipment that can be used to support people who can't use a standard toilet or who can't even use a standard, you know, accessible toilet. So, they make a world of difference for those individuals with really high support needs and a world of difference to their families and, indeed, their carers.

This is a Commonwealth Accessible Australia Initiative, and it's currently providing up to 50 per cent of the total build costs for fixed Changing Places, with the state offering an additional 25 per cent funding. And proponents of each project, which are often local councils, are responsible for contributing the remaining 25 per cent. So it's a really good example of that collaboration that we see work so well across all levels of government, especially when you're trying to achieve something really meaningful like this. So the 2024-25 Budget funding of

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\$300,000 was provided for Changing Places, with \$200,000 available in the 2024-25 Budget and \$100,000 available in 2025-26. And the 2024-25 funds were rolled over to the 2025-26 Budget following delays that were caused by both federal and state elections last year.

We now have eight Changing Places projects that are spread out across four of our five electorates. There's a brand-new facility at Kangaroo Bay Park, with construction now complete. There's one at Glenorchy Memorial Pool and the Glenorchy Sports Centre - they're going to benefit from Changing Place facilities, and I'm advised that construction has commenced for both of those. There's new facilities in the works at the George Town Aquatic Centre and the Lions Park are already underway, and construction for another facility at UTAS Stadium has commenced. I understand we have a facility that's due to begin construction at the Mersey Bluff foreshore as well. The eighth project, the Stadiums Tasmania project, was in receipt of another Tasmanian Government funding and it didn't receive an allocation from the 2024-25 Changing Places budget commitment.

I think what this is about is that it's just opening up our island to be more accessible. It's saying you can go to the football, you can go to the aquatic centre in George Town, you can go to the bluff foreshore, and we will have these facilities set up for you. We know that this is a game-changer for families, for adults with disability, to know that they can go out and if they need to have that time and that space to go to the toilet, to change, whatever their needs might be, that there is now the infrastructure to do that, which is really exciting. And I'm also -

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Ms PALMER - Oh. Ask me about playgrounds next.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, disability advocacy organisations are expected to help people navigate NDIS reforms, foundational supports, and new safeguarding arrangements. Has funding increased to organisations to reflect that additional workload? Has the department assessed whether current advocacy services have sufficient capacity to support children and adults with disability seeking assistance?

Ms PALMER - Okay. I will pass to the department to speak to that. Are you ready with that one, Mel?

Ms GANLEY - Through you, minister, so yes, we have our three advocacy organisations that get their base funding, and as we've been working on the reforms, we did provide some additional funding in 2025, this last financial year, and we always will look to the future. So, there's no commitment, but we do have reform funding in the Budget going forward, and we're looking at how best to utilise that funding across our advocacy organisations.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you for that response. I am a little bit concerned about organisations who are providing these important advocacy services. I've had a number of representations through my office.

What assessment has the department undertaken regarding the demand in the next few years to ensure that those organisations have the capacity to support people going through these changes?

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Ms PALMER - Well, there's funding that we provide ongoing to three organisations - the Association for Children with Disability Tas, there's also Advocacy Tasmania, and Speak Out Association of Tasmania. Then, as Ms Ganley spoke to, with regard to the amount of reform that's going on there's also been additional funding provided to Advocacy Tasmania, a \$50,000 amount of money; Speak Out Tasmania \$80,000; Disability Voices Tasmania \$50,000, and the Association for Children with Disability \$50,000 as well. That's money that you'll see in the budget that is for reform and we're using that and some of that is actually going to some of these organisations that you would be speaking about who are playing a role in how we actually develop the reform that is needed.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Just mindful of time, so I might skip to something else. There's a budget line item for \$1 million for the Legislature-General for accessibility. Can you detail what that funding is for?

Ms PALMER - That doesn't come under this portfolio, sorry.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, thank you for your comprehensive answer about Changing Places. I have a follow-up question to that, because often with changing places and accessible toilets, there's a lock on them so that they're maintained for people who really need them. The system around those locks is the Master Locksmiths Access Key, or the MLAK system, and it's an initiative of the Master Locksmiths so that people with disability can obtain an MLAK key that gives them access to dedicated accessible public facilities so that might be used on Changing Places or other accessible toilets. People with a disability can apply for the keys and, in Tasmania, that often happens through their local councils. What's happening at the moment is different councils have different fees for that. So, Hobart City Council, it's free; Launceston it's \$64, which is what the national rate is for it. Do you support MLAKs being free, on application, for all people with disability who need to use accessible toilets. Will you look into the role the state government might be able to play in helping make them accessible in a fair way for people across the state?

Ms PALMER - I certainly wouldn't want to commit at this table to something that councils have management of, but I certainly think it's something worth looking at. I think what we're doing with the review of the *Disability Rights and Safeguarding Act* is - an element of that is actually looking at how we can work more closely with our councils in this space. That might be something that could possibly be raised in that area.

Ms ROSOL - Yes. I know there's people who would be very grateful if it could be, who've been in touch with me.

Just on to another question around something that people have been in touch with me about. I was contacted by someone who has a disability parking permit. Unfortunately, their permit was stolen and, when they applied for a replacement and paid the fee, they were advised it would take seven weeks before their new permit reached them and there was no provision of an interim permit, such as we get when we apply for a driver's licence. The person was not able to walk long distances due to their health and, without the disability parking permit, they couldn't park close enough to services and they had to cancel critical medical appointments through that waiting period, including appointments for cancer treatment because they couldn't park close.

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Minister, I'm just interested in your thoughts on whether that's acceptable, that there aren't interim parking permits provided for people? I recognise that that happens Through State Growth, but as the minister for Disability, is that something that you could follow up on and work with State Growth around ways that interim parking permits could be provided so that people don't have that delay and that difficulty in getting access to places?

Ms PALMER - Look, that certainly seems like a pretty basic, common-sense solution to me. Obviously, again, I can't commit anything that sits outside of this particular portfolio. But I appreciate you raising it, and I'm sure my Cabinet colleagues would back it up that I'm advocating constantly wherever we can see that we can be delivering things better - especially low-hanging fruit with things like that. So, I can certainly commit to raising that with the relevant minister.

Ms ROSOL - That'd be great. Thank you. I guess it's something that might fit with the accessibility and the inclusion - disability inclusion plan as well. Something to be considered with.

Ms PALMER - Very much so.

Prof RAZAY - Back to Thriving Kids. The main concern is about the risk of vulnerable children falling through the cracks, and I would like to address some of these concerns. Some of them, they might fall between Thriving Kids and the NDIS, and they might just lose access to the necessary services. The program mainly addresses children at the age of eight and under, and therefore there is no continuity of care that might be helping families to continue supporting service when they move on to age nine and over. And families feel that this funding with centralised services in childcare centres and school will strip them of their ability to choose specific services for their children. So, these are my main specific concerns. I wonder whether you can address them.

Ms PALMER - Yes, okay. So, one of our really big concerns as a state is what happens when a child turns nine, and as I think I mentioned in one of my earlier responses, we are developing Thriving Kids, which is zero to eight. If there is a diagnosis which indicates that that child's needs are well beyond low-to-moderate, then the pathway is through the process of applying to the NDIS. So, one of the big concerns that we have is: what does this look like for children in that low-to-moderate space once they come out of Thriving Kids?

But, you know, Thriving Kids is being developed slowly; it's being rolled out in stages. Alongside of that is the work that we're doing around foundational supports, and I would be anticipating that there will need to be a foundational supports model that actually looks at what happens with those children once they turn nine and they're outside of thriving kids, but what we're really hoping to see is that with early intervention, there's just going to be such better outcomes for children and for their families through Thriving Kids. But that is part of the work that we are doing at the moment, and each state and territory is responsible for putting together those models that best suit their communities and their regions.

I'll just check if the deputy secretary has anything to add.

Ms GRAY - Thanks, minister. Yes, we got that exact question, as you can imagine. Through all of the consultations statewide across Tasmania, there's a lot of anxiety and concern about the changes across Tasmania. I might just ask Ingrid, though, to talk about the exact

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definitional work that we're doing with the Commonwealth to ensure that we can put as many safeguards as we can so that children do not fall through the cracks.

Ms GANLEY - So, we're working closely with states and territories in the Commonwealth to identify the level of moderate - so, what is 'moderate'? That would be the responsibility of the NDIS, and therefore what would fall under the Thriving Kids banner so that we don't create that gap between the two systems. Noting that Thriving Kids is early-intervention and time-limited, with the expectation if an individual and family needs ongoing support due to the disability, that'd be a pathway into the NDIS.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, this does affect several constituents of mine who are waiting for social housing. So, can you tell me what proportion of applicants of Tasmania's social housing waitlist are people with disabilities or accessibility needs? How many new social housing units were built in the past year to universal design and accessibility standards?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. So, part of your question you would need to put to the Housing minister; that's not part of the Disability Services portfolio. What I can say is I absolutely stress that I have done, and continue to, advocate for suitable housing for Tasmanians with disability in both social and affordable housing. The Housing Strategy 2023-24 and the associated action plan sets out our government's plan to address the housing needs of all Tasmanians, and that is inclusive of people with disability. And I'm advised that Homes Tasmania is exploring its options to register its specialist disability accommodation (SDA) portfolio to maximise access to Commonwealth funding, to upgrade the portfolio and to expand alternative housing options.

Disability housing is often misrepresented as only relating to people with mobility impairments, and we absolutely recognise that disability arises in various forms - mobility, mental health, psychosocial, there's vision-impaired - each with a range of specific requirements that it[need]'s met. It is important to note that our government is fully committed to the implementation of the liveable housing standards, as agreed to and set out in 2024. These standards ensure that homes are accessible and adaptable for people living with a disability.

I do have a little bit of information here which I think goes to your question. I've been advised that at the end of April 2026, 2137 Tasmanians with disability were on the Housing Register. This information has come from the Housing minister's office and represents 38.8 per cent of the Housing Register. Of those, 445 are NDIS participants and receive a disability support pension; 1552 are non-participants of the NDIS, but are in receipt of a disability support pension; and 140 are NDIS participants.

I'm also advised that as of April 2026, there were 2821 people living with disability in Homes Tasmania properties. I think that's the data that you were seeking.

Mr GEORGE - I guess that means 2137 on the waiting list at the moment and 2800 in accommodation.

Ms PALMER - Yes, that's the information. But, again, that's not in this portfolio, but we've received that information from the minister for Housing for you.

Mr GEORGE - I appreciate it.

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Mr VERMEY - Minister, you were talking about different locations and things with Changing Places, the next tranche of Accessible Australia initiatives. Can you give me an update on some parks and beaches programs, please?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I would absolutely love to. I'm really pleased that in 2026-27, we're funding two accessible play spaces which is through the second tranche of the Accessible Australia initiative and one inclusive beach amenities project.

I'm really passionate in this space. Nothing breaks my heart more than going to an accessible playground where there's an accessible swing where a child can go with a wheelchair into the swing and it's surrounded by woodchips. It's like dangling a lolly that a child with a disability cannot reach, so it's really exciting to see that there is investment into having a really holistic look and having fully accessible play spaces. Also, play spaces where there's a picnic table where a dad in a wheelchair can roll up to the picnic table and actually watch their child play. Again, we often see woodchips used which, anyone who has any experience in walking frames or wheelchairs knows it's just an impossible scenario. It's particularly exciting to see a beach wheelchair as part of a project that's been put forward by the Waratah-Wynyard Council because, again, you don't want to go to the beach and stay in the nature reserve space in your wheelchair and look at the beach, you want to go and participate in it. It's really exciting to be again working across all levels of government to see true accessibility for children and adults right across Tasmania. I hope we see more of it.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, Chair. Through the commission of inquiry and also the disability royal commission, we heard evidence that children and adults with disability are at higher risk of sexual abuse. What measures have been introduced to ensure that people can safely report abuse, neglect and mistreatment in the services that they rely on?

Ms PALMER - A really great question and I will pass to the department for that, but I will start by saying this is where we are so excited to have our inaugural disability commissioner, which of course came to fruition through the legislation that was put through. Catherine Whittington is an extraordinary commissioner. She is now completely set up. She has her team in place and that is already an avenue that people with disability now know they have this independent person who they can go to for numerous, for all sorts - for some of the circumstances that you're speaking about, but many and varied circumstances as well. She is doing an absolutely fantastic job, but for more information I'll pass to the department.

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister, this is such an important question. As the minister said, the flagship of our response to those disability royal commission recommendations and, indeed, where they crossover with the commission of inquiry recommendations, has been the establishment of the disability commissioner. It's so great to have this historic position for Tasmania. We work with the Keeping Children Safe reform unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. We have a part of our team that keeps a close eye on the disability royal commission recommendations and where they do crossover with the commission of inquiry recommendations. We've mapped those. We work with agencies on the progress of those through our disability reform steering committee, which has deputy secretaries from every agency and we run all reform - commission of inquiry, disability reform commission, NDIS, the implementation of the act - through that steering committee, which reports up through to the secretaries' board and ultimately to Cabinet in relation to disability reform and ensuring there's progress on those recommendations.

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Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Have all government-funded disability services been required to demonstrate that their complaints processes are accessible to children with communication, intellectual or cognitive disabilities? And, has some of that auditing and compliance - have we been checking the organisations are meeting their obligations?

Ms GRAY - Through you, minister, another great question that. Through the principles of the act, we ensure that in any grant agreements and, in fact, in defined entities, Tasmanian government agencies included, understanding of the implementation of the principles of the *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024* that those defined entities, those government agencies, understand the obligations of that act. And, from the Department of Premier and Cabinet's perspective, we monitor, like other agencies do, the public funding to organisations and, where possible in monitoring the compliance against the funding deeds, ensure that accessibility is paramount in those deeds.

Mrs GREENE - Finally, a question on the Disability Inclusion Advisory Council (DIAC). It's my understanding that expressions of interest were open in January. Can you provide an update on the establishment of the DIAC?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I certainly can. We were overwhelmed with the response that we got to the expression of interest process. Catherine Whittington, our disability commissioner, led that process, which is the process defined in the legislation. It's been a really extensive process looking for our first chair and our board, taking into account, where in the state, different types of disability -

Mrs GREENE - It was meant to start I think earlier this year, now we're in June, I'm just wondering, when?

Ms PALMER - There's an announcement that's in imminent. I want to thank the disability commissioner for the extraordinary work that she has done in this space, and, as I say, making sure that we did it in an accessible way, which sometimes does take a little bit longer, but it will be very exciting for that announcement which will be forthcoming.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, Chair. I want to go to a question that I think broadly comes under inclusion as well. The People with Disability Emergency Preparedness Project, it doesn't fall under your portfolio as such, but I think is part of that broader conversation about inclusion of people with disability. That project is currently being undertaken by the State Emergency Services and helps people with disability to plan for emergencies in ways that fits with their life, using a person-centred emergency preparedness approach (P-CEP). It's a great project that recognises people with disability, are the experts in their own life and planning for emergencies starts with them. The project runs until February next year and I understand it has six staff currently available around the state to support people. I was interested if you're aware of the project, if you're tracking it and if you're following engagement with it, and do you know how many people with disability or what proportion of people with disability have developed P-CEPs through the SES project? If a large number of people with disability haven't yet developed PCEPS, would you be willing to advocate for the project to continue so we can ensure people with disability are prepared for emergencies?

