



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jo Palmer MLC

Wednesday 25 September 2024

MEMBERS

Mr Simon Behrakis MP (Chair)
Ms Ella Haddad MP (Deputy Chair)
Mr Vica Bayley MP
Ms Kristie Johnston MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr Andrew Jenner MP
Mr Josh Willie MP
Mr Rob Fairs MP
Mrs Beswick MP
Ms Anita Dow MP
Ms Cesily Rosol MP
Ms Ella Haddad MP

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. JO PALMER MLC

Minister for Education, Minister for Disability Services

Kathrine Morgan-Wicks

Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet

Jenny Burgess

Acting Secretary, Department of Education, Children and Young People representatives

Kane Salter

Deputy Secretary Business Operations & Support

Katharine O'Donnell

Director Education Regulation

Ingrid Ganley

Acting Executive Director, Disability and Reform

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The Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

DIVISION 2

(Department of Education, Children and Young People)

CHAIR - (Mr Behrakis) - The time being 2.30 p.m., the scrutiny of the Education portfolio will begin. I welcome the Minister for Education and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, including names and positions, for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. I'd like to introduce my acting secretary, Jenny Burgess. Also joining me at the table is the deputy secretary, Business Operations and Support, Kane Salter.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Education is three hours. We will take a short break for afternoon tea at 4.30 p.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 they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary so it can be included in correspondence to the minister for answer.

I remind you all that microphones are sensitive, so I ask you to be mindful of Hansard and be careful when moving your folders, documents and water glasses around the table. Also, it is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I ask that members speak one at a time to assist with this.

Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is committed to ensuring that every child is known, safe, well, and learning. The 2024-25 State Budget contains \$266.7 million in new and additional funding, and into the forward Estimates for the Education portfolio.

As the Minister for Education, I've taken every opportunity to visit our Department for Education, Children and Young People facilities, such as our schools and our family and learning centres, to meet and to listen to our learners, to their families, and to our workforce. We recognise the critically important role our education system plays in supporting young Tasmanians to gain the skills they need to fully contribute to our social and economic future, and lead their best lives. To achieve this, we have dedicated and hardworking staff within the department, including our principals, teachers and support staff, and I do want to take this opportunity to thank them.

As I'm sure you've heard, today is an historic day for Tasmanian government schools, with an agreement reached to see them funded to 100 per cent of the school resourcing standard by no later than 2029. This agreement will see Tasmania's contribution increase to 77.5 per cent and the Commonwealth's contribution to 22.5 per cent. We are really excited that we have been able to reach this deal with the Commonwealth, and about the benefits this extra funding can

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bring to our learners. While we have until 2029 to reach this level of funding, I am committed to moving to the 100 per cent mark as quickly as possible, and work is happening right now to determine that time frame. Further to this, we will always strive to do our best for our learners and our workforce, and that is why we are committed to an independent review.

As minister, I'm committed to providing our students with a safe and inclusive learning environment. My objectives are: to give every young person the opportunity to learn and to improve their literacy skills, so they have the foundational skills they need for learning and life; to increase the education and training options to ensure we are developing our workforce of the future, through increased vocational education and training - VET - investments; and, provide the best possible facilities to support our learners and workforce through new builds, major upgrades and developments, such as through the School Building Blitz.

The 2024-25 state Budget continues the Tasmanian government's record investment and commitment to the education and care of children, young people, and all Tasmanians, so they can lead positive lives and have bright futures.

I'll hand back to you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIR - I'm going to start questions with Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Before I start questioning, minister, I'll say that the Labor Party welcomes additional funding into our school system, but there are serious questions here on whether you've secured the best deal for Tasmania. I can say, as a father of young children in the state system, I am disappointed - not only for them, but a generation of kids in the state school system - that you have potentially sold them out.

On Monday, in the other place, you said, 'We firmly believe that we must see 100 per cent funding in our government schools, and that the federal government should be providing that full 5 per cent, not 2.5 per cent. We are standing with other states and territories'. We were holding firm on 5 per cent on Monday and today you signed up to 2.5 per cent. What's changed?

Ms PALMER - It's been a big 24 hours. What I can tell you is that I would have loved the federal Labor government to sign up to 5 per cent and we have spent months lobbying for that. As soon as I became Minister for Education, Jason Clare flew to Tasmania to have face-to-face discussions with me on this. Since that time I also met with him again face-to-face in Sydney to have discussions with him. We've had numerous phone conversations and it would have been fantastic had the federal government signed up to 5 per cent, it would have been great for our state.

It's not just me who's done this work. The previous Minister for Education also stood with other states and territories outside of the Northern Territory and Western Australia to fight for 5 per cent. That deal is off the table from the federal government at the end of this month. There are only days left where there is a deal on the table, so, between the comment that I made on Monday, which I absolutely stood by, I would have loved to have seen 5 per cent from the federal government. They did not come to the party. They have stood very firm at 2.5 per cent and that's the agreement that was made with Western Australia. That is what has been on the table for all the other states and territories.

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I know you need to come to this place with a glass half full and I get that, that's the political side of it, but the reality is -

Mr WILLIE - No, I'm deeply concerned about this.

Ms PALMER - we have been able to secure what I'm advised is around \$300 million that will come in to our state government schools in the next five years, which is actually a really exciting thing to do.

Something that's really important in this agreement that we have signed with the federal government, that we have worked with the minister, Mr Clare, and with the Prime Minister, is a no worse-off deal. At the end of September, states that have signed on, as Tasmania has now, as Western Australia has, as the Northern Territory has, legislation will go before the federal government to allow that money to start to flow. That will start to flow in 2025. If I had not signed on, then we just roll over for another year.

If in another year a different state can get a better deal, we get it too. We have a 'no worse off' agreement. Regardless of what happens with any other state and their negotiations, if they can negotiate a different position, we get that position. I feel very, very safe in the knowledge that that is part of the agreement.

The other thing that we really need to stress here is that the original agreement that was on the table was looking at a very different timeframe with funding flowing through to 2034. We've been able to negotiate the timeframe that the line in the sand has been drawn at 2029. That is when we must see, and are committed to seeing, 100 per cent funding of our public schools, the SRS by 2029, not 2034. That's the deal that we have been able to broker and I am excited at what opportunities this presents for us and to know that this money will be flowing in 2025.

Mr WILLIE - When did you find out about the agreement? Who reached the agreement and who signed it?

Ms PALMER - We've been working on this - and I can only speak from when I was Minister for Education - but this has been around for a considerable length of time. I've been working on this, literally, since I became Minister for Education, with Jason Clare and with his office.

Mr WILLIE - That's not my question. When was the agreement reached, who signed it and when did you find out about it?

Ms PALMER - This element of the agreement I found out about on Monday, that we were actually going to be in a position. It was worked through with the Treasurer, with the Premier and with me.

Mr WILLIE - If you're saying this was on Monday, when did you find out about this on Monday? After that hearing or before?

Ms PALMER - I had an indication that there could be an opportunity that the federal government was presenting, unofficially, prior to the Budget Estimates hearing. However, I did

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not have anything official that was actually part of the work that was done from Monday evening onwards.

Mr WILLIE - What this looks like, minister, is that you have exchanged a commitment to fix a broken promise in the Northern Heart Centre, \$120 million, for a fifty-fifty deal that you were standing against on Monday. Was the Heart Centre part of the negotiation?

Ms PALMER - Any questions around the Heart Centre need to be put to the Premier. I was not part of discussions about the Heart Centre. My focus has been purely as Education minister. I have been in discussions with Jason Clare - more intense discussions in the last month with that deadline of the end of September looming, trying to get this over the line.

I was also very conscious that our secretary, who has had a lot of skin in the game when it comes to this, was also leaving during that September period and that Jenny would be stepping up as acting secretary. There's been a huge amount, some intense work that's been done in the last month on this. When I realised that we actually could be in a position to sign, I got that information on Monday evening.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, the real story here is what the Australian Education Union (AEU) has put out in a withering media release just now. They are devastated. The real story here is that what you're selling - that eventually, in five years' time, Tasmania will be meeting 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard. What we've heard is that you've sold us out. We should have been getting that extra 5 per cent that's needed from the federal government. Instead, Tasmania is going to have to pay 2.5 per cent.

The actual story here is the loophole which you've secured, so that 4 per cent of the funding now can go to non-teaching-related needs, like capital depreciation and school registration. That is not meeting the Schooling Resource Standard. That is not what teachers need, that is not what students need. That is not what classrooms and parents need. You've secured this loophole to be able to pay for some of the things that the state should be paying for. Don't you feel a bit ashamed about that?

Ms PALMER - No, the complete opposite. I'll start by saying I completely reject the beginning of that question. To say that I had 'sold out' Tasmanian students is completely inappropriate and inaccurate. I have been working on this -

Dr WOODRUFF - They are devastated.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms PALMER - I have been working on this for months, as has my team.

Dr WOODRUFF - It's not about you.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms PALMER - We are very proud that we have been able to secure around \$300 million in the next five years. I would have loved for the federal government to put forward 5 per cent. That is not what they've come to the table with. In five days, the deal is off the table, and we

just revert and we roll over. Any state that has not signed up reverts to the same funding arrangement that we have right now. It would have been off the table.

We have managed to secure this deal with a 'no worse off' agreement, so that if that percentage changes, Tasmania will get that percentage. This deal will see money flow to our schools, to our families, to these students, starting from next year, which is really exciting. This is a great thing, with the 'no worse off' deal. Can't go backwards here, only going forwards.

When you talk about the 4 per cent cap, I've had a number of conversations and I'm absolutely listening to our stakeholders on that. I, too, have some concerns about that, and we are progressing a body of work so that I have a better understanding of what that actually looks like. I have said to stakeholders that is something that I will be looking at. The other thing that's really important to remember here is that the Schooling Resource Standard is not the only way that we invest in schools.

The Tasmanian government invests in so many other ways as well, particularly when it comes to our infrastructure spend. We know that students, to achieve the best educational outcomes that they can, need to be in good and sensitive environments. Environments that inspire them. We know how important it is that they are safe environments. We know how important that is for our workforce, as well. I am going to schools. I am on the ground, talking to teachers and principals and parent associations, and they are talking to me about the importance of those environments. There's a huge investment there, as well.

Dr WOODRUFF - On the loophole - can we talk about that, then?

Ms PALMER - And as I've said, with regard to the 4 per cent that has always been attributed to depreciation - which every other state and territory has as well, I'm advised - I have concerns around that and I'm looking into it.