CHAIR - Time for scrutiny has now expired. The committee will now take a break for lunch. We will return after lunch to examine the children and youth portfolio at 1.00 p.m.

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The committee suspended from 12.15 p.m. to 1 p.m.

Children and Youth

CHAIR - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the Order of the House Establishing Estimates Committee, which provides questions that must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to issues of public concern in relation to former minister Ogilvie, if the minister chooses to answer them.

The time now being 1 p.m., the scrutiny of the Children and Youth Portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I now invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, full names and positions, please, for the benefit of *Hansard*.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that, Chair. I'd like to introduce Gina Webster, Secretary, Department for Education, Children and Young People; Mr Peter Whitcomb, Deputy Secretary, Child Safety and Youth Justice Operations; Tiffany Black, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Children and Youth is three hours. Would the minister like to make an opening.

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much, Chair. As the Minister for Children and Youth, I welcome the opportunity to outline this government's ongoing work and priorities for Tasmania's children, young people and their families. My role as minister for Children and Youth comes with great responsibility but also great opportunity to lead the government's commitment to safeguard and improve outcomes for Tasmanian children and young people. I feel very privileged to be part of this important work.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the contribution of staff across child safety, out of home care and youth justice. Their work is complex and it's demanding, and their continued professionalism is critical to the delivery of these services. This government has continued to progress its response to the Commission of Inquiry into Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, which is setting the agenda for child safety and youth justice system reform. This government accepted all 191 recommendations which are being implemented in stages through to 2029 with independent oversight and regular public reporting. Working directly with the commission of inquiry Independent Monitor, Mr Robert Benjamin and other oversight bodies such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People has been a priority for me in my role as minister for children and youth to ensure the implementation of the COI recommendations delivers its intent.

This work is being supported by the 10-year Change for Children Strategy which establishes a longer term whole-of-system reform approach with a focus on prevention, early intervention and system accountability.

There has also been continued and focused reform activity in the youth justice system, the work to deliver a contemporary youth justice act that will provide the foundation for lasting and meaningful youth justice system change is underway and it is important we get this right

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to support a caring and safe community. Work is progressing under the Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034, including delivery of the Youth Justice Model of Care and Diversionary Service Framework through the commission of inquiry implementation. Public consultation on the draft model of care for the new youth justice facility occurred from February to April 2026. The model of care is intended to support more therapeutic individualised responses to young people in detention, also with a focus on supporting community safety and the government acknowledges the need to maintain the effort and pace of reform, particularly in relation to system and demand pressures and the need for stronger early intervention responses which continue to inform the government's priorities. As minister for children and youth, I remain focused on delivering improved outcomes for children and young people.

Turning to investment, the 2026-27 Budget has committed funding across key areas of the children and youth portfolio to support the delivery of Uplifting Care strategy, including additional funding for out-of-home care to respond to the demand pressures and increased advice and referral line inquiries, continued investment in transition supports for young people leaving care into supported accommodation programs, new and significant investment to ensure children in care have an allocated child safety worker and continued investment into the Foster and Formal Kinship uplift allowance across four years. In addition, we continue to invest in youth justice infrastructure, including funding for the new facility to replace the Ashley Youth Detention Centre as part of a broader system. With those few comments, we will do everything we can as a team to answer all questions that are put forward to us by the committee today.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, DECYP has been allocated an operational efficiency target of \$228 million over four years, with 150 so-called 'backline' roles to go. Will you be accepting redundancy expression of interests from workers within the Children and Youth portfolio?

Ms PALMER - I will refer to the department around the specifics of your question but will make some initial statements. We've been clear that we are not talking about frontline services or frontline positions in this work. We know we have a big job in front of us. It is not lost on us what we need to do with this department and we'll certainly be doing it in a very careful, methodical and appropriate way. We welcome staff who may see it as an opportunity for a voluntary redundancy, but we're being very careful to ensure that the people and the positions that we need in the department are protected from any process. For the rest of your question, I'll defer to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - We certainly expect that some of those people from within or across the agency will no doubt apply for a voluntary redundancy and we will work through those and make sure that we assess them on a case-by-case basis, but we have quite a significant increase in budget for child safety workers, for example, so we will be recruiting child safety workers to ensure that all children have a key worker, not reducing our child safety workers. Additionally, for our youth workers within Ashley Youth Detention Centre and as we move to the new Pontville centre, we will be making sure we maintain and stabilise that workforce. We won't be taking away resources that provide services directly to children and young people.

Mrs GREENE - What roles do you consider backline within the Children and Youth portfolio? What criteria are you using to assess that if you're going through vacancy control measures or looking to fill a role? What makes a position backline?

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Ms PALMER - As I said previously, this is not about cutting frontline services. We've been really clear that efficiency focuses on how services are delivered, not reducing the services themselves. We're looking in areas where there might be duplication, where we can do things more effectively and efficiently, but I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Some of the roles we would consider in terms of the profile we may look at, and as I said, we haven't gone anywhere near identifying specific roles. We want to do this with staff. This is a really significant change and we accept that people may be feeling uncertain about their future, so we want to make sure that we meet with them, talk to them and talk to their unions. That's the process that we'll undertake. We'll do it really carefully.

In terms of some of those roles, they would be some leadership and management roles in health and wellbeing, finance and accounting, data analytics and research, communications and marketing, admin and support. The first question that we ask now in our vacancy control process is what service does this position provide directly to frontline service delivery for children and young people, particularly in this portfolio? As I mentioned, for child safety workers, youth workers, child support officers and those who provide really important functions directly to children and young people and their families who need support, we have not and will not be looking at those roles.

Mrs GREENE - Do you accept that cutting positions more broadly within the Department of Education, Children and Young People will impact on services within Child Safety and Youth Justice? For example, if we're cutting roles in ICT or data analytics, policy, workers and management roles, what type of risk assessment have you done or will you be doing to ensure that that doesn't impact on service delivery?

Ms PALMER - That's the work ahead of the department and as I say, it will be managed in a very sensitive and appropriate manner. An example is looking at areas where there's duplication and where we can be more effective and efficient across the entire department. They're the sorts of things we are taking into consideration. As the secretary has said, we are very carefully looking at what are the back-office jobs that directly support the work on the front line and making sure they are not impacted.

Ms ROSOL - I'd like to stay with some questions about operational efficiencies and funding of out-of-home care and Youth Justice. I note that there's quite a bit of conflicting information in the Budget about funding because on one hand, you're looking for efficiencies and cutting funding to the service, while on the other hand you're recognising that there's not enough funding in the service and you're increasing funding, say, for out-of-home care, but even those increases are decreasing over the forward Estimates by around \$9 million a year. You've provided that out-of-home care increase in recognition that there's increasing demand for services, so why is funding dropping over the forward Estimates? Do you think the increasing demand is going to magically fall away over the forward Estimates and in the coming years? What's going on in the thinking behind those decreases?

Ms PALMER - Sure. I'll start with some high-level comments and then I'll pass to the secretary. You can see in the 2026-27 Budget that the government has provided an additional \$151.8 million over four years. That's to strengthen child safety, support families and deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. We are looking for efficiencies and we are making sure we are investing in the areas where we need to see that investment, especially when it comes to fulfilling our obligation regarding the commission of inquiry. It's about

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looking at the areas - and I'll use the same example - where there are duplications. Where can we do that better and where will we have efficiencies? At the same time, the government is acknowledging there needs to be further investment in that space, and that is where you see that \$151.8 million over four years.

We're talking about \$3 million over two years for Child Safety workforce initiatives to support, attract, and retain frontline workers; \$8 million over four years, which is the increase to the base for fostering kinship care allowances, which I know you have an interest in; \$21.5 million over four years to increase and to ensure that every child and young person in contact with Child Safety has an allocated child safety officer; \$100.1 million over four years to support the increasing demand for out-of-home care services; and \$10 million over four years for the continuation of funding for youth housing programs, including the Kingston House service.

There's also additional new funding in the Budget. There's \$5.1 million over two years to support the continuation of the advice and referral line staffing levels; and \$4 million over two years to continue Ashley Youth Detention Centre operational staffing, supporting a stable workforce and continuity for children and young people. This is about identifying the areas that need to have investment. Our government has said these are the areas that we need to be investing in to ensure we are keeping children and young people safe and getting the best outcomes we can for them and over here is where we can be more effective and efficient. As the secretary and I have laid out, we're looking at where we are doubling up and where we can be smarter in some of those back-end areas.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister. I'm thinking about the commission of inquiry recommendations in relation to funding. A number of those recommendations remain outstanding, some of them are delayed and clearly more work needs to be done to keep Tasmanian children safe and to implement those recommendations. Will you rule out cuts to any parts of the department that are focused on implementing commission of inquiry recommendations?

Ms PALMER - With regard to the commission of inquiry recommendations, I don't think our government could have been any clearer that this is a priority for us and I think you can see that, at a time when it's a very tough budget, there's extraordinary investment into this portfolio, which really shows our commitment to delivering on the commission of inquiry recommendations and what we should be delivering on for children and young people.

Ms ROSOL - Thanks, minister.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you very much, honourable minister. With the state government's new policy of dealing with children with behaviour problems, it is looking at a prevention rather than detention model, replacing the Ashley Youth Detention Centre at Deloraine with a new facility in Pontville. Now, the Ashley centre has 51 beds, but the proposed new facility will have- correct me if I'm wrong- 24 beds. There will be 16 residential beds and eight beds for medical needs and also for orientation. Do you think that will be enough beds to deal with the issues with our youth? What would you do if there were more youth with behaviour problems?

Ms PALMER - We are really excited about the opportunity that comes with building a new youth detention facility, because we're not just building a new facility and picking up

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the staff and the children at Ashley and moving them over: this is going to be an entirely new way of working with children, complex children, children who've been affected by trauma, children who have lived lives that, quite possibly, many of us have just never had exposure to.

This is a new way of delivering youth justice, and we've seen in other parts of Australia where new facilities have been built and there hasn't been a change to a therapeutic model of care. They've literally just moved into a new facility. Bricks and mortar don't change a set of circumstances - it's the opportunity that we have to have a whole new therapeutic model of care and so, that's the work that we have been doing. We want to see less children in detention. That is why we are investing in the areas that we are investing in now, because we don't want to see more children. It does not relate to good outcomes.

Unfortunately, there will probably always be a need, certainly for now, to have a youth detention facility. We have a responsibility to keep our community safe, but we also have a responsibility to the young people that find themselves there, because it really does mean it's the end of the line for them. So, we want to be offering a model of care that says, 'Okay, you've got yourself to this point, how can we turn this around? How can we put your life on a different trajectory?' And that's got nothing to do with the building, that's got to do with what happens in the building. So, we are looking forward to the opportunity of having this new facility, this new therapeutic model of care, and seeing less children coming through.

I don't know if there's anything the secretary or the deputy secretary would like to add to that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I suppose the first thing that I'd like to say is, young people don't belong in detention facilities; they belong in homes and communities. As the minister stated quite clearly, we want to see detention as an absolute last resort. And, you know, we've been able to invest in things like the Youth After-hours Diversion Service and Aboriginal-led responses, and a range of other services like JCP, who have and are making a real impact in children and young people's lives.

We did some quite detailed analysis on the numbers related to the new facility, and the Youth Justice Blueprint provided some really clear guidance for us, the Commission of Inquiry provided really clear guidance for us, and this government has committed to that direction of travel. And we took some cross-sections of young people, real young people who are in Ashley Youth Detention Centre, over the course of the last year, and we thought about the future service system, the future policy, things that would be in place, the future legislation that would enact that, and we did an overlay. That helped us determine the size for the new facility, and we're really confident that it is an appropriate size, given our future model of care around youth justice.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I appreciate your work in this space and I, just from the beginning of this hearing, want to appreciate and extend to you my gratitude for the way that you care for the kids in our state. I always say it this way: I think they're our most precious Tasmanians.

I'd like to ask you a question about the *Youth Justice Act* Review. As members here would be aware, it's a fundamental part of the whole youth justice reform that you are leading, and we all want it to be informed by a wide range of stakeholders to ensure lasting and meaningful change.

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Looking at the website that deals with the review, it speaks about your and the government's strong commitment to prevention, early intervention, connecting children and families with the right services, and restorative justice processes. So, to the point on consultation, I'd invite you to explain how that's going. How will people be consulted on the *Youth Justice Act* Review discussion paper so that you and the government are able to hear from everyone in the community about this very important reform?

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. Thank you very much. You know, we are really committed to delivering a meaningful youth justice reform that reduces offending, that supports victims of crime, protects the rights of children and young people, and keeps our communities safe. As the minister in this space, I remain committed to delivering improved outcomes for children and young people.

Now, the review of the *Youth Justice Act* is a foundational element of the youth justice system reform, so it's really important to get this right. It's an important piece of the youth justice system reform puzzle, which is complex and multifaceted, as a number of us have already said today. The current act has not been comprehensively reviewed for quite some time and it no longer reflects contemporary understanding of child development, trauma-informed practice or evidence-based approaches to reducing youth offending.

Updating the act will ensure the legislative framework supports improved outcomes for young people and safer communities, and a key component of the act review is extensive and genuine consultation. This consultation is underway and is being coordinated by the department across government and non-government sectors, including through regular cross-agency working groups. We know we cannot limit the consultation to government stakeholders. Targeted engagement has commenced with a broad range of voices, and they're actually including the voices of children and young people who have lived experience of being in the justice system: our Aboriginal communities, over-represented in youth justice - a very important voice; the youth justice and community services sector, and critically also, the voices of victims of crime.

Including the voices of victims of youth crime is really essential, because victims provide that first-hand insight into the impacts of offending on individuals, families and the broader community. Their perspective certainly helps to ensure that the reforms strike that right balance between accountability, rehabilitation and also community safety, and that the system acknowledges and responds to the harm caused by offending behaviour.

Consultation to date has included testing, the draft discussion paper with senior leaders across government, including through the Tasmanian Government Secretaries' Board, and further targeted engagement with agency heads is ongoing. A final discussion paper will be released for public consultation in the second half of 2026, and that will ensure that all Tasmanians will have that opportunity to contribute to that conversation.

The review also draws on a substantial body of evidence and reform work, including the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, the Youth Justice Blueprint, the Disability Royal Commission, and Closing the Gap commitments. It's supported by detailed research into trauma-informed approaches, diversion, rehabilitation and international best practice.