Dr WOODRUFF - With that 4 per cent loophole, it is shameful that the Prime Minister didn't close that, and it is on the head of the Labor Party that they didn't do that. But, you have the choice as the minister and the Tasmanian Education Union is so clear that represents \$260 million over the next five years that will come out of Tasmanian schools. If you don't close that 4 per cent loophole, that money - in addition to the fact that we're paying the extra 2.5 per cent, and you didn't manage to secure 5 per cent - but that 4 per cent is something you can do something about. It will actually mean \$260 million over five years that's funnelling into department costs like overheads and depreciation. These are not things that it should be spent on. It should be spent on school students. Will you commit to working to close that loophole? Just to make the decision, actually. There's no work involved. You just make the decision. You've got the power as minister. Will you do that?

Ms PALMER - I don't think I could have been any clearer that I have concerns around that and I am looking into it. I've made it very, very clear.

Dr WOODRUFF - They want to hear more than concerns, minister. They want to hear action on this.

CHAIR - Order, Dr Woodruff.

Ms PALMER - I've answered the question.

Mr JENNER - The education union has said that the minister hasn't decided yet where the \$81 million cuts in the public education bill will be applied. We've got, at the moment, 2217 students in Tasmanian government schools waiting to see school psychologists. Another 380 are waiting to see social workers, and there are another 598 waiting to see speech therapists and pathologists. The education union has stated most students are waiting up to 250 days just for initial assessment with a psychologist, and then another 198 days to receive any intervention. These students can't afford to be waiting that long for these services. The government really does need to be investing in ways of attracting more social workers and psychologists to our public schools.

Can you indicate: will the \$81 million in cuts be applied to some of these services? Especially in the light of looking at our Tasmanian AFL team, where we're spending \$12 million a year on players and that we're looking at only getting two players a year from actual Tasmania, the rest will be from out of state. That's \$144 million in 12 years. It seems our money seems to be being spent in the wrong places.

Ms PALMER - That was quite a long statement. Can you reiterate what your question is?

Mr JENNER - Basically, the speech therapists and the psychologists that are needed in schools at the moment - there's a huge waiting list of up to 18 months - and what I was worried about is the \$81 million in cuts, because it hasn't been told where it's going to be applied to. Will it be applied to this area that actually needs more funding, not cuts?

Ms PALMER - The budget efficiency dividend that needs to be achieved in the Education portfolio for 2024-25 sits at \$11.8 million, \$23.9 million in 2025-26, and then \$36.4 million in 2026-27.

Operating efficiencies are subject of consideration while protecting our frontline services; I want to be really clear on this. In our schools, our school principals will continue to operate on a business as usual basis in filling their allocated positions. They will not be asked to implement vacancy control processes in their schools. Teacher allocation methods will remain consistent with the school resourcing standard and the fairer funding model. For example, schools will have an increase in resources where it's demonstrated that there is a need for that. It could be increased enrolments. It could be students being enrolled who might have a disability. It's just normal practice in a school. That will not change.

The immediate focus is on achieving the 2024-25 efficiency allocation whilst, in parallel, working through the strategies and the actions to achieve the estimated structural reduction of \$36.4 million in 2026-27.

Some of the things - we're very much focused now on the 2024-25 and the \$11.8 million. I've brought along some examples of where, as a minister, I am looking and where I'm asking questions. I will say straight up that this is really difficult. This is a very challenging thing that we have to do. I am very much in step and in a team mindset with the department that we need to work through this together. That is a process we're undertaking at the moment. Some of those strategies and some of those things that we're putting on the table now as part of workshopping, this is as part of overall resource management. DECYP will consider

opportunities to redirect resources to roles funded to support the response to the commission of inquiry. This review includes consideration of pausing or stopping non-COI activity.

I can say there won't be vacancy control processes; that won't be happening. The review is not going to impact on the delivery of any key government priorities or any of our frontline services. We're looking and we're talking and fleshing out things like ceasing or pausing or scaling back non-priority activities that are not this government's priorities or that are not commitments funded in the 2024-25 state Budget. Capturing salary savings that occur through genuine vacancies and the timing of filling those vacancies. And also really clear focus on reducing expenditure in those non-salary costs, which won't see an impact to frontline activity. So, things like staff travel and transport, consultancies, those types of expenses. Office expenses, equipment expenses, office accommodation is something else that we've been workshoping and staff ICT costs.

I don't mean to be flippant, but does everybody need a new laptop each year? Those type of discussions. That's where we are fleshing out what we can do in those spaces. What do those numbers look like and, if there are ways that we can achieve the same outcomes but be more efficient, then that's what we need to do.

I think it's also asking questions around outcomes. We may have always funded something; that doesn't automatically mean you just keep funding it. What are the outcomes? What's being achieved by that? Show me the outcomes. If it's working really well, we've got to protect it. If we're actually not getting outcomes, then maybe we need to look at pivoting in that space.

They're the sort of discussions that we are having and, at the moment, very much focused on the 2024-25 efficiency that we need to find.

Mr JENNER - Thank you, minister. That's great. Obviously this is very serious, so it's not a cusp thing. Can I take it then that there won't be cuts to that area?

Ms PALMER - Sorry, I didn't answer the second half of your question. My apologies. We're actually trying to get more staff in that area. We have waiting lists. We want more. It's really hard to find the people to fill positions, which is why, in the election commitment, we've put forward 20 new scholarships in this space to try to encourage our social workers, our psychologists, our speech therapists to consider coming into the education space rather than perhaps private practice.

Those scholarships have already been out and I understand we've already had quite some success with that. Also fantastic that we're really hoping that we're going to see with this year our first graduates from speech pathology coming out of UTAS. So, again, it's been wonderful to engage with the university and to see how they've actually been running that particular course. A really good strategy that the university has been using is that if you're a student in your studying speech pathology and you're from the north-west coast, when you're doing your work placement, they are placing you in your community, in your area, to further strengthen those connections as well.

It will be exciting to see, with those graduates coming through the university, what that will mean, certainly in that speech pathology place. We are trying to get more.

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Mr FAIRS - Minister, I'd like to ask you about literacy. You've said many times that the elements of structured literacy are being taught in every childhood classroom. Can you outline to the house what this actually looks like?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you very much, Mr Fairs - seems a bit funny calling you that - for that question. Our government is absolutely committed to providing quality education for our students, and learning to read is absolutely foundational to all other learning. What we're seeing is children in their early years of school being provided with evidence-based phonics instruction, with children learning how to decode and encode letters into sounds - a skill that is essential for them to be able to read and write. I've seen firsthand, and I can tell you how engaged students are in their learning.

Our teachers are being supported to teach this important skill, with training and classroom-ready resources that are freely available to every school. These supports are helping our teachers by reducing the time that they need to plan, and giving them back time to focus on teaching.

For students, we are making sure that they have the right texts to be able to practise their phonics, with \$800,000 of funding for decodable readers over the next two years in the last state election. This funding will provide every prep classroom in 2025 with a starter pack of books, making sure that our young learners have a successful start to learning to read.

I've certainly heard on my many visits to schools how this way of teaching is making a huge difference - particularly Invermay Primary School, who was just so proud to talk about their NAPLAN results, and they have been using this way of teaching for a number of years now, and they're really beginning to see those results.

There was one particular student, this young student in the north of the state, who'd been really struggling with their learning, and they didn't like school. And then, you fast forward six months, and they're now reading and they're writing sentences and, importantly, really importantly, they're excited to be coming to school, because of the way that they're being taught. It's really exciting to be part of an election commitment that is adding extra support and resources into this space.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, just earlier you said, 'I had an indication that there could be an opportunity that the federal government was presenting before the hearing on Monday.' You went into that hearing, and you said things like, 'We are standing firm, which is what our stakeholders have asked us to do, to see the full 5 per cent funding from the federal government'. Did you mislead that committee?

Ms PALMER - I absolutely did not, and I completely and utterly reject that. There was an indication from an informal conversation that there may be an opportunity to further the discussions that I had already been having with minister Clare over many, many months. When I went into the budget Estimates Committee meeting, the official position I took in was that, exactly as you have quoted, and it was not until after budget Estimates - or even, really, until the next day - that we were in a position to look at this formally.

As a minister, Mr Willie, you just can't go into a hearing such as this and speak about something that has not gone through a proper process, that you have not had on-the-record conversations with. That would be really irresponsible as a minister. I had an informal

indication that perhaps there may be some movement. I've had a number of informal conversations where I have thought, over the last four months, that we might be on the verge of being in a position to sign a deal, and it hasn't quite come off. This has been happening regularly with me and my staff in this. It would be very irresponsible to hear just part of an informal discussion and then take that to this forum without any indication that that was correct.

The official position was that if we couldn't reach an agreement, that would be to the best benefit, in my mind, for Tasmanians. Remember, I only had five days left and the whole deal was off the table. We have been stepping towards this, working really hard trying to find a pathway through. There was an indication that maybe we might be able to do something, which had been said a number of times before over the last three to four months. I went in with what the official position was, came out of budget Estimates and then began to wait to hear if anything further had progressed.

Mr WILLIE - You were pretty strong, though. Why didn't you just say, 'We're in negotiation with the federal government', and leave it vague? I'm not asking you to talk about informal conversations, but you had this information, you walk into a hearing and you're really strong about it with your language. It does look like you're misleading. You could have reflected a bit more reality of the situation that you were in negotiation with the federal government.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair. I'm very interested that you would want a minister to come into budget Estimates and be as vague as she possibly could. That is an intriguing statement from you. I went into budget Estimates with a formal position that I have held, and I have held with all other states and territories outside of the Northern Territory and the Western Australian state. There have been a number of times in the last few months where minister Clare and I have thought maybe we might be able to get something over the line. This has been happening on a regular basis. That was just the timing that it happened to be. I went into budget Estimates very clear on what my official line was that I have held since I became Education minister. Then sometime after budget Estimates, another flow of information started to come through and we began working.

Mr WILLIE - You talk about an opportunity that the federal government was presenting for the hearing. What was that opportunity? What had changed for you to consider that deal that you were saying you wouldn't sign up to?

Ms PALMER - No, there was just an informal discussion.

Mr WILLIE - That is not what you said before.

CHAIR - Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - You said an opportunity.

Ms PALMER - Sorry, there was an informal discussion that perhaps there might be an opportunity.

Mr WILLIE - Was that the heart centre?

Ms PALMER - That was not raised with me, Mr Willie.

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CHAIR - Order. Mr Willie, I am allowing people to go down a line of questioning but if questions are asked, can the minister's answer be heard in silence and I'll give you the opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

Mr WILLIE - You said there was an opportunity being presented by the federal government. Was that the heart centre being put on the table?