Ultimately, the *Youth Justice Act* Review is really an investment into our state, into the safety and wellbeing of our community and into the safety and the wellbeing of our young

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people. So, really important work that lays the foundation to achieving the commitment that we've made. Thank you for the question.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, the Budget announces 48 additional key worker positions for children in out-of-home care. How many children currently in out-of-home care do not have an allocated key worker? How does that compare to last year?

Ms PALMER - It certainly, you know, is an area that we have a real focus on and it's why you see that commitment in the Budget, because we know that the best outcomes are when we have children with those allocated workers. I will pass to the department for the numbers you were asking for.

Ms WEBSTER - This is as at the ending of the March quarter. The total number of unallocated is 366.1, although I know that we have some more recent data, so I might throw to the executive director for that information.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Currently at the moment we've got 792 children who are allocated. That is 70 per cent of the children across our portfolio that we're working with. At the same time last year that was 47 per cent, so we've grown the number of children allocated with a key worker by 23 per cent. That's a really substantial shift and has meant that children are being seen more often and are having safety assessments undertaken more quickly.

We've seen a steady growth in our workforce across our Child Safety Service. We are currently just 0.6 of an FTE off having a full complement of Child Safety staff on our front line and we know that improves next financial year with the new funding that's coming, so subsequently we've got a cohort of staff starting on 1 July to continue to grow our workforce.

Ms WEBSTER - And the unallocated numbers?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Our unallocated numbers as of today are 346, and we have an approach for those children and young people whereby we are triaging who most needs responses, who has care teams in place so there is support for them happening in the here and now, and how those children are monitored and overseen. We are in the process of developing some clear guidance for our staff in our sites around our core expectations for them in terms of those children who don't have an allocated key worker, so that we can be sure of the quality of service they are receiving.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. I'm sure you're expecting this question. You've just mentioned that you're almost at capacity in terms of FTE positions being filled, but how many staff are currently on workers compensation or stood down or on other types of leave?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'll take a whole-of-portfolio approach to this. We currently have 72 workers across the portfolio on workers compensation, made up of 40 in Youth Justice and 32 in our Child Safety Service. We have recently established a role at Ashley Youth Detention Centre where there have been a higher proportion of workers compensation claims. It's a role for a psychologist, it's a wellbeing officer and it is directly intended to support and plan with staff when there are hard incidents or situations that occur that help them remain in the workplace or return to the workplace as quickly as they can.

Mrs GREENE - What's the FTE for the whole portfolio?

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Mr WHITCOMBE - FTE sits at about 550 something. I could get that.

Mrs GREENE - Yes, and then a breakdown of what that is for Child Safety because that was where I was leaning initially with that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - A total of 32 come from across our Child Safety Service which has about 300 FTE within it.

Mrs GREENE - So about 10 per cent. Minister, I was a union organiser for child safety for a decade and I've been concerned for a number of years about vacancies in Child Safety Services and Youth Justice. We know that it's very hard sometimes to fill those vacancies and sometimes those vacancies happen very quickly if there's been a significant issue in the workplace. I'm concerned that we're really just going to create 48 new vacancies rather than 48 new roles. What's the plan to fill those roles so you don't advertise them and you don't have bums on seats?

Ms PALMER - It's pretty complex work that our Child Safety officers do and they really do an extraordinary job dealing with families and children at really high risk and who are also really complex and challenging young people as well. Our government continues to apply incentives to recruit and retain Child Safety officers, advice and referral line employees and Youth Justice employees and there's been a particular focus for the north-west which has seen a really great outcome for that region. The \$4.5 million in the Child Safety Workforce package provided in the 2024-25 Budget aimed to make improvements to Child Safety Service wages and conditions to bolster services to vulnerable Tasmanians. We are delivering on our commitment to support the attraction and retention of frontline workers in the Children and Youth portfolio with a continued investment of \$3 million over two years. The government remains committed to frontline services and future investment beyond the two-year commitment which will be in future budget considerations.

It's important to note that we are also progressing short- to longer-term strategies to build the Child Safety workforce pipeline, and that's including scholarships and pathway initiatives. In May and November 2025, a Child and Youth workforce roundtable comprised of leaders from across government and the community sector met to identify actions that could be taken to address both immediate and long-term workforce shortages and we certainly remain committed in this space because we know how important those positions are. I'll just see if the secretary has any more to add on that.

Ms WEBSTER - I think the minister has mentioned most things with Child Safety. However, I will talk about youth workers because I think she also mentioned that. We've seen a really steady increase in the applications received for youth workers at Ashley, which is an equally challenging and demanding job and they're doing some amazing work, as are our Child Safety workers. We've seen quite a significant increase in applications, and just to give you an indication, in March 2025 we received 52 applications, in July 2025, we received 67 applications and in September 2025, 244 applications for youth workers.

Mrs GREENE - Quite a jump.

Ms WEBSTER - That's quite a jump. Mr Whitcombe mentioned some of the work around staff safety and wellbeing that we're doing, but we've also been doing a lot to make sure we are stabilising the workforce and also providing programs to children in Ashley that enables

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the workforce to do their job a lot easier. Whilst we can't 100 per cent ever say that we'll have 100 per cent recruitment, I think we are doing a lot better than we did and I think that evidence is in there also for applications received for Child Safety workers. We want to make this a great place to work because I think that does increase applications. The work will always be really hard and for me it is about making the workplace safer and a better place to work, so they're the investments we're making into both sides of the organisation. The other thing I would say is that we're currently underway with an industrial agreement around Child Safety and Youth Justice. Mr Whitcombe is the lead negotiator with that and it is about making sure that we have some capacity and to be flexible within that workforce, so that's the work that we're currently doing - notwithstanding it is really challenging work.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, I'd like to come back to the question I asked earlier around ruling out cuts to any parts of the department focused on child safety and the commission of inquiry recommendation implementation. You spoke in your answer quite a bit about looking at what the government was doing, but you didn't actually rule out cuts in those areas. Will you rule out cuts to any parts of the department focused on commission of inquiry recommendation implementation and child safety?

Ms PALMER - It wouldn't be wise for me to be pre-empting this body of work. This is the work that the department has to do. We've been very open and transparent to say the number of positions we are focused on. The secretary has laid out the areas that make up that back-office number and that is the work that we do now, looking at, where are we duplicating, where have we got, for example, areas where we've got one unit that has a position and another unit that has a position, but that position could actually work over both units. How can we pull units together? Where's that duplication? That is the work that we're doing now.

We're really conscious, me as a minister and certainly, my secretary in her position, that this is a period of time that is unsettling for our workforce, so we want to have those discussions with those staff. The discussions also need to happen with the unions as well, but everything we do, every decision that we make, we are looking through the lens of how are we improving outcomes for children and for young people? That is always the lens that we are looking through.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister, and I think I probably speak for many people in the community who would be disappointed that you won't rule out cuts in that area -

Ms PALMER - Just to be really clear, I'm not ruling anything in or out, so I don't want to see a headline tomorrow 'minister won't rule out' because that just frightens people. Our government is absolutely committed to the recommendations of the commission of inquiry. Not just ticking a box, but changing culture. Not just going, okay, we've made that adjustment, now, we move on. We want to see real change and a real result from that enormous body of work that was so hard for our state to be involved with. We have made a real commitment that we are not looking at frontline services. First and foremost, we are about improving the outcomes for children and young people, but there is work that needs to be done in looking at where there are areas where we can be more effective and where we can be more efficient, and that is the body of work that the secretary has in front of her.

Ms ROSOL - Thanks, minister. I still think that your words speak for themselves, but moving on to another question. The funding in the Budget for child safety workforce incentives in the forward Estimates, they end after 2027-28. Why do those incentives end after those two

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years? Will it be easier, do you think, to retain child safety workers in two years time or is this a way of making the Budget bottom line look better? I'm just trying to understand why those incentives would only be there for two years.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. Our government recognises the challenges our child safety workforce faces every day. Certainly, for me as Minister for Children and Youth, I see their dedication to support children and young people firsthand. This 2026-27 Budget recognises the importance of our child safety workforce, with an inclusion of \$3 million over two years to continue attracting and retaining these frontline workers. This funding also supports the transition to a new child safety and youth justice operations industrial agreement or equivalent, establishing a dedicated classification and qualifications framework, consolidating existing child safety and youth justice instruments and supporting the recruitment and retention of frontline staff. We remain committed to supporting this vital component of our workforce. I understand that bargaining has now commenced between the department and the unions regarding that new agreement.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I guess that didn't really answer the question about why the funding ends in two years time though.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, the incentives are there whilst the negotiation work is underway and it is intended that the new agreement will include anything that is negotiated between the department - between the government and between the unions around what may or may not be in a future agreement.

Ms ROSOL - So potentially permanent incentives that wouldn't be on a separate budget line, but would be somewhere in a wage figure?

Ms WEBSTER - No, that has been negotiated yet. That's what I'm referring to.

Prof RAZAY - The Department for Education, Children and Youth mandate that punitive responses like detention and suspension are strictly used as a last resort. Schools are probably the best places to identify and understand the root causes of behavioural problems because it related to trauma or misdiagnosed learning behaviour. I feel the best way to address prevention, not detention, is to work at school to identify these youths. Most importantly, do they have the resources connecting them to the really experienced trained staff in helping them? I'm not talking about psychologists, but experienced trained staff who can help a student to improve their behaviour.

Ms PALMER - I realise I'm the minister across both portfolios, but I'm here now with the team for Youth Justice and Children and Youth. So, that question is probably not for this session, it's probably more in the Education space. What I can say is that we are looking at children from the moment they're born - from even before they're born - what can we do in that preventative space. We're looking at things like Bringing Baby Home and another a number of other programs that the deputy secretary can speak to. So, yes, certainly across school age, but it actually starts often when we hear of a pregnancy. I'll ask the deputy secretary to expand on that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I think the question goes to the heart of why Child Safety Services and Youth Justice and Education were brought together. There is such an opportunity to see better outcomes for children and young people by holding them,

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nurturing them, doing everything we can to keep them engaged in education. And this is a live discussion across our agency. We are talking at a leadership level and at local and community levels about how can we be better as an agency, in terms of teaming up and seeing, particularly young people, connected and reintegrated back into education. We're seeing some amazing stories come about as a result of that.

I want to be really clear, in this work, when you take on the care responsibilities as a corporate parent, you are responsible across all of the wellbeing domains and Education is a core part of that. In our outcomes framework that we will be releasing in draft in a month's time, really squarely within that outcomes framework is a commitment to see all of our children and young people engaged in and learning in education, training or employment in some way, shape or form, and that's what we'll be striving for.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, one of the marvellous services that you look after that emerged from former minister Jacque Petrusma's child safety redesign is the Bringing Baby Home program, keeping families together and keeping a focus on helping that precious little baby to thrive. In the past, the government has indicated that Bringing Baby Home is available statewide and I'd ask you to update the committee on what is available for at-risk families, including in the north and north-west, relating to the Bringing Baby Home program.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. The safety of children comes first and this government is committed to families being supported to stay together wherever possible. As I mentioned in my response to Prof Razay, children from the very beginning. As the Minister for Children and Youth, I have firmly placed the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people at the centre of everything I do, and this government is actively delivering on this commitment.

Bringing Baby Home is an ongoing initiative that commenced in 2021 as part of the government's child and youth wellbeing strategy, and this is Tasmania's most intensive family preservation program and it is reserved for families where infant removal is really quite imminent. So Bringing Baby Home keeps infants with their parents and it's providing that intensive in-home support or residential care to strengthen, in particular, parenting skills and to prevent the need for those alternative care arrangements to be put in place.

Bringing Baby Home is an intensive support model. It provides up to 12 weeks of hands-on parenting education and support, helping parents to make positive changes and build sustainable parenting skills. The program provides vulnerable families with the support that they need with, you know, the hope that it will set them up to continue to keep their baby with them. We know how important those first few months of a child's life are.

The program is either delivered directly within the family home and safely supported, or within a dedicated Bringing Baby Home residence. This vital program is delivered statewide and until now, families in the north-west region have only had the opportunity to access Bringing Baby Home support within their own homes. While the in-home support arm of Bringing Baby Home is immensely important for many families and has shown to have great outcomes, we know that for some families, that intensive residential support is needed outside of wherever their family home might actually be. So, I'm pleased to advise the committee that families in the north-west will now have access to a residential Bringing Baby Home support program for up to 12 weeks, as well as the in-home program.

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What this means is that we're going to be able to assist four more families over a year in the north-west through intensive residential support. The expanded program in the north-west not only benefits the families, but it also keeps that community really connected because the families are actually accessing the support in the areas where they live, in the places where they work and, you know, for that 12-week program.

For all families accessing the program's support, a step-down approach ensures continuity of support following the program completion, and our government has supported more than 70 families since Bringing Baby Home commenced and now we'll be able to support more families than we ever have before in the north-west, which I think will be very much welcomed.

Mrs GREENE - Just to come back to the 48 additional child safety roles, will those extra workers be supported by additional unit coordinators, practice leaders and support workers, and is that funded with the additional money that's in the Budget?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the deputy secretary, thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Again, in the modelling for child safety officers, yes, I can confirm that unit coordinators, practice leaders and practice managers were all included in the modelling and in the Budget that we've received for those positions.

Mrs GREENE - So, how many additional roles would that mean for the service?

Mr WHITCOMBE - From memory, it's about five more practice leaders and it's either two or three more practice managers. Then, obviously, there's unit coordinators attached to each of those teams. I could get the specific breakdown of those extra staff during the session.

Mrs GREENE - That would be great if that could be tabled, or if you need to take it on notice.

Ms PALMER - I think we'll try and get it for you before the end of the session.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. How many of the 48 additional positions do you expect to be filled by, say, 30 June 2027?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, within my portfolio and the message that I've given, we are to go as strongly and as firmly into the space of recruiting more child safety officers as fast as we possibly can. Right now, we've put out 25 letters of offer and we've had 23 of those letters of offer accepted. As I mentioned earlier, we've got five starting on 1 July. We've got another recruitment campaign that's kicking off in July.

And we have taken a different approach to recruitment. You know, we're utilising social media, we're telling stories, we're going more broadly across jurisdictions. Certainly, the workforce package has helped us achieve that. So, I'm really committed to moving as quickly as we can to establish our child safety workforce.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. I'm also just keen to understand what the cost of recruitment has been in the previous 12 months. How much have these campaigns cost to attract such a huge amount of applications? Because that certainly hasn't been the case in years gone by. Just

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keen to get a breakdown and understanding of what the cost has been and also the cost of onboarding new staff.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, most of the work that we do to onboard is internal work, so it would be a part of - when you mentioned the practice leader and the unit coordinator, and indeed, Mr Whitcombe's and Ms Black's role, there was a child safety recruitment campaign which advertised both intrastate and nationally, and that was at a cost of just over \$25,000, and there was a youth justice recruitment campaign - that was \$16,500. So they're

Ms ROSOL - Minister, the honourable Cassy O'Connor tabled some questions or asked some questions in the Legislative Council about the use of force at Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC), and you provided some information in April in response to that. Thank you for those responses. I just had some follow-up questions off the back of the answers that you gave.