Ms PALMER - No, what was given to me was that there was an opportunity that we might be able to sign a deal in the Education space, and then I had to go into budget Estimates. That's where my head was. Let's be really, really clear that this is a wonderful outcome for Tasmania. I get what you are trying to do but, to be honest, I can't predict or dictate to the federal government about when an opportunity is going to be presented. They don't look at my diary or the department's diary and say, 'Oh, this isn't a good time for this, she's in budget Estimates.' I have to respond, as a minister, when I can. There was an informal indication that perhaps there might be an opportunity. It was as informal as that. Then I went into budget Estimates. I had my formal position, because you've got it. As I've already said to you, these types of opportunities have been presented a number of times in the last few months, and we've had to work through them. This was not an abnormal thing for me as Education Minister.

Mr WILLIE - We're trying to get to the bottom of what has changed, minister, for you to sign up to the deal. I've read the press releases. I've read all of your comments. I've read the previous minister's comments. You were resolute that the federal government had to pay the 5 per cent. That's changed on Monday, and I'm trying to get to the bottom of what was being offered that was different to before.

Ms PALMER - I think the thing that was different to before was the trajectory. Anything that has been looked at before the formal offer, that went to every state and territory, was always talking about 2034. This was an opportunity that had a different trajectory that we might be able to look at, and that the federal government would be willing to come to the table, and I drew the line in the sand at 2029. That's five years difference that we might be able to get to 100 per cent funding in five years. Although, can I assure you, my focus is actually to get there a lot quicker if I can, but the line in the sand is at 2029. That was not on the table prior to this. That is what changed for me to go, 'Okay, this is serious, because I'm about to run out of time to negotiate anything. After September, there's no more money at all, and now there was an offer that looked at a different trajectory that the federal government might be open to'.

Dr WOODRUFF - There are two issues here that I can see, minister. One is that you promised that you were going to go and fight for 5 per cent and you only secured 2.5 per cent. The state is going to be paying 2.5 per cent. The biggest issue from the education union's point of view - the union representing teachers and other school staff - is the 4 per cent loophole that remains. It should have been a generational opportunity. What it's meant to be achieving, this SRS, the School Resource Standard, is to bring the amount of money required to bring four out of five students to the minimum standards. The AEU have identified that it should be with this 5 per cent that's coming - 2.5 per cent state and federal - \$1000 per student a year to fully fund Tasmanian schools. That's what's required.

Instead, the State Government is going to keep on pulling out, stealing from that extra money, some \$900 per student. Can you see that it's not a happy day for people who are working in this sector, because that's what's required to get students up to four out of five just having

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a minimum standard of schooling. They are devastated that that loophole hasn't been closed. Will you commit to closing that loophole?

Ms PALMER - I've already answered this question. I don't know how to answer it any other way. I've spoken -

Dr WOODRUFF - Could you try again?

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, I've already answered this question -

Dr WOODRUFF - No, you haven't.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms PALMER - I've already answered this question and I don't know how to answer it any other way. I have spoken with stakeholders. I am very aware of their concerns around the 4 per cent, and I have already said here, and also to stakeholders, this does concern me and I need to have a look at it.

CHAIR - Additional questions, Dr Woodruff, and I will remind -

Dr WOODRUFF - That was one question. I get two.

CHAIR - Do you have any additional questions?

Dr WOODRUFF - I'll just make the point that being concerned is not the same thing as making a commitment, and that won't cut it when it comes to the proper funding that's needed for students. The government has received funding from the Better Schools funding agreement today. It's contingent on initiatives that support wellbeing for learning, including students having greater access to mental health professionals and initiatives to strengthen teacher and school leader wellbeing. In your response to Estimates on Monday, we heard that there are 2217 students in Tasmania waiting, on average, more than a year for an intervention from a school psychologist. There's not a cent that's been budgeted to recruit and retain more allied health professionals in schools. How do you intend to meet the requirement of the 'better schools' funding agreement?

Ms PALMER - All government schools and child and family learning centres have access to professional support staff, which includes school psychologists, social workers and speech and language pathologists. These specialists play a vital role in our schools by helping students to learn, to join in at school and to build wellbeing and resilience for the best outcomes.

Over the last decade, our government has employed record numbers of staff across the education workforce and this includes increasing the overall number of professional support staff on the ground, providing direct support to children and young people by 59.85 FTE. Now, the way our professional support staff workforce is allocated and managed across the department is complex and I will pass to the acting secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you, minister. The increase in the professional support staff and that increase that's occurring over time and across the forward Estimates will help reduce those wait times for children and young people. But let's be clear, we operate in a triage system, so

when we have information around children and young people and what they need, our professional support staff work to ensure that those children have the supports that they need to engage in their learning.

Professional support staff are one element of that work. We have wellbeing teams in schools that make sure that the students in their school are triaged and that they have the supports that they need and that we broker in the need for those students so that they are well supported and can learn.

We have inclusive practice coaches, whose job it is to make sure that those children and young people are included in the learning, included in the classrooms and that they've got the behavioural supports that they might need. In addition to that, the levels of funding that have gone into trauma and students with a disability has meant that there are more staff in schools that are supporting our children and young people to make sure that they get what they need to be known and safe and well in the context of learning.

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, thank you, minister, for that explanation but the fact is that there are over 2200 students who are not getting those needs met because they are not able to access school psychologists. Waiting for more than a year on average is not support, so while the government has put more money in, you have not put a red cent more in this Budget into recruiting and retaining allied health professionals such as school psychologists. You haven't, and you're not meeting the need.