The information that you supplied went up until 20 March, and I'm just wondering how many more incidents of the use of force have been reported since that time? How many more investigations have been finalised since that time?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Thank you. I'll ask the department to see if they've got that information with them, but what I will say upfront is any form of violence is unacceptable and the government remains committed to ensuring the safety and security of AYDC, certainly until its closure. All uses of force are all assessed, they're carefully looked over and, you know, whatever action needs to be taken.

So if there is any sort of incident, then there certainly is a very thorough process which takes place to ensure that it is appropriate. In all interactions where there is a risk of an incident occurring, the objective is always to try and resolve issues through de-escalation and negotiation with children and young people wherever it's safe to do so. Staff follow the approved Awareness, De-escalation, Protection (A.D.P.) model when force is deemed the option of last resort in an incident's response. This assists to maintain the safety of everyone at the centre, the staff and the children, which is really important.

I'll just ask the secretary to address the other elements of your question.

Ms WEBSTER - I only have the same data up to 31 March, but Mr Whitcombe has, I think, some more recent data.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I've got some data around rates of use of force at Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Would that be helpful?

Ms ROSOL - Rates? I mean, I was looking for numbers, but I guess if you tell me the rates and we can see -

Mr WHITCOMBE - So per young person, per month, it typically sits at .4 experiences of force being used for a young person, which is a funny number, I know, but it's a breakdown of per child per month. It did rise in February this year, and it lifted to 1.5, but we are monitoring the numbers of use of force, so we will be able to get the specific number during the course of this hearing.

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As part of our stabilisation work, we want to understand how settled the residence is, how often force is being used. And obviously the practice and policy around use of force is really important, and we have just recently established a new interim policy for use of force. There's also a checklist there that's quite a simple guide over two pages for our staff, and we're in the process of rolling out learning and support for staff with that new policy at the moment.

Mrs ARCHER - Thank you. The second part of my question there was how many investigations have been finalised since that time? Because I think there were nine had been finalised in the answers that I got.

Ms PALMER - So you're talking about between?

Ms ROSOL - Between 20 March and now. But we can come back to that later, if you want to.

Ms WEBSTER - So, through you minister, we only have the data up to the end of March as well, and that would be a quite a significant - In terms of a lot - You're talking about reportable conduct matters closed?

Ms ROSOL - Well, reports - Yes, finalised, where there's been an investigation.

Ms WEBSTER - Yes. That will be in relation to the data that I think Mr Whitcombe said we should be able to get during the hearing.

Ms ROSOL - Great. Thank you. When there's a reportable conduct incident, I know that DECYP does an investigation and the Office of the Independent Regulator (OIR) also does an investigation. Have they made any different determinations to the DECYP investigation when they've drawn their conclusions

Ms WEBSTER - I'll just go through the information that I've got, and this is up from 1 July 2025 to 31 March. We have notified the independent regulator of 234 reportable conduct matters. I should say, this is across the agency and it's important to note they reflect allegations that meet that statutory reporting threshold. Between that same period, 1 July to 31 March, five cases were closed by the Office of the Independent Regulator with substantiated reportable conduct. They were at the lower end of reportable conduct and did not involve serious criminal behaviour such as child sexual abuse.

It might be helpful from our perspective internally, we have an internal process called a 'concern notice' across the agency where anytime there's any allegation or suspicion of behaviour or use of force at Ashley, a concern notice is raised. That information is reviewed by our own complaint management oversight unit. Obviously, if it meets that statutory threshold for the independent regulator, it goes to the independent regulator. And if it does meet that statutory threshold, we do an investigation on that, but we also may do a code of conduct investigation at the same time.

There are a number of matters across the agency and - this is across the agency, not just Ashley or child safety - around 89 active code of conduct matters that do not all relate to reportable conduct or child matters. They can relate to a whole range of other matters. We also have an internal process at Ashley to review all - an independent review committee - that

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reviews all use of force matters. Then a secondary committee that sits outside of Ashley that also reviews any that might meet that threshold.

There's quite a few additional checks and balances now that previously weren't in place and we continue to work. I regularly meet with the independent regulator. Mr Whitcombe meets more regularly on those, and if the independent regulator is of a view we should have referred something then we would certainly work with her and her office to make sure we understood why we had a difference in viewpoint.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. That information is really useful. I'm not sure that it quite got to whether the investigations by the OIR sometimes, whether any of them don't match the conclusions DECYP investigations reach.

Ms WEBSTER - I'd have to take that specific question on notice which I can answer, but what I can say relating to Ashley, I think was the specific question - there were 83 cases related to Ashley that were reported to the independent regulator for oversight in that same period, 1 July to 31 March. I don't have the information here about the closing of those or if there's a difference.

Ms PALMER - What we might do is we will try to get that information for you within the session so our team will see if they can get it for you. I will try to get back to you before time is up.

Prof RAZAY - Many young people in contact with the justice system come from a background of extreme poverty, abuse, complex trauma and it's manifested by high mental health disorder, addiction to drugs and alcohol, poor physical health and conduct disorders. How we respond to these challenges is very important. I believe that music and sport can play an important factor in dealing with behaviour like that. For example, music. Being in a choir singing or being part of a group playing a musical instrument. In addition what has been shown repeatedly is they can improve the wellbeing of the child, improve their learning processes, improve their mental health wellbeing, it reduces violence, aggression and most importantly improves self-confidence. Are we using this music and sporting helping behaviour of our youth?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I will ask the deputy secretary to address that. I think they're some of the things that we're really looking at in the therapeutic model of care we are moving towards in some of those areas.

Even if you look at the setting of the new Pontville detention facility, such careful consideration has been given to what it sounds like when you're inside the facility, to what it looks like when you look out a window. The very fact that you don't look out onto fences and barbed wire, you look out onto fields and paddocks, and the perimeter of the building is the fence line. There certainly is consideration in where we're moving to with a more therapeutic model of care, but I will ask the deputy secretary to speak to that in further detail.

Mr WHITCOMBE - The role of our community youth justice team is understanding each child and young person and what their strengths are, what they're interested in, what are going to be some of those things that if we can build stability, relationships and connections within their community that are really pro-social are going to make a difference. I know that

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our community youth justice on a young person by young person basis do that work and are definitely bridges and connectors for young people to some of those activities across the state.

I am reminded by your question, there's an old saying, 'A kid in sport stays out of court' and it's a very simple statement, but that goes to building relationships, being connected.

There is a really great initiative in the north of the state that's happening now. It's not sport or music, but there's a community garden they have established. Young people were involved in the cultivating and growing of that garden and young people now are involved in making salads with the produce from that garden. There's some really great practice that's happening across our youth services.

Prof RAZAY - We're looking forward in the future to attend performance by the choir singing in your youth.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, our foster and kinship carers are obviously a very important part of our care system to look after our children and young people during such vulnerable years, like I'm sure you do every other day, I applaud them and thank them for what they do. It's a very generous and loving thing to offer yourself for that service but, of course, our foster and kinship carers need support, access and maybe, at times, advice from your child safety team and I would ask you to let the committee know how you're providing that support and perhaps even continuously improving it?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question because we know if a young person can't be at home with their own family, the best option for them is indeed to be with other close family members through kinship care or indeed foster care. Our foster and kinship carers are certainly a really vital part of that whole care system we have, opening up their homes and their lives to young people. I deeply value the contribution that foster and kinship carers make into the lives of children, young people and families. I loved going to their conference when I first became minister. It was one of the first things I did in this portfolio, and it was absolutely wonderful.

It's really good to see we are strengthening the information available to carers through a new online resource hub, which is called the foster and kinship care tool, available through the department's public website. The website includes information and resources under headings for things like carer and wellbeing support. That's offering peer support and mentoring, counselling and support service resources. There's also training and development for information on how to register for required training courses or additional online training. Also supporting children and young people which includes resources on how to support that really diverse and changing needs of children and young people who might be in their care. Of course, we still offer the option for carers to access support through telephone or email, with these details also available through the same website. The website also includes information and updates on how the Tasmanian Government is continuing to work in partnership with the Foster and Kinship Carer Association of Tasmania to improve support for fostering kinship carers. They're known as FCAT and an invaluable part of the care system. Again, I deeply appreciate all the work it does in supporting our foster care families and our kinship carers.

We're continuing to work in partnership with the Foster and Kinship Carers Association to update the carer handbook and strengthening access to training resources and peer support,

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which is so important, and recognising that carers need consistent, reliable information to help them on their caring journey.

Alongside the additional investment of \$8 million over four years in the Budget to continue the uplift to foster and kinship carer allowances we're investing in a more sustainable and responsive system that better supports both carers and the workforce that works alongside of them. These actions are directly aligned with the recommendations of the commission of inquiry. Another example of where we are investing in outcomes from the commission of inquiry, where it emphasised the needs to strengthen, improve communication and engagement with carers.

Through our Uplifting Care reform program, we're delivering these changes by building a system that is child centred, rights based and informed by lived experience while ensuring carers are recognised, ensuring they are supported and equipped with the information they need to do the amazing work they do day in, day out.

Mrs GREENE - Arch was established as a co located multidisciplinary response to sexual harm, yet I'm hearing from the sector there's often no physical child safety service or advice and referral line presence in either the north or the north-west in Arch's and that there've also been multiple absences at the statewide steering committee meeting with Arch partners.

Do you accept that children and victim/survivors in those regions are now receiving a different level of service than the south. Can you just provide some clarity on exactly what's happening? Is it a service capacity issue or is the need not there?

Ms PALMER - Certainly. I will pass to the deputy secretary to answer that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'm going to make some opening remarks and then pass to Tiffany Black. We remain really committed to the Arch model. We are in active conversations with the leadership and team there. At the same time, we need to be really sure our child safety workforce is doing the work that is going to have the most impact every day. We are aware that when we look at demand and the needs of children who don't have a care worker, that we have to balance our workforce in creative ways. I'm just going to pass to the executive director for our service to talk further to that.

Ms BLACK - I can give you an update of where it's specifically up to. In alignment with the change to the advice and referral line model, the work we've done with Professor Leah Bromfield on how we respond and organise ourselves. We've had to update statement of duties for the role that will be within Arch. That's been approved and it's going through the vacancy management process at the moment. We're hoping to resolve it quite quickly.

Mrs GREENE - But how long has child safety not had a presence in Arch? I am trying to understand how this has happened. Was it something that was approved by the steering committee for Arch or has this lack of presence in Arch been because there hasn't been the staff there? Or is it just because you feel there's more pressing work to do in the broader service?

Ms BLACK - We still provide responses in collaboration with Arch police. Our staff haven't been co located there, but we're still responding to and fulfilling our statutory responsibility when there is a child at risk in that process.

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Mrs GREENE - Thank you. When government agencies reduce their presence within Arch, the workload doesn't disappear. Instead it's absorbed by organisations such as Laurel House, Sexual Assault Support Service, Tasmania Police, or the Family Violence and Counselling Support Service.

Has the department assessed whether NGOs are carrying responsibilities beyond what they're funded to do because child safety or ARL haven't been physically present in Arch?

Ms PALMER - I will pass to Tiffany Black and the deputy secretary, but I think it was just explained that there may not be a physical presence in Arch, but the service has not disappeared. We're still responding in the same way. It's just that there isn't a physical presence in Arch. For more on that question, I'll pass to Tiffany.

Ms BLACK - I'm not aware that that has meant that the NGOs have picked up work that we aren't doing, but it is an ongoing conversation that we're having. I'm up there next week, meeting with Laurel House to talk specifically about the model and talking them through any concerns that they have in the north-west, which is the newer centre. We'll resolve any issues as they come up.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Also, minister, was there an impact assessment undertaken before this change of what it looked like in March was implemented?

Ms PALMER - I will pass to the deputy secretary for that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, we did modelling on the numbers of matters that related to children that were coming through and I want to be so clear about this - we are committed to being responsive in an enduring way around those matters that affect children who come through the Arch collaboration. We think it's a really strong initiative. We have very strong relationships at local levels, and that's described by members of the collaboration, so picking up the phone is really straightforward and, as the executive director has said, those conversations about the shape of what it could look like into the future are ongoing. It is really important that, when we are talking about this particular service that we provide a really strong response, we're committed to that, but it's equally important that children who might not have a response will get a response through us being really clear about how we deploy our child safety staff across the state. We need to have a close eye to that.

Mrs GREENE - It sounds like we might need to monitor this one going forward, I think.

Ms ROSOL - I want to come back to use of force at Ashley. In the response and the answers that you provided to Ms O'Connor, one of the answers stated that nine matters at that time of use of force had been investigated and finalised and of those, nine, seven cases were assessed as operationally necessary, which means that two were assessed as not being operationally necessary. I wanted to ask what actions have been taken in response to those incidents of use of force that were determined not to be necessary?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question and I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, without going into those individual matters that may relate to individual employees, again, I can talk from a system response. Where the use of force has been found to be not reasonable there would be, as we say, an investigation

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undertaken by the department and an investigation under the Independent Regulator around reportable conduct under that act. If there's a breach of the State Service Code of Conduct, then it would depend on that individual matter as to what outcome it might be. In some cases, it may be the termination of an employee. In some cases, it may be that there is some counselling, some retraining, and that really goes to the individual incidents.

Use of force, there is a lawful and reasonable use of force applied sometimes in Ashley. There's a really strong process for determining, as we know, when that isn't the case, but the outcome of that is really dependent on a case by case. But, I can say, where there is an alleged breach, they are independently investigated and then returned to me. I then become the decision-maker on what the outcome and what the sanction for that employee might be.

Ms PALMER - If I could just add to that, I think a really important part of this is the use of body-worn cameras. We have quite a large number that are now on site and we are working through that process to see full implementation of staff wearing body-worn cameras, which is a really good way for there to be that proper and thorough look at any incidents where force had to be used. I think that's a great tool in ensuring that use of force is only used appropriately, but also in ensuring that staff feel comfortable and confident that their actions can actually be directly seen by the committee that oversees this, and that's got to bring them a certain amount of comfort.

We also have CCTV, of course, in use and that again is making a big difference to transparency when it comes to interactions between staff and young people as well. So, the CCTV is obviously not operational in holding rooms or the bedrooms of the young people, but certainly in other areas around the facility, which adds to the fact that we want everybody to feel safe at the centre, both our young people and our staff.