Do you accept that you're not meeting the need and that you actually have done nothing in this Budget to shift the dial for those average 2200 students?

Ms PALMER - I disagree with the way that you have worded your question, which I think will just be probably repeated through much of the day. Can I just quickly correct the record on the opening comment that I made in answering your question? I think I said this includes increasing the overall number of professional support staff on the ground providing direct support to children and young people by 59.85 FTE. It's 79. My apologies, I didn't realise I had read that wrong.

There's a couple of things here, we know that we have issues with workforce shortages, so recruitment of professional support staff certainly remains a challenge in an environment of national shortages, with Tasmanian recruitment campaigns ongoing and a number of selection processes recently finalised.

Through our 2024-25 State Budget, we are continuing to provide support for this workforce and funding of 20 new scholarships for the next generation of speech and language pathologists and psychologists in Tasmania. The funding is in addition to the nine scholarships already available for speech pathology for 2024.

I can confirm that our 2024-25 Budget includes funding of \$9.76 million over 2024-25 and the forward Estimates to continue the investment in our 2023-24 Budget commitment for an additional 20 FTE professional support staff positions, the 2022 Allied Health Professionals Agreement, including additional recruitment and retention initiatives such as increased remuneration, enhanced career pathways and more flexible work arrangements. Further recruitment initiatives have included the creation of promotable positions between base-grade and senior levels and the development of graduate recruitment pathways.

In addition, a speech pathology qualification commenced at UTAS in July 2022, which will also boost the recruitment pipeline over the longer term.

The scholarships that we have put forward that are part of this current budget process are for students who are in their final year of an accredited speech pathology university course or who expect to complete all requirements of their course by mid 2025. Psychology students, they must be in their fifth year of an accredited 5+1 internship or in their second year of an accredited masters pathway to registration program at an Australian university and expect to complete their course in 2024.

Successful applicants will be provided with \$25,000 across their scholarship term to contribute towards university course costs. They will be offered secure employment with the Tasmanian government for a minimum of three years. The scholarship placements are offered across Tasmania and we have a real focus on those regional areas.

I should also state the wellbeing and the learning needs of our students, it is our highest priority. We're really aware that students have to be in a frame of mind where they're in a good place that they are able to learn and, as has already been stated by the acting secretary, there's that effective triaging that actually ensures that students with those serious or complex needs are actually able access student support services in a timely manner.

Ms JOHNSTON - In answer to Mr Jenner's question earlier about cuts of \$80 million across the forward Estimates to education, you indicated that in the 2024-25 period of \$11.8 million and you gave a list of items you're looking at to make savings. One of those included non-priority activities, could you perhaps give an example or a few examples of what you would consider to be non-priority activities.

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

Ms BURGESS - Together with the minister, we are looking at where there are functions that we perform that can possibly provide savings. By way of example, you would appreciate that within a big department like Education there are a high number of policies and procedures that are on an annual or biannual or four-year rotational basis.

That takes a significant amount of work to make sure that they're contemporised. What we would be doing is looking at, for example, areas where they are non-critical or non-urgent pieces of policy work and that we would be able to either slow down if there was low risk, or delay even further if needed. Therefore, through that process, we would be able to then move those staff into areas that were being prioritised, and that would be a way of ensuring that we weren't building our staffing but we were using our staffing wisely to make sure that we were meeting the needs. We would always prioritise the needs of children and young people, so anything that directly impacts on them being known, safe, well or learning would be absolutely prioritised in that work.

The other thing that we would leverage off is as a small jurisdiction there are often ways that we can work with other jurisdictions rather than reinvent the wheel. One really good example of that is the work that we've done in the student wellbeing survey. Rather than in that situation develop our own survey and use the resource to do that, we've leveraged off the work

of South Australia so that we can use their survey work with them and not duplicate unnecessary functions.

We'd be looking also nationally to work with our colleagues as we've done in the Respectful Relationships area, as we're doing when we're thinking about years 11 and 12 course development and curriculum about how we might actually leverage some of that, rather than as a small jurisdiction going it alone, and for us that makes a lot of sense.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you, minister. You also outlined some non-salary costs where you're hoping to achieve some savings and you included things like travel and transport, office equipment, consultancies and ICT. These are often areas that teachers put their hand in their own pocket to try to fund any shortages in their classrooms. I know numerous teachers will pay extraordinary amounts to ensure their classrooms are adequately equipped with a whole range of things, including stationery and things like that. Can you guarantee that with these cuts to these consumables or non-salary costs that no teacher will have to put their hand in their pocket to adequately equip their classrooms?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I'll refer you to the acting secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. Absolutely. The resourcing to schools is off the table. So therefore, there will not be changes to the non-salary component of the funding to schooling outside those normal things that happen over a three-year cycle where we look at student enrolments and the students that are there. So those normal practices will apply but outside of that, we wouldn't be looking at reducing non-salary resources to schools.

Mr FAIRS - Minister, we know that schools aim to provide an environment that's inclusive and equitable. Can you provide the committee with some examples of how the government is supporting this area, please?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Mr Fairs, for your question. The Tasmanian government is committed to providing all students with access to inclusive and equitable learning experiences, environments and quality curriculum. Our aim is to ensure that every child is known, safe, well, and learning. Since starting in the education portfolio, I've visited many of our schools and I'm constantly impressed by the environments that our school staff create for our students. Each is different and meets the needs of its learning community. For example, Exeter Primary School, Hobart City High, Big Picture and the Northern Support schools, they are well looked after spaces, they're constructed with such care both inside and out. I can see teachers and leaders that are acting with care and respect. I know that our schools are inclusive places where a student is supported to achieve success. Our government is committed to continuing to support our schools to do this.

The Educational Adjustments Disability Funding model is our biggest financial commitment designed to provide needs-based targeted support for students with disability. Through this funding, Tasmanian government schools are provided with additional resources to support implementation of adjustments for students with disability. Further to this, our government of course commissioned KPMG to conduct an independent review of that actual model's implementation, which demonstrated, I guess, our commitment to refining that process and to ensuring that it is a really effective process for students with disability on the ground. My department has a number of teams available to work closely with students and their families to ensure that they receive the tailored supports that they need across our government schools.

Our government is committed also to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. All students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders are required to have their learning tailored through a learning plan and resources are available through the department's Aboriginal Education Services to support this. We all work to ensure Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential and that all learners build a deeper understanding and a respect for Tasmanian Aboriginal history and living culture. Our government welcomes students and their families from diverse cultures. Resources are available to schools to support students who have English as an additional language - so it's EAL - and these resources can be used flexibly by schools so that they're able to respond to changing needs of an individual student.

These examples are just a few of the ways in which our government is supporting our schools to be places that are welcoming, where people do feel that sense of belonging and an empowerment to achieve their full potential. There are just some wonderful things that are being done in our schools to provide those really inclusive environments and those equitable environments. I've been to a number of schools where you can see that work is quite evident.

Mr WILLIE - You said earlier, minister, that the trajectory was enough to clinch the deal that up until Monday you said was a bad deal for the state. I'm interested in the Premier's involvement in the negotiation. Who signed off on the deal? Was it you or was it him? Are you aware of anything else that was being negotiated?

Ms PALMER - I signed a letter to minister Jason Clare. He had sent me a letter that I responded to and I signed that. As for the Premier's involvement, you need to take that to the Premier. I have a very clear focus on education and that's where my focus has clearly been.

Mr WILLIE - Was the Premier involved in the negotiation?

Ms PALMER - As I said, you would need to ask the Premier those questions. I'm not going to answer on behalf of the Premier. My clear focus has been on education and when it became apparent that we could see that much better trajectory of seeing money flowing into our government schools I knew that was a wonderful opportunity. To reiterate to you, included in my conversations with minister Clare was the 'No Worse Off' deal.

With five days before any deal was going to be off the table for Tasmania, before those five days were up that there would be no more money flowing over and above the agreed position we were in, this was an opportunity to see that trajectory brought right back to 2029 and have that 'No Worse Off' deal. If any other state in the coming year has an opportunity and are successful in getting a higher percentage rate or another aspect of the deal, Tasmania is in a very good position to have that 'No Worse Off' deal.

Mr WILLIE - I don't see higher revenue states, Labor-governed states, falling over themselves to sign up to this sort of deal. We've got Western Australia with revenue that is the envy of the nation; the Northern Territory got a special deal, they got 40 per cent federal funding; and you've signed up Tasmania to get 22.5 per cent. How is that a good deal?

Ms PALMER - In the next five years at the most, we will see \$300 million flow to our government schools, students and our workforce, looking at what more can be done in the wellbeing aspect of our students and our workforce? What more can we do in literacy? What

more can we do in Year 1 phonics and the early years numeracy checks? I'm not sure if what you're suggesting is that we should have stayed at 20 per cent?

Mr WILLIE - I just mean you should have fought for Tasmania.

Ms PALMER - Fight we did, the Education minister before me and this became an absolute priority for me when I became Education Minister to get up to speed on this deal because I arrived at quite a pivotal point in this and our team has fought all the way. With five days to go and a federal government that made it very clear that they were not in a position to move from the 2.5 per cent, the two options in front of me were nothing, zero, no more dollars flowing to Tasmania or an opportunity to see \$300 million flow to Tasmanian government schools in the next five years and a 'No Worse Off' deal. I don't know what you would have done, Mr Willie, but I can tell you that it was a wonderful opportunity.

Mr WILLIE - Fought for Tasmania, that's what I would have done.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms PALMER - I haven't finished.

CHAIR - Order. I will let the minister finish and then I'll let Mr Willie ask a follow-up.

Ms PALMER - They were the two options that were in front of me and the clock was ticking. When I have to front up to a school, to a parent association meeting and they could have said to me, 'You let this opportunity go. We're going to have no more funding. We're just going to sit at that 20 per cent for another year and just see what happens,' or I was able to get a 'no-worse-off deal' and see that money flowing as of next year, there will be opportunities next year that, had we not signed up to this, we would not have had those opportunities, and the 'no-worse-off deal' was the most critical part of this.

Other states are trying to, you know, they have to manage their own business. They are in discussions with minister Clare. I'm not part of those discussions. My focus is on Tasmania. Yes, we saw the NT sign up and that was a deal that was for the Northern Territory. We saw WA sign up and I had the opportunity to see millions of dollars flowing next year and I am absolutely rapt that we've been able to secure this for Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - What does it cost the Tasmanian government over the life of the agreement, minister?

Ms PALMER - Yes, so we are looking through that now. We are. That's what we're working through at the moment -

Mr WILLIE - Surely you know when you sign up for something.

CHAIR - Mr Willie, can you let the minister answer the question?