Ms ROSOL - Just out of what you said there about the body-worn cameras, has that rollout of the body-worn cameras been delayed at all?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to the deputy secretary for that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, we currently have 74 body-worn cameras at the facility. The original thought when we were rolling those out was that we would need to allocate one to each staff person. We've changed that system and it's going to be deployable on a daily basis system that does link directly to that person for recording purposes. We are, or have been, in consultation with the unions because of the change that sort of underpins this, and we have incorporated being very clear about use of body-worn cameras and any restraint practices within our updated use of force policy. Now, we expect that will be in place carte blanche across the facility from 1 July.

Ms ROSOL - And is that a delay from what you were hoping?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, it has taken longer than what we would have wanted, I think it's fair to say.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you for that answer. I think that leads into my next question, which is to do with training. In February this year, the Office of the Independent Regulator told the commission of inquiry responses committee that she was concerned about lack of training, feedback and corrective action at Ashley in the area of de-escalation. She said:

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It is my view the majority of the physical violence allegations against youth workers stem from a lack of effective training and remedial action after incidents occur.

She also said:

My concern is when incidents occur, there needs to be some corrective action and there is feedback to that worker or they view the CCTV or the body-cam footage. That's the part for me that's missing because we see time and time again there's a lack of de-escalation.

So, it's obviously a very serious matter. But, when you were asked by media about it more than two weeks later, you said, and I quote, 'No, I'm not aware of that matter and that's probably a matter for the secretary.' I'm just wondering how you could not be aware of such a serious issue as the Independent Regulator raising a concern around training and feedback and why you would suggest that that's a matter for the secretary and not for yourself as the minister?

Ms PALMER - Well, obviously, I am looking at this from a much higher level. Operationally, it's a matter for the secretary and the deputy secretary and for the facility itself. But, we have been doing a lot of work in trying to look at how we can be better training our youth workers at AYDC. A lot of it comes down to the rostering system, which doesn't allow - the way that it's currently set up - for there to be adequate opportunity for training. That is certainly something that the deputy secretary has a real passion for and he's looking at how we can we change that rostering system so that it can take into account opportunities for more thorough training opportunities. But, that's a matter the deputy secretary has to work through with the unions and also with staff as well, so I don't know if you'd like to add more to that?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you, through you, minister, I do want to be really clear that following incidents where force is used, there are both what we call 'hot debriefs' and 'cold debriefs' and those hot debriefs are sort of immediately after the situation. Then there's often a week that passes and there's the ability to sort of step back from what might have happened and have a more fulsome conversation about whatever the incident is.

I wanted to also just acknowledge that we have grown our learning and development capacity.

Ms ROSOL - Since February? Since the time of this?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That's right. We have a dedicated trainer who's part of our broader learning and development team who's helping facilitate a longer version of our induction program so it's now a seven-week program and it does go to real-life scenarios around use of force and de-escalation and walks people through those as well.

Lastly, the intent of the IRC, which is chaired independently, is to provide a learning loop and provide feedback. It's really important when it comes to use of force that it's overseen really carefully, that it's only used as a last resort. But it's also really important that people feel capable, confident and supported to use force and intervene when it's appropriate and I want to get the balance right across our workforce so that they feel supported to act when they need to and that they've got all the tools and support of the organisation to do it in the right way.

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Prof RAZAY - Local organisations such as the Eskleigh Foundation have seen positive outcomes when workers are supported to implement therapeutic parenting approaches, including training delivered by Act for Kids, which is supporting services for children and family which are experiencing or at risk of child abuse or neglect. What funding does the government currently provide to ensure residential care workers across Tasmania, receive consistent training, coaching and supervision in therapeutic parenting and trauma-informed practises?

Ms PALMER - It is so important that we are seeing that rolled out in the training resources that are provided and I'll ask the deputy secretary to go into more detail for that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - In particular, we utilise the Australian Centre - it's ACF - I'm just trying to get the acronym right. But on a caring family by caring family basis, if there's needs there they get directly involved in supporting those families. Right across our service, there's a lot of talk about therapeutic care and what is therapeutic care really? We have been working with a couple of external organisations to develop a set of things that remain true when it comes to therapeutic care and how we both support our caregivers, our kinship carers and right across our residential care, our salaried care providers to be really clear on what those components of therapeutic care are. That's going to provide the basis for which we, not just commission care, but also informs our learning and development supports for carers right across the system.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, the advice and referral line would be the primary way for concerns on mandatory reporters, like everyone in this room can make notifications in relation to child safety concerns and I'd like to make the point, I suppose, that we all would want an effective model to ensure that urgent and high priority concerns are met most quickly, while lower priority cases are also given due consideration. Would you please update the committee on the advice and referral line to have triaging and efficient allocation and any changes that you're implementing please?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question and we certainly, as a government, make no apology for putting the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian children at the centre of everything that we do. We acknowledge that like jurisdictions right across the country, child safety services has historically experienced workforce vacancies. I think that just reflects the really demanding roles that these are and the national pressures that are on the child protection workforce but our government has acted decisively and with record investment to address these challenges and to support the system.

Since 2021, we've delivered a comprehensive reform agenda and that's through Strong Families Safe Kids and we're continuing that momentum with our response to the commission of inquiry. In the 2026-27 Budget alone, we've committed a further \$151.8 million over four years specifically to strengthen child safety, support families and improve outcomes for children and young people. A central pillar of that investment is our frontline workforce because we know that our staff are key to delivering improved outcomes for children, young people and for their families, so we're investing \$5.1 million over two years to support the continuation of the Advice and Referral Line staffing levels.

Importantly, we're not just focused on numbers, we're focused on supporting our staff to do their jobs well to enable improved outcomes for children and young people. That's why we're strengthening supervision, leadership and practise support and delivering a new operating model for the Advice and Referral Line, and this will give staff clearer decision-making tools,

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it'll give them better processes and also stronger alignment with child safety services. This work is directly aligned with the commission of inquiry recommendations and importantly the intent of the commission of inquiry. We're also improving intake and triaging so that children at greatest risk are identified and that they are responded to efficiently and we're strengthening coordination across the system so families get the right support that they need at the right time, at the time that they really need that support.

As we're seeing results of this dedicated focus and effort, we've significantly reduced the number of matters waiting for allocation in the Advice and Referral Line from more than 2000 at its peak to fewer than 10, ensuring faster responses to children and families who need that support. It's this team, here in this room who have been absolutely instrumental in seeing those numbers change.

We're also responding to increasing demand with contacts to the ARL growing substantially in recent years. That is driven in part by greater community awareness and I think particularly since the commission of inquiry. On one hand we don't want to see any reports, but at least we know that our community is now really attuned to this and they are acting when they feel that they need to. Our current focus and investments are ensuring the system can respond to that demand and ultimately it's about the outcomes for our kids. A stronger and a more stable workforce means timely assessments, it means better decision making and a more consistent engagement with children and families and it means earlier support which is what is really key in this space so that there are fewer escalations which means that there's better safety for children and young people. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Before we continue, we're almost halfway through, if committee members and the minister agree to take a quick two-minute break to stretch the legs and do whatever.

The committee suspended at 2.28 p.m. to 2.36 p.m.

CHAIR - Before we go to Mrs Greene, minister, you've got some more information on questions you took on notice.

Ms PALMER - Yeah, we do. Thank you, Chair. I'll ask the deputy secretary to address those. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, these relate to the instances of use of force per month and it's a complete number as opposed to a rate per child which I described before. I'm going to go month by month, outlining the incidents and how many distinct young people were involved.

Firstly, from January 1st-31st this year, we had 10 instances of use of force involving seven children or young people. In February, it rose to 33 incidents that involved 25 distinct young people. In March it was down to 11 instances involving seven young people, and in April, 10 use of force incidents involving seven young people.

Ms PALMER - There's also another question as well. Thank you, Chair.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, there was a question that related to the support staff for the new child safety officer roles, given the Budget that supports the

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recruitment of 48 new roles. This needs to be taken in context of the roles that we already have within the service, so the practice managers, the unit coordinators and the practice leaders that we already have within the service. Beyond the extra child safety officer roles, we have an additional practice manager role, we've got six additional practice leader roles and we've got one further unit coordinator role.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, minister. What measurable actions have been implemented in response to the CSS Frontline Mind survey in 2024? There were a number of findings that related to psychological safety and burnout, and also there were some suggestions in there around leadership and communication and transparency in decision making. I'm just hoping you can provide an update post that survey and how staff are feeling now.

Ms PALMER - Of course. Thank you very much for that question. The wellbeing of our staff and the culture in which they function is really important. That was something certainly that the commission of inquiry identified, systemic issues in that regard around culture, so quite a lot of work has been done including improving leadership capabilities, accountability for cultural change, embedding cultural change responsibility with senior roles, and establishing appropriate monitoring, data collection and governance arrangements to track progress over time.

Of course, the recommendations also identified the need for dedicated focus on cultural change, including the establishment of a cultural change function to support the operational environment and leadership across this portfolio. For more details specific to your question, I'll refer to the deputy.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister, the portfolio has continued to work with Frontline Minds and not just at a sort of service level where there've been some follow-up workshops and planning at individual sites where they've been able to work on those things that they really think will make a difference from a culture perspective, but also right through to our portfolio executive leadership team. We've had a number of sessions facilitated and supported by Frontline Minds that talk through as a leadership group what kind of leadership behaviours we want to represent, how we want to be known, how we're going to be accountable. Those types of processes have been really formative and important.

We have gone through a process of firming-up right across the portfolio, where accountability sits for decisions, and we've had a significant reshape of our portfolio so that those accountabilities are really, really clear. I would also acknowledge that there is so much more work still to do and it sits on the shoulders of all of us, but particularly as a leader, holding myself accountable for the kind of service and behaviour that I would expect. So, I'm saying that there's some good progress there. We've followed up on the things that we learnt. There was a subsequent, sort of, smaller version survey that still told us that we had a way to go and I think we'll be forever having conversations about our culture and where we need to be.

Mrs GREENE - Are you able to provide an update on what the cost was of Frontline Minds through that culture work and provide any recent data to show that there's been a measurable improvement? Sounds like there have been some improvements. Is that something that you're able to provide?

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Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice around that. We think we can get that information for you during the session, so we'll ask the team behind us if they can get that information and we'll bring it to the table.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Want to pivot to something new. I'd like to ask about the new Advice and Referral Line model. My understanding is that a change proposal went to staff back in March. I wrote to you back in March, minister, and I haven't yet had a response. I'm just keen to know what the changes are and how they will impact on staff and children in the implementation of the new model.

Ms PALMER - I'll start by apologising. If you've written to me in March and I haven't responded, that's most unlike my office. So I'll follow that up and make sure that that hasn't been -

Mrs GREENE - I'll forward it again, if you'd like?

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you. That would save someone some work. Appreciate that and I certainly will respond. There has been a lot of work in this space and, you know, looking at some really good solid changes so that we can see even better outcomes for children and young people. I'll pass to the deputy secretary. Thank you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, I'll provide a quick overview of the changes. I know the minister earlier spoke to some of the improved responsiveness that has occurred. But we have gone from, as an example, close to five minutes being the average wait time for a caller to an average wait time of 33 seconds and that's been in the context of every year growing volume, as you're aware. We expect that the volume of contacts to be somewhere in the vicinity of 31,000 or 32,000 contacts this particular year. That's a really good thing. It means that children are increasingly visible and they're able to be responded to.

We, through quite a significant review and process that spans back to 2024, you know, there was a review of the service and a range of recommendations that were made that needed to improve the service. We are moving to a slightly new model from 1 July and we're going to be putting out some communications that help people understand what those changes are. What I want to be really clear about in this forum is that from a caller's perspective, there's no changes. Keep calling, you'll get a response. You'll get a timely response. But what happens in behind the service is changing a bit.

There's an earlier decision point about whether it is a support need that needs responding to or whether there is a risk around harm or neglect. That early decision point will mean that the caller will either speak to someone about how they can access supports and that matter will go through to what we're calling a family referral hub, or there'll be some information collected when it comes to child safety matters and there will be quite a clear process that collects the right information and is able to refer that on to the child safety service in a more timely way.

So in many ways it is just about us organising ourselves to make sure we've got really good decision making processes, we're really efficient, and we're really responsive. But look, there's going to be a range of communication materials that includes a video explaining all of the changes and we're doing direct communications out across the sector.

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Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Just one more question on the ARL changes. Can I confirm that it will be a government worker, not an NGO partner, picking up the phone from 1 July going forward? And also how many staff have resigned or transferred or taken leave in ARL since the new model has been discussed since March? Has there been a turnover of staff?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I will get the data and the information about the sort of staffing questions that you ask. But yes, in terms of who's responding to matters, it will be a DECYP employee. When it comes to the support roles and the family hubs we're setting up over the course of the next couple of years, that is going to be an NGO role.

CHAIR - Ms Rosol.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, Chair.

Ms PALMER - I'm so sorry, Ms Rosol, and through you, Chair, we actually have an answer to a question you asked regarding reportable conduct. If I could get the secretary to address that.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. I might read it out so that I get it right. Between 21 March 2026 and 2 June, which was yesterday, the department notified seven matters to the Office of the Independent Regulator involving allegations relating to the use of force in accordance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme. Of these seven, two related to historical matters raised through the National Redress Scheme or in connection with a civil claim. The remaining five notifications relate to contemporary matters.

Between 21 March and 2 June, a total of six investigations relating to allegations of unlawful use of force have been finalised. Investigation reports for each of these matters have been submitted to the independent regulator for review and oversight.

To answer your question - whether independent regulator differs from the department's own findings - the independent regulator has powers under the *Child and Youth Safety Organisations Act 2023* to conduct its own motion investigations. However, to the department's knowledge, the OIR has not conducted any own motion investigations into use of force incidents involving department staff at Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Rather, the OIR performs an oversight function in relation to reportable conduct matters. As part of that function, the department provides the OIR with investigation reports and closure reports that detail the department's investigations, findings and rationale. The OIR then assesses these reports against the requirements of the act and may provide feedback on the adequacy of the investigation, the evidence considered or the findings reached by the department.

Where the OIR identifies concerns regarding an investigation or takes a view different to the department, they provide feedback to the department. We carefully consider that feedback, including the rationale provided by the OIR, and determine whether any further inquiries, reassessment or other action is required. There have been occasions where the OIR has expressed a different view to the department, regarding aspects of a matter, including the findings reached. However, after careful consideration of the available evidence and the feedback provided by the OIR, the department has remained satisfied that its original findings were appropriate.

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These matters are often complex and require specialist expertise to assess and determine. The department is confident in its processes for investigating reportable conduct at Ashley, which are conducted independently at the centre itself and include oversight by an independent chair, together with members who bring specialist expertise across youth detention, workplace relations and safeguarding. This approach ensures that matters are assessed objectively, thoroughly and in accordance with the requirements of the reportable conduct scheme. We do work side by side with the independent regulators' oversight team. We value the oversight role, and we use feedback received to support our continuous improvement in investigative practice, decision making, training and quality assurance processes.

Ms PALMER - I think that now gives you that total picture, right up until yesterday, from the questions that were answered to Ms O'Connor in the other place.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, I want to go back to my question from earlier, which related to the independent regulator's comments about training and follow up and de-escalation at Ashley. I'm a bit concerned you didn't appear to know about the regulator's comments at the time. The regulator appeared before the committee in February. Then two weeks later, you were asked questions about it in the media but weren't aware of it. I want to understand how it's possible that the independent regulator can appear before the commission of inquiry hearing and either you're not watching or you're not getting the information communicated back to you. Can you confirm if it was the situation that nobody in your office, which is the office for the Minister for Children and Young People, was watching when the regulator responsible for the safety of children and young people gave evidence to a parliamentary inquiry?

Ms PALMER - No, we do our very best to keep across things quite thoroughly and obviously the department does an amazing job in this space. I think it was just a circumstance where it was a question, as part of many questions, at a media conference and I didn't have the answer to hand.

Ms ROSOL - You're indicating from that you were advised about it by someone in your office but had forgotten about it when you appeared before the media. That's what I take from the answer that you've given me just then. After you were asked about those concerns and were reminded of them again, what steps did you take to find out about the issue and what decisions or actions did you then take?

Ms PALMER - As I've said, we've been working in the space of training for quite some time so the comments that were made were not necessarily something that came as a surprise to us. We have been looking at how can we do better right across this portfolio with the staff that work in these really complex spaces. We've already given a number of examples of how we are trying to do things differently so we're able to provide especially at AYDC with our youth workers, more opportunity within their daily roster to have that constant reinforcement of training.

Obviously, there's very intensive training done before a youth worker is put on the floor at Ashley, but we want to be constantly updating, reinforcing and continuing with that training. That's the work we've been doing for some time. The deputy secretary is going through a process which needs to happen with our unions to actually look at how can that roster look different. This is so we are able to be in a position where we can have that, not necessarily more intense, but more regular, constantly inputting into the training of our youth workers to ensure they are always feeling confident, always feeling equipped, always having refreshers in the

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work they do. As we've said, they're working with some pretty complex situations, some really complex young people. We see that as something really important and that work is continuing.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister. This is a really specific question, so I'm not sure if it might be something you need to take on notice, but on what date did the Office of the Independent Regulator first raise concerns either with the department or with your office about the lack of training, corrective action or feedback about de-escalation techniques at AYDC?

Ms PALMER - If you were looking for a specific date, we would probably need to take that on notice. We will see if we can get an answer for you in the session, but it is quite specific. Have you got anything to add to that, deputy secretary?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Between myself and the secretary, we meet with the independent regulator. For me, that's in the context of the oversight network, which includes the Children's Commissioner and the custodial inspector and ombudsman.

We have a very consistent way of communicating between our organisations. I want to reinforce the points on our commitment to reflective learning, particularly when it comes to de-escalation and use of force. It's an area that, as I've said, we've just released a new policy and those debrief approaches are fundamentally important.

I maybe could go back through my calendar and work out when that last meeting with the independent regulator was held and that could be a helpful date in terms of responding to your question.

Ms ROSOL - Yes, I think it would be good to know because I hear you talk about your commitment to training and the things you're doing but here was an incident where the independent regulator said, 'I'm concerned about training'. The minister didn't know about it and that kind of doesn't match with what's being said here today about the commitment to it. I would like to know what dates things happened on so we can track that out. If you were able to take that on notice, I'd appreciate it.

Ms PALMER - We will take that on notice but, just to clarify, our focus on training goes back to briefings I had when I first became minister in the Children and Youth portfolio, which was last year, obviously, after the last election. So, this isn't something new that we've just started focusing on. As I say, we weren't surprised by the comments that came from the regulator, but we have been working in this space certainly since, well, it would predate my time as minister. Because what was presented to me when I first became minister was work that was already underway, thinking that was already underway, and looking at what could we do differently in this space.

Did you want to add to that, deputy secretary?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister: as part of that briefing at the minister's office, it has become a standing agenda item to talk about Ashley Youth Detention Centre, the stabilisation work and our progress on a weekly basis against what we know we need to do.

I want to just add to the statement I made earlier and say that the other thing that we have done is a thing called toolbox sessions. So, in spite of the fact that we don't have dedicated time for staff to be off the floor, we are using the short period during changeover to work through

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particular policies and procedures - we're calling them toolbox sessions - with staff, just as a way of doing something in the short spaces of time that we can.

When it comes to the roster, we have a roster at the moment that does not allow for any learning and development time or time off the floor for our staff, aside from breaks. That's not an acceptable space to be in, and that's why it's so important that we change the roster, and that's what we're working through at the moment.

Ms PALMER - There's a process we have to work through to make those changes with staff and with the union, and that's certainly what we're doing. I will just reiterate that this work, as I would say, certainly predates my time as minister in this space.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, digital addiction, which is compulsive overuse of digital devices, social media and online gaming, among children and youth is increasing dramatically. This has a major impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of children, including anxiety, depression, bullying and abuse.

What initiatives do we have in tackling digital addiction, and in particular, how do we safeguard our children and young people from abuse?

Ms PALMER - When it comes to digital addiction, there's a couple of things here. First and foremost, all levels of government have a role to play, as all of community has a role to play, all of society; that's looking at the role that families play, first and foremost, with regard to this. The fact that we have had a - Sorry, I'm putting different ministerial hats on through the answering of this question. We no longer allow mobile phones, you know, in our government schools. We've also seen the federal government come out and be extraordinarily brave, and we are a leading nation now in banning social media for those under 16. The work that the eSafety Commissioner is doing on the social media age restrictions, which started in December of last year, we're yet to see the impacts that will have. And we're sort of seeing 14- and 15-year olds being dragged kicking and screaming to that space because they've grown up with it. And I think what will be really interesting, in five years' time, when we're looking at 10-year olds who'll then be 15, 16, who will not have been exposed in those formative years, that will be certainly really interesting to see the impact of the federal government's policy in that space.

But the policy and procedures that we have with regard to artificial intelligence (AI) in the Tasmanian Government Schools policy and procedure, which is designed to keep young people safe when they are using AI - and I don't like it; I'm going down kicking and screaming like the teenagers with the social media ban when it comes to AI. But it is part of life now and we have to learn how to use it carefully and transparently. So, the policy and procedure supports the use of generative AI tools appropriately, safely, responsibly and ethically, certainly, in our schools.

We also have in our schools the roll-out of respectful relationships, which also covers off on how to speak respectfully to each other, and that's also regarding bullying, which we see online as well.

I go back to my original statement, which is that this is a whole-of-society problem that we have. I think we're seeing the federal government do some heavy lifting in this space. We've certainly done some heavy lifting here in Tasmania with regard to banning mobile phones in

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all of our government schools and the work that we're doing in that policy space around the use of AI tools.

I'll just check if there's anything further the secretary would like to add.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister: you mentioned safeguarding, and the department has a really strong safeguarding framework called Safe, Secure and Supported, which supports the commitment and implementation of the Child and Youth Safe Standards and the universal principle for Aboriginal cultural safety. There's mandatory training for all of our staff and contractors around safeguarding training, and that's made up of a number of mandatory reporting and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) awareness modules and a requirement to read and acknowledge the Conduct and Behaviour Policy in the relevant standards. The mandatory reporting module provides staff with information about their obligations to report concerns about child abuse. Staff learn when, why and how to report child abuse concerns, how to support a child or young person in a trauma-informed way, and how to meet their obligations.

The Child Sexual Abuse awareness training module helps staff to identify also signs of child abuse and grooming. Volunteers and external providers, including contractors, are required to complete a 'Your Obligations - Safeguarding' training video as well. From January to March this year - because all our mandatory training has to be done by 31 March - 12,305 employees and an additional 3113 relief staff and external contractors completed the safeguarding training, and 7703 members of the community, including volunteers and external service providers of the department, watched the 'Your Obligation - Safeguarding' training video.

We really hold that requirement very closely. Those certificates remain valid for 12 months, and every 12 months we have to complete that training, including myself. So, from the Secretary down, all staff have to complete that training.

Prof RAZAY - I'm really pleased that both state and federal governments recognise digital addiction and are taking a great initiative in tackling it.

Ms PALMER - I will also mention that when it comes to our young people that are at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre, they also don't have access to digital media.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, and to your team: new opportunities for effective self-determination for Aboriginal people is a key component of our agreement between the Commonwealth, all of the states and territories, under the Closing the Gap agreement, which I remember very vividly Tasmania enthusiastically joining in 2020. No doubt it's a key part of your responsibilities in Youth Justice and Child Safety, so I'd like to ask you to update the committee on what the government and what your team is doing to support Tasmanian community-controlled organisations to build their own capacity and enable a greater say on those areas of policy or decisions that are impacting Tasmania's, and benefiting Tasmania's Aboriginal babies, children and young people.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, and I will make some opening comments here. Then, time permitting, Chair, the Deputy Secretary will have more details on specific Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) partnerships that would be of interest to you.

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Self-determination for Aboriginal people is central to our reform of the youth justice and child safety systems, and our government is committed to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations - I'll refer to them as ACCOs from this point on - to support greater control over decisions that impact Aboriginal children and young people.

We recognise that Aboriginal organisations are best placed to design and to deliver culturally safe and place-based services, and that by empowering these organisations, it's critical to improving the outcomes for children and young people. That's why we're working in partnership with ACCOs to build capacity, to grow Aboriginal-led services, and enable stronger participation in decision-making across both youth justice and child safety systems.

Listening is a really key part to this process so government clearly hears what ACCOs tell us, so that we can ensure we enable the right approach and deliver what is truly needed to support improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. This includes co-design of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, and that's informed by Aboriginal people and organisations with lived experience.

Importantly, this reform effort also aligns with the national Closing the Gap priorities, particularly in strengthening the community-controlled sector and improving outcomes for Aboriginal children. By building ACCO capability and supporting shared decision-making, we're contributing to targets that reduce over-representation in a number of areas, certainly in out-of-home care and certainly in youth justice.

As part of this partnership approach, we're supporting ACCOs to lead the design and delivery of services through initiatives such as the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's Nukara Strategy, and that represents a really significant step towards Aboriginal community control of child safety responses.

All of these commitments are focused on ensuring Aboriginal children and young people are safe, that they are connected to culture and they're supported within their families and their communities wherever possible. We are supporting initiatives such as the development of culturally grounded models of care, investment in dedicated Aboriginal roles, and the establishment of programs that strengthen family, culture and connection.

I think we've got a little bit of time, and so I'll ask the Deputy Secretary just to inform you a little bit about some of those relationships and partnerships.

CHAIR - About 20 seconds.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Alright, I'd better be quick. Through you, minister: it was a really momentous time on 2 April this year, the Secretary and myself were able to sign a partnership agreement with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) that really enables them to support their communities, their families and children that are linked to them. We're not just working with them, we're working with a range of Aboriginal organisations right across Tasmania. And next financial year, we will be tripling, within a year-and-a-half, the amount of investment going into Aboriginal organisations. It's a real privilege, from my perspective, to be able to work alongside these communities and the amazing work that they do.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Mrs Greene.

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Ms PALMER - Sorry, my apologies. I just have a response, through you, Chair, to another part of a question that I think was your question regarding staffing re ARL, so I'll ask the deputy secretary to address that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister: so, this question was in relation to how many have resigned or gone on long leave or transferred since the changed proposal in March. I wanted to say, clearly, no ARL staff have resigned or taken long leave since the formal change proposal opened.

We've had five of our frontline ARL staff - and they were invited to do this - indicate a preference to move to the Child Safety south service, and we're supporting this.

We have increased the child safety liaison officer roles from three to four - they're also known as the hospital liaison roles - as they've transitioned to being managed directly by the Child Safety Service.

I wanted to just say also, just in terms of the broader workforce outside of DECYP, consistent with public sector workforce principles, affected staff were supported through redeployment opportunities, where available, including into other DECYP roles, NGO services, or through voluntary redundancy arrangements. And I recognise that I'm speaking more broadly across our partners who work -

Mrs GREENE - How many of those were redeployed?

Mr WHITCOMBE - That would be their information in terms of their staff and how they work through that, but we are clear that there are other opportunities for them.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Minister, last year the Custodial Inspector recommended phasing out the use of private security officers and establishing more therapeutic approaches to transporting children and young people in custody. Do you accept that recommendation to phase out the use of private security officers and, if so, what work has been undertaken to implement that?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. There has been a lot of work done with regard to how young people are transported. I had the opportunity to meet with the operator who currently does the transporting and we've been able to really look at that process and some of the recommendations that have come forward around that and I think we've been able to move into a much better space than where we were.

There's a lot happening in this space and I will ask the deputy secretary to talk to that, but that's inclusive of us getting our own vehicle that is much more fit for purpose and far more appropriate. As we are seeing this recruitment drive around youth workers, that puts us in a position to be able to look at having a youth worker travel with our young people. There's also training that takes place with contractors as well. We've looked at ensuring that we have proper PPE gear in those vehicles that are used, so we've had quite a focus in this space with regard to transport of young people, but I'll pass to the deputy secretary for more.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. The question at its core was about using our own staff who have relationships versus a contracted service -

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Mrs GREENE - Do you accept the recommendation from the Custodial Inspector to cease the practice?

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, we do accept that. In terms of the timeline to get to that point, it is contingent on us having the workforce available consistently to be able to achieve that, but I am absolutely committed to achieving that. I know that, increasingly, we have youth workers going on transports alongside the essential security team. I've asked that every time there is a transport that, if at all possible, we always have a youth worker there as part of it, I want to build on what the minister said in terms of the safeguards within the contract and the robustness of making sure we're meeting regularly at different levels for that particular provider. We're working much more closely with them and we want them to be successful, we want them supported and trained, and I know that's occurring consistently.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. I still have a few more questions about this. I'm really worried reading the Custodial Officer's report. Last year, young people said:

They're really rough. They won't talk to you or tell you their names, they pull their handcuffs too tight and it hurts. You have to go into the hospital with handcuffs on and everyone stares at you. It would be better if youth workers took us places because they can support you. You have to wait ages for them to pick you up.

I hope that some of those experiences of young people are changing. I'm keen to understand when the contract ends for essential security and we will not see this outsourcing happen anymore?

Ms PALMER - I think we've addressed a number of the issues we've seen there around ensuring that there is better training for those who are transporting. Also, as we have this recruitment drive and we see more youth workers come in, we would really like to get to a stage where we have a youth worker in the vehicle with the young person because, as the deputy secretary says, when there's that relationship and that understanding and you're with someone who's actually trained in how to engage with you and perhaps has history with the young person, we know that's going to be a more therapeutic way of travelling with young people.

It was really good to sit down and speak with the business that has this contract. They want to be doing the right thing. They really wanted to be engaged in that training, so it's been good to see that we continue to progress improvements in that transport process around what our policies are, what the governance is to ensure practise always remains aligned with contemporary therapeutic reports, and as I say, to ensure training for those who are using that. The sort of training we're talking about is around the use of force, developing infection prevention and control guidelines, training that includes de-escalation techniques and how to manage and avoid spitting has been updated and provided to both staff and contractors and it will continue to be improved as processes are developed.

The department's Strategic Commissioning and Engagement team is working with AYDC staff to oversee contractor compliance, drive decisions, monitor progress and elevate risks to ensure mitigation occurs in a timely manner. It's something we had concerns about and we're putting a lot of policies in place to ensure that is more therapeutic for the young person, but also that it's a better environment for the drivers and the contractors as well.

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Mrs GREENE - One part of my question wasn't answered. When is the contract ending? A new question - what is the cost of the contract and what is the data on how many transfers of young people they have provided for the contract?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I'll answer part of the question and then we'll come back during the session with the rest of it. The spend for the transport service through to 30 June 2024 was \$259,496. The amount through to 30 June 2025 was \$235,643 and the amount through to 31 March year to date was \$348,881.

Ms PALMER - What was the other part of the question?

Mrs GREENE - How many transfers or transports did they provide for that large sum of money?

Ms PALMER - I don't know that we've got that information to hand, have we?

Mrs GREENE - Is that data something that's collected?

Mr WHITCOMBE - I will need to find out.

Mrs GREENE - Okay.

Ms PALMER - We will take it on notice. We'll try to get you the answer before the end of the session, but if not, we'll provide the answer out of session.

Ms ROSOL - I'm coming back again to the training and the independent regulators. Regarding feedback and comments about training at Ashley Youth Detention Centre, the deputy secretary has explained training and some of the changes that have happened over that time. I'm interested to know, minister, since 5 February this year, has the independent regulator indicated to you that she is now entirely satisfied with the processes for training, feedback and corrective action about de-escalation techniques at Ashley?

Ms WEBSTER - I think the deputy secretary mentioned that the independent regulator and I have met regularly. We had a discussion around this at the end of last year, in fact we talked about these things all the time. I don't believe we've had any recent correspondence, or I have, formally, from the independent regulator, but members of my complaint management oversight unit meet with her team regularly. so I can certainly check. I know that we had been really clear that we need to improve that feedback loop, and I would agree with her comments that we need to do that and Peter has outlined what we're doing around that. In terms of feedback mechanisms and staff training, we owe it to our staff to make sure we've got the right policies in place to make sure that we train them and give them opportunities to improve because all of the staff want to do the right thing by the young people. As an organisation, we owe it to them to do that, so I would support her comments that we need to do more of that. Specifically around that issue, I don't believe I've had formal communication with the Independent Regulator because it isn't with this minister, it is with me, as the head of the entity, and the Independent Regulator sits under the Department of Justice. So, just want to be clear, if it was the Commissioner for Children, for example, she might meet with and regularly communicate with this minister, but because the Independent Regulator sits within the Attorney-General and Deputy Premier's portfolio, formal correspondence with ministers

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usually, I believe, goes that way. But, certainly, she communicates with me, as the head of the entity.

Ms ROSOL - So, you're saying that she has more - not informal, but through meetings, you have regular contact with her, but you haven't had any formal, written communication that says, 'I've looked at everything that you've done at Ashley and I'm entirely satisfied with what you're doing with the training there'? That hasn't happened. Are you saying it wouldn't happen?

Ms WEBSTER - No, I'm saying it could happen. What I'm saying is I haven't had any - I think I misunderstood your question, so I apologise for that. I thought you were asking if I had further correspondence that she was further concerned. I don't believe -

Ms ROSOL - No, no, I was asking if she said, 'All okay now. I've looked at what you've done and I'm entirely satisfied'. Has she communicated that to you at all?

Ms WEBSTER - Not to me - not to me formally. I'd have to check with - because her team regularly meet with my team. So, I'd have to check in terms of the content of those meetings.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Is that something that you could get back to me on here or on notice or something?

Ms WEBSTER - Yes.

Ms ROSOL - Great. Thank you. Just a question - changing topic. I just wanted to ask a question about watch houses. Last year, the Custodial Inspector reported on children being held in Hobart and Launceston reception prison watch houses and, in those situations, they've been exposed to threats of sexual abuse and witnessed violent behaviour. The Custodial Inspector also described the treatment that they've been subjected to as inhumane and degrading. The government, at that time, indicated that it would act to end or tighten controls around them. Minister, could you confirm whether children are still being held in adult watch houses at Launceston or Hobart reception prisons? And, if so, how many children have been held there in 2025-26?

Ms PALMER - Look, thank you so much. The questions and the information you're seeking are not under this portfolio; they come under the portfolio for the minister for Corrections, who has responsibility in that place. What I can tell you is that our department and the Department of Justice continue to work closely together to investigate potential alternatives to accommodating children and young people. I took a particular interest in this and have been working with the minister for Corrections. We went and visited the Launceston Remand Centre so I could have a good understanding of what that actual physical layout was like. I've also spent time one-on-one talking with those who work in that space and hearing some of the concerns that they have, and I have relayed my concerns to the minister for Corrections who also has deep concerns in this space.

So, the responsibility sits under a different portfolio, but I have stuck my nose into this space because I know that these are not good outcomes for young people. We don't want young people in watch houses. When they are detained it needs to be for the shortest, quickest period possible. But, the questions that you're asking around data and numbers - we wouldn't have that, it doesn't sit with this portfolio.

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Ms ROSOL - Can I just clarify that? Because there're children who are being held under the *Youth Justice Act* and so you would have responsibility for them, as the Minister for Children and Youth. Are you saying that you don't receive reports from the minister for Corrections about children being held in adult watch houses? Like there's just this blank space there? How do we know how many - how do you know how many?

Ms PALMER - No, that's certainly not what I said. They're your words, not mine. As I said, I engage regularly and have over the last nine months with the minister for Corrections. We have toured the Launceston Remand Centre together. I've even gone and looked at other premises and buildings that are owned by the government to see if there are any other options that might be available, which we haven't been able to find. So, I certainly work alongside the minister for Corrections, but the data that you are asking for does not sit in this portfolio. It sits with the minister for Corrections.

Ms ROSOL - So, the data sits there, but it doesn't get forwarded to you as the minister for Children and Youth.

Ms PALMER - As I say, I work very closely with the minister for Corrections and particularly in this space -

Ms ROSOL - I heard you say that, I'm just asking specifically.

Ms PALMER - but that data does not sit in this portfolio, it data sits with the minister for Corrections, obviously I engage with him on a regular basis, particularly on this matter. Our government does not want to see this and we are looking at options and I'm certainly doing what I can to support the minister for Corrections in his endeavour to find a different solution to this.

Ms ROSOL - Do you ever seek that data and ask for it?

Ms PALMER - I certainly did when I was visiting the remand centre in Launceston. It was great to be able to speak to those workers there and to be able to get some of that information, but I think the deputy secretary has more to add to that.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, firstly, I'm the chair of the cross-agency steering committee as it relates to youth justice reform and Justice is a key part of that group. As a governance group, we have commissioned a piece of work to occur around establishing a dashboard from a system's perspective around what is happening around exactly the things that you are talking about so that that data is visible on a monthly basis for all of the leaders across the youth justice system. I want to provide you some assurance that it's on our work program and that a dashboard is being established to help us have visibility of that.

I want to also point out that in our draft blueprint action plan for this year and next year, which is an a cross-agency action plan, there is a piece in there around exploring the alternatives to watch houses for children.

Lastly, I'm the business owner for the *Youth Justice Act* discussion paper and work that's going on in that space. Obviously, a system that is therapeutic, that is child-centred would move to a place where we don't see children housed in watch houses alongside adults. We as a

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leadership group are committed to that. Solutions are not simple, but it will be one of the issues that comes to the fore through the discussion paper and that process.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, the Tasmanian Government has committed to closing the Ashley Youth Detention Centre and building a new centre in Pontville, what are you doing now to ensure that the new centre is adequately staffed to keep young people safe now?

Ms PALMER - It's going to be a big job moving from the Ashley Youth Detention Centre to our new facility. I do have to state, however, that the new facility has a number of processes that it has to go through. It's with TASCAT at the moment and we are anxiously waiting for the outcome of that. It's also with the Public Works Committee and we're waiting for the outcome of that as well.

The work that has already begun is around what will be required with the new therapeutic model, what staffing levels will be required, what type of staff will we need there. We're also looking at some of the staff who we have currently at AYDC - will they want to come to the new facility. Some of them might want that opportunity, some may wish to stay in the Deloraine region, which is where the current facility is. A lot of work is happening in that space, certainly around what staffing levels will be required to ensure that we are able to offer that therapeutic and new and nation-leading model of care. But, for more information I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister, as of March 2024 we had a total of 94.8 FTE allocated to AYCD and roles. In March 2025, that had grown to 108.4 FTE and, as of March this year, that had grown to 114.7 FTE. We are undertaking enormous efforts to ensure that we have high safe staffing levels that is consistent at AYDC. We've taken a different approach to recruitment through social media channels, a bit of storytelling about the kind of core purpose of the work, and we've had a recruitment one round that attracted more than 200 applicants and another that's attracted more than 300 applicants.

At the moment we have 12 staff who are going through the induction program. They started that during May so they're not counted in these numbers either and that will be an additional 12. It was really important on a couple of fronts, but firstly the recent announcement around the future of the AYDC site in terms of enduring employment opportunities for staff that are there, but also to be clear that we want to grow and develop the staff that are there so they can be best placed, should they want to, to be successful through a process for the new facility when that comes online.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, a bipartisan commitment was made to JCP Youth in the 2024 election. It was nice to have something we could agree on in that election period and consequently, the Tasmanian government has invested \$3.7 million with I think one of the most exciting social enterprises in recent decades, JCP Youth, to deliver the BEAST program from 2025-28. I'd love to hear from you, minister, explaining to the committee how you feel it's going and the extent to which we're seeing positive outcomes for young people, including a number who are at risk in Tasmania, and how that program is supporting young people and their families to have a positive future.

Ms PALMER - I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to outline to the committee today those positive outcomes that are being delivered through our investment in JCP Youth

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and, in particular, to its BEAST program. We committed \$3.7 million over three years to expand a proven community-based diversionary program that is making a real difference in the lives of vulnerable young people across Tasmania. JCP Youth was already operating across the state delivering its BEAST program to the community when the government's investment commenced in 2025.

JCP Youth offers an innovative service to at-risk young people and provides a really intensive service 24 hours a day seven days a week supporting young males aged between 11 and 17 years of age. These are young people at risk of entering or indeed re-entering the youth justice system. The BEAST program is designed to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour, supporting young people to build life skills, strength and resilience and reconnect with their communities.

JCP Youth targeted support to the BEAST program participants over a 12-month period, showing what can be achieved through dedicated and intensive support, delivered with a strong passion that we see for supporting children and young people to become the very best versions of themselves. JCP is reporting strong early outcomes from our government's investment, which is great.

In 2025, 18 young people participated in the program through our government funding. Across this cohort there were more than 1000 individual engagements, demonstrating that intensity and, indeed, that consistency which is so important in the support, remaining consistent. Importantly, all young people participating in the program have self-reported improvements in their short-term outcomes, including progress in at least one key risk factor within the first six months, and there are critical early indicators that the program is successfully stabilising participants and really setting them on that more positive pathway, which is of course what we're trying to achieve.

We're also seeing tangible improvements for participants in social and economic participation. I'm delighted to say that four participants secured employment within their first six months of the program, a significant achievement for young people who had previously been quite disengaged. I've also been provided with individual stories, with the consent of the young people, about how JCP Youth has helped them to turn their lives around. I can't share them with you today because of confidentiality reasons and also to protect the identities of the young people, but the feedback that the young people themselves have provided is about how the program has delivered real results for them.

Individual young people are reporting improvements in areas such as gaining employment, reduction in offending behaviours, improved connections with their families, community and culture, certainly improved mental health, reduced drug and alcohol use, and residential stability. That's just an example of some of the areas where we're seeing those real improvements. Young participants have reported feeling respected and noticed without feeling judged, which I think is really beautiful, so it's good to see the government's investment seeing real returns through that program.

I can also say that strong governance and accountability measures are in place for this partnership and that's including an independent evaluation. That is currently underway and will be delivered in two stages. The evaluation will further inform how the program can continue to deliver even better outcomes for young Tasmanians. It's really exciting to see what further outcomes come from that evaluation process. We certainly remain firmly committed to

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investing in effective diversionary programs that address the causes of crime and keep our community safe. I think that goes to the question Professor Razay was asking about the size and the number of beds at the new detention facility. Investing in these sorts of programs is how we keep young people out of youth detention.

Mr FERGUSON - Chair, not to ask a new question, but to say, minister, I thank you for that and I thank you for the work your department has done here, because I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that JCP speaks very highly of the engagement with the department. That's a partnership that's working for our kids, so thank you to all of your team.

Ms PALMER - Thank you for that feedback, it's really appreciated.

Chair, I have some answers to questions that came from Mrs Greene in regard to transport and the number of children who were transported.

Mr WHITCOMBE - I can confirm that in this financial year to date to the end of March, there were 262 transports. That contract period is completed on 30 September 2027. I also want to add to that that the service is utilised on an as-needs basis. There's a charging rate and that accounts for fluctuations and numbers of transports.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, you mentioned that progress at the Pontville site is tied up at TASCAT. Given the significant community opposition, planning delays and ongoing TASCAT litigation, how much taxpayer money has been spent on legal fees and consultants defending the Pontville proposal? What assessment has been made whether those funds would have been better invested in services for children and young people?

Ms PALMER - I'll probably pass to the secretary to see if we can get answers to those questions, but I will say that our government did try to put legislation through the parliament so that we wouldn't be in this position. While it passed your House, it did not pass the Legislative Council. I'm completely respectful of the decisions that come from the Legislative Council, however the previous minister did attempt to put legislation through so that we wouldn't be in this position, but we are and we're working through that, as we should. At the same time, it's not that everything has halted behind the scenes with regard to moving forward with what we can do, we are doing in the background to ensure that once that decision is handed down, and we certainly hope that it will be in the positive, that we are ready to move swiftly in seeing the first sod turned at that site.

For the more operational side of your question, I will pass to the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. through you, minister. I would echo that the new facility is part of a broader program aimed at improving youth justice in Tasmania and that detention is our last resort and we are prioritising early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation.

The legal costs, we don't have a number for you because it's still ongoing. Once the process is over, we'll be able to collate those costs for you.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Stakeholders that continually asking me and there might be a few listening today, why did the government decide on one facility rather than smaller facilities around the state where young people could be closer to their communities? Do you think it's appropriate to have our new youth justice facility next to Australia's largest cannabis

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manufacturing site and near those two rifle ranges? Can you provide some advice on how that decision was made? It certainly seems unusual.

Ms PALMER - I will pass to the deputy secretary around that. Those two particular issues that you mentioned have been worked through quite thoroughly and I am certainly satisfied with the work that the department has done with regard to both of those examples that you put forward. One of the first things I did when I became minister was actually go to the site with some of the members from our department, so that I could actually be there in that space to have a real understanding of any noise impact from the gun club. There's been a considerable amount of work done and I believe any issues with regard to the smell from the cannabis facility have been rectified, which is a really fantastic. I will pass to the Deputy Secretary about your questions around how this decision came to be.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Through you, minister. There were a significant range of options that were considered and this goes back prior to me being a part of the department. It was around October/November 2024 that a decision was landed on in terms of the Pontville facility, and I think that there are about 600 options that were considered as part of that process.

From a perspective around children being closer to their communities, I certainly think that the new site is a significant step forward from where we are right now in terms of the majority of young people with offending behaviours do come from the south region. It sits close to 70 per cent. With this new facility it means that there is going to be less travel and more ability to engage with their families and services closer to their communities within the facility.

I wanted to touch on the comments about smell and noise. They are being factored into the planning of the facility, into the planning of what happens in terms of young people's experiences when they first come into the facility. I too have gone and stood at that site on now quite a number of occasions and the impact of the work that we've done in conjunction with the medicinal cannabis organisation out there is really significant in terms of the smell. They've got a new incineration process in their facility and it's reducing the smell enormously.

Mrs GREENE - I hope so, because neighbours have been raising concerns about this issue.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Yes, and I think that's going to be a significant impact for the community. From a noise perspective, I too have gone out there and listened while the gun clubs are operating, and I would describe it as a background noise that sounds a little bit more like a hammer on a tin shed in the background.

Notwithstanding that, in terms of the initial induction and assessment process for young people when they first come into the facility, there would be a way that we work through with them in terms of past trauma. If that's believed to be an issue for them, the gun clubs operate on a Wednesday afternoon and intermittently on weekends on Sundays typically, and we think, certainly operationally we're going to manage that without impacting from a trauma perspective for young people in the future.

Mrs GREENE - That's good information to have. Minister, just moving to another issue back to child safety and staffing, is the department proposing to restrict future recruitment into child safety roles to applicants with university degrees only, while existing staff are to be

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grandfathered in the system? If so, what evidence does the department have that a degree automatically leads to better outcomes for children and young people? How has the department assessed the risk of excluding experienced people that perhaps may have a diploma through TAFE instead? Is there any truth to this rumour? I've heard it a few times from child safety officers in recent weeks.

Ms PALMER - Okay. Thank you very much for the question. I'll refer to the deputy secretary.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Thank you. Through you, minister, we currently are in a process of establishing a new agreement, so no decisions, firstly, have been landed on in terms of qualifications, expectations and pathways. I want to be really clear that we, in an enduring way, are going to be committed to the workforce that we have in terms of seeing their capability grow, in terms of seeing their access to qualifications and higher learning be in place and be embedded in how we operate. I think child safety work and youth justice work is incredibly complex work and we need highly skilled and thoughtful people in this space and I make no apologies for wanting to lift the capability of our staff.

Certainly we are working through a qualifications framework and we're engaged with both HACSU and CPSU in relation to that and we have strong membership within those conversations with the unions from directly within our workforce. They've got great ideas. We are working with TasTAFE and the university around qualifications pathways and right now we've got 16 of our staff on scholarships to grow - it's the Diploma in Community Services and the Certificate in Community Services - that's an example of developing our own workforce from within and seeing them supported.

Just lastly, you mentioned the word 'grandfathering'. We certainly think that that's a good approach to our workforce in terms of the future workforce and the future agreement.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, I have an answer that we took on notice. It's with regard to correspondence from the OIR - from the secretary.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you. Through you, minister, the Office of the Independent Regulator did write to us on 2 April and made recommendations following a review of the implementation of the child and youth safe standards within Ashley, so not specifically related to use of force necessarily, but it does obviously relate to those things. Those recommendations included prioritising addressing the Ashley training function by investing in sustained support that enables training coordinators to deliver comprehensive ongoing education and training, and concurrent with the development of existing initiatives, devise and implement a robust incident reporting system that equips training coordinators with actionable data that can be used reliably to identify staff skills gap in order to plan targeted training interventions. They were the only two recommendations at that time.

Most oversight bodies and regulators don't write to me usually saying what a great job we're doing all the time, but that feedback is really important. Just for those two recommendations, I would say that, you know, I would agree with that and I would support those recommendations. I haven't had a chance to meet with the regulator since I've returned from leave, but I'll certainly do that.

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Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Minister, I want to ask a question about Child Safety Services treatment of two carers, Joanne and Alan Shreeves, who have given 21 years of service to child safety on behalf of the state and received awards for their care and I have permission to use their names. The Shreeves have cared for numbers of children, including one who died. They took your department to court in 2009 in order to get appropriate support to care for a child with disabilities and won in court. They're still pursuing appropriate support for another young man who was in their care for years.

Minister, a staff member last year asked the Shreeves to write a catalogue of their grievances with the department over 20 years so they could, they said, review the file and understand where the problems had occurred. The department's response finally came last month, but was not sent to the Shreeves. Instead, it was sent, without their permission to a psychologist, someone who had acted for them in the past. The letter gave them no option to write a reply or to counter the mistruths in it. They did not give permission for their psychologist to act on their behalf. Minister, the process has left them struggling with their mental health. Do you agree this was a disgraceful breach of their privacy, personal information and confidentiality?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. Obviously, I can't comment on any personal and individual matters. What I can commit to in this environment is that both the secretary and I will take a further look at this.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I have another question following up from that then that maybe you could follow up with as well.

Ms PALMER - Sure.

Ms ROSOL - To add salt to their wounds after being asked by the department to record their grievances about the mismanagement of carers and their children over the last 20 years, when the response finally came, it was -

This matter is extremely complex. A staff member who specialises in reviews and complaints will answer.

But the department's response was to send the complaint to Uplands, a legal disputes resolution company. Minister, do you think it is okay to treat the record of grievances your department has asked carers to collate with such utter disdain and heartlessness?

Ms PALMER - Again, I'm not going to comment on individual matters, but what I can commit to is that the secretary and I will investigate this.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Will your department sit down with these two decent, kind people and work out how processes can be improved so these failures never happen again in the way carers are treated?

Ms PALMER - We don't want circumstances like this so my commitment is that the secretary and I will look at this matter and investigate.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister.

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Prof RAZAY - Since the publication of the commission of inquiry into child abuse, there have been several recommendation which have been implemented by the department of Education, including registration of working with vulnerable people, and mandatory reporting on grooming and abuse. Do we have any reports on how successful these strategies have been since implemented in 2023?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, and I will pass to the secretary for more on this, but what I will say is that one of the greatest improvements that I've certainly seen from the work that's been done in addressing the recommendations from the commission of inquiry is the way in which we're removing the silos around, particularly keeping children safe across institutional government settings. So, ensuring that there's not going to be a report made in one area that other areas have no line of sight over. There's now even stronger communications and processes in place, so that police are involved, youth justice is involved, Education is involved, Justice is involved, and we're even seeing that work transfer over to the work that's currently being done in the childcare space where, nationally, we're looking at reforms that will see information not only shared amongst state entities but shared nationally as well. So, we certainly have been able to identify through this exceptional body of work that the commission of inquiry is, is that one of the number one ways that we can keep children safe is through really solid communication lines. I'll ask the secretary to add to that.

Ms WEBSTER - Through you, minister, I think my experience and observation would say that we have had all the people in this department and also other departments with the best intent to keep children safe. I think what we didn't have was the system that supported that and I think, across the board, that cross-government and also cross-sector, if we do delve back into Education, there's the work that we do with the Catholic education system and also Independent Schools Tasmania, so we regularly collaborate. The amount of reporting that is done now, that's mandatory, but also is just a matter of course.

The biggest change that I've seen is children reporting themselves. Where we do have concern notices that come to me that reach a certain threshold, children do make reports now, including children and young people at Ashley, and I respond to them all and get back to them personally, and it's now written in a very child-friendly way as well. That would be the biggest change that I have seen across government and I'm quite old, I've worked in this place for a long time and it's the biggest change that I've seen in the way that we respond to safety of children. It is not perfect because, unfortunately, we will still have people who want to harm children, but we have to try to stay one step ahead of that and I believe the systems that we have in place now help us to do that.

It's part of my performance management plan. It's part of the deputy secretary's performance management plan around keeping children safe. It's been discussed at secretaries' board on a regular basis since the commission of inquiry. And, obviously, there's more formal evaluations that we're doing and the biggest way we can check, is by asking the children themselves, are they safe and do they feel safe? We're doing that work as well.

Prof RAZAY - I think this is the biggest change you have said actually that we do believe what children say is right.

Ms WEBSTER - Absolutely correct.

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Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I do recall, I think it was the last year's budget, it could have been the one just before, where we funded an increase for Ashley Youth Detention Centre for security systems. I would appreciate very much an update on how that's going in terms of protecting the safety and security of all people who are either resident at or working at Ashley Youth Detention Centre. I know I'm not the only one who has a sense of concern, not just for the children, but also for the people who work there. So, I'd invite your updates on that.

Ms PALMER - Our government has prioritised investment in the Ashley Youth Detention Centre workforce to improve the safety and stability and care outcomes for young people. This is why we're investing \$4 million over four years in the 2026-27 Budget towards ensuring AYDC has appropriate levels of staffing to support the day-to-day operations of the centre and its overall safety and security. We've been working hard to deliver workforce growth and targeted initiatives, and to strengthen staffing levels and capability. As at March 2026, AYDC had 114 full-time-equivalent staff, an increase from 108 in March 2025 and 94 in March 2024, so you can see that steady growth across those years.

The centre is now consistently exceeding ideal youth worker staffing benchmarks, which illustrates the commitment of this government to the safety of everyone at AYDC. The investment is delivering measurable improvements, including stronger workforce presence across shifts, more consistent engagement with young people, reductions in time spent in isolation and stabilisation of incident trends. These outcomes reflect a more therapeutic, proactive approach to care for children and young people who do find themselves in custodial youth detention.

The AYDC stabilisation plan and taskforce is well established, supported by additional resources focused on workforce stability, enhanced safety measures and strengthened wellbeing and work health and safety culture. Initiatives include enhanced training, increased leadership support and improved wellbeing services for staff. To deliver on this commitment, a dedicated wellbeing officer was employed at AYDC and started recently at the centre. This role is really great and it's going to assist in delivering support to AYDC staff in real time because they're at the centre. When it's identified that there is a need there'll be a much more immediate response.

Cultural drivers specific to AYDC are also being reinforced through staff induction and are used to guide expectations of behaviour in practice, providing a clearer link between values and day-to-day interactions. This is supported by investment in training capability through a dedicated learning and development lead role and ongoing support to leaders. A well supported, capable workforce is critical to maintaining safe and therapeutic environments. These investments are contributing to enhanced and consistent practices, fewer incidents, and improved outcomes primarily for young people in the broader Tasmanian community.

Mr FERGUSON - I really appreciate it. Thank you, minister.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, what new monitoring, security, mobile application management, data control, or digital governance software has been implemented across child safety services and youth justice since 2024? It's my understanding there have been some upgrades that has caused some angst with staff.

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Ms PALMER - Okay, I will get the department to get that answer for you. Can I just quickly refer to a question we took on notice with regard to child safety workforce survey, the Frontline Mind? We have an answer for you.

Mr WHITCOMBE - There was a question regarding the cost of the services from Frontline Mind, and that cost is \$17,000. In terms of the latest outcomes of a smaller touchpoint survey held in August 2025, I do want to note a limited sample size with that particular second scan, so they're not necessarily generalisable. The results are not necessarily generalisable to the entire workforce. There were some strengths that were identified. Our team identified a strong foundation of purpose, of community and commitment, with staff really motivated by the importance of the work, despite the system strain they felt. It noted pockets of positive practice, excitement about peer support, professional learning, family-led decision making, and some other really positive things. There were some opportunities for change as well, and findings indicate there were material workforce risks that intersect with psychosocial safety with retention, leadership capability, workload and changed governance.

This question is in relation to digital systems upgrades. I will provide some information, it may not be a fulsome answer. There's been, as you say, some quite significant investment. It's meant we've been able to establish a control room where all of the feed from a live perspective of the 190-plus cameras is occurring and it also helps with incident management in real time.

There've been some things more recently whereby there's been CCTV system remediation and upgrades to improve coverage across the facility and resilience. You can appreciate that power sources and different things you will want to be continuous and if anything disrupts that it can impact. We've had improvements in relation to that because of previous issues. We've had access control, re keying and locking upgrades to reduce any vulnerabilities. I do have quite a detailed list of some of the aspects of that. It includes a thing like the boom gate being put into place and working more consistently, but I hope that gives a sense of the improvements.

Mrs GREENE - Perhaps you could table the list that you have there, through you, Chair.

Mr WHITCOMBE - Certainly.

Mrs GREENE - That would be very helpful. My question was also relating to ICT systems that staff are using across the children and youth portfolio. I guess also relating to Outlook, Teams, SharePoint, screenshots, downloads, file sharing; apparently there've been some changes that have been implemented in the last 18 months or so. The reason why I asked the question is: I was keen to understand what privacy or workplace culture assessment was done regarding that digital monitoring or restriction of some systems to make sure that it doesn't negatively impact on staff morale and making staff feel as though they're being monitored and surveyed at work. So, less concerned about Ashley Youth Detention Centre in this question, more about how they're using their systems in their day-to-day work within child safety.

Mr WHITCOMBE - There have been a range of developments; you're absolutely right. One of the really significant ones has been the development of Youth Justice Plus, which is a case management system that spans across custodial and community youth justice and replaced three different systems we had. We've recently had a further successful upgrade with some fixes around that particular case-management system, meaning we're able to be clearer about

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our business, be clearer about our data. Some of the data that we've been able to present today has been a direct consequence of having that system established. I'm really proud of the team and the work between our ICT services and our frontline staff and how they've worked together on that particular system.

The other upgrades we've had, we certainly have ongoing work in our child safety case management system and there's intermittent upgrades, but probably what you're referring to is the establishment of some dashboard data. In terms of our child safety work, how we, again, hold ourselves to account, but actually know our business really well and make good decisions about what's really important we need good up-to-date information. We've had a small team establishing data dashboards for each of our regional services and child safety. It means that the data is updated daily and it shows things like case allocations, child visits and some other aspects of the work we're accountable and responsible for.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Racing. We will now take a short break. As time taken for breaks must be made-up, can I encourage members to be as quick as they can? Please stop the broadcast.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee suspended from 4.08 p.m. to 4.14 p.m.