Ms PALMER - We are working through that now with Treasury and with DPAC and with my department and across our government, we are absolutely committed to play our part and to see 100 per cent funding for our government schools in the earliest time frame that we possibly can. That certainly is my focus.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - I find it hard to believe -

CHAIR - Last question for Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - I find it hard to -

Dr WOODRUFF - I thought that was the last question. That's what you said. You did.

CHAIR - I did say that, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, you've been saying we're going to move to full funding as quickly as we can, and that's my focus. But educators and advocates have been calling for full funding for over a decade and it's really clear in this deal that it looks like there's drip feeding over the next five years.

Notwithstanding the 4 per cent loophole which we've just discussed, which is a shame and something that you need to fix urgently - exactly when do you think that Tasmania will achieve full funding for its public schools under this agreement?

Ms PALMER - The agreement that we have been able to secure is that the line in the sand for when we must see 100 per cent funding is 2029, and I have been very clear with you that I'm absolutely focused on seeing us get to 100 per cent as quickly as we possibly can. But, you know, what was initially on the table was a deal that wouldn't see us get to that until 2034. That was not acceptable. To bring that back to 2029 was a far more reasonable position to be in, and I will have a very clear focus that I would love to see that happen before 2029.

Dr WOODRUFF - You said before, 'There will be opportunities next year,' and then you said, 'for millions of dollars to flow.'

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Dr WOODRUFF - There's nothing in the Budget in the forward Estimates at all, no increase in funding from this government. You're meant to be putting in 2.5 per cent. The forward Estimates are four years of the five years that this is meant to be fully funded. Where's the money flowing from, the millions of dollars next year that you talked about? Is that flowing from the federal government or is that flowing from the state government? And can you be clear with the committee, how many millions you're talking about will be flowing next year? Which is what you said.

Ms PALMER - Our intention is that we will see 2025, 26, 27, 28, 29 and that's the work that's been done by Treasury and DPAC and my department now to ensure that we are at 100 per cent by 2029. My clear focus is that I would like to see us at 100 per cent funding before that time, but there are discussions that need to be had with DPAC, with Treasury, with my department and with the federal government as well, but I am very confident that this process will begin in 2025.

Dr WOODRUFF - You just said millions will flow next year but then you've just said that you've got to go and have chats to DPAC and Treasury and hear what they have to say about it. How can you say that millions are going to flow next year? How do you know that?

PUBLIC

How many millions are you talking about? Are you talking about \$1 million, \$5 million or \$100 million? This is hundreds of millions of dollars which, by the way, you're going to take the majority back unless you change your position. You said millions next year. How many millions?

Ms PALMER - That's the modelling. That's-

Dr WOODRUFF - So, you're just making it up?

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, you've just asked the question, can you let the minister answer the question, please?

Ms PALMER - That's the modelling that's been done now. We haven't negotiated the final trajectory with the federal government. We have said we must get to 100 per cent funding by 2029. That's the line in the sand that we have said as a state government. That's where we have to get to. We are now looking at what does that look like in 2025, 26, 27, 28 and 100 per cent at 2029. As I've already said to you, I have a very clear focus that I would love to see and I will be fighting to see that 100 per cent come in earlier if that's what we are able to do. The deal that we have with the federal government is that we will get to 100 per cent before 2029.

Dr WOODRUFF - You got no basis to say that millions will flow next year. You don't have a piece of paper, you don't have any agreement that says it will start next year. You don't have anything that says that the federal government will put their 2.5 per cent in before 2029. It might be that they hold it all back for five years. You don't know that won't be the case but you've told us millions will flow next year. I think you're being a bit loose with your language in that regard and I think you should be much clearer for teachers and staff who are desperately waiting for this money how many millions next year, because they're not in the budget?

Ms PALMER - That's the modelling. That is the modelling, that is the work that is being done now and I am advised that, based on that modelling, that is the expectation that money will be flowing next year, which is what makes this so exciting for the teachers that you're talking about, for their families, for those students that based on base modelling that we are going to see money flowing next year.

I guess worst-case scenario is that we will get to 100 per cent at 2029. My focus is that we get to that 100 per cent funding before 2029, and that's what I'm working towards. That's what I'm working towards with our government, that's what I'm working towards with the federal government.

What we do know is that both governments have a really firm commitment that is now part of an agreement that we will get to 100 per cent funding by 2029. Prior to this deal, the only other offer on the table was that we would get there by 2034. We will now get there by 2029. This is a very exciting day for those teachers and those students and those families that we will see this flowing from 2025.

Dr WOODRUFF - They've spoken and said they don't feel your level of enthusiasm. They're on the record as saying that.

PUBLIC

Mrs BESWICK - I have come across several instances where policies have been considered in internal documents and not released publicly from Department of Education. Minister, could you elaborate on the specific criteria or framework the Department of Education uses when deciding whether a policy should be classified as internal or external? In particular, how does the department ensure that policies which directly impact the welfare and care of children are appropriately communicated to stakeholders, including parents, educators in the wider community?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I think I'll pass that one to the acting Secretary.

Ms BURGESS - We have a team of people that look at the policies for the agency and determine firstly the audience for that policy. Now if the audience is predominantly and primarily staff-focused, those policies and procedures and the guidance that sit underneath that will be internally facing. Those that have a broader audience, or a policy where there are implications for stakeholders that need to meet a commitment as part of that policy process, so an accountability, then we'd think about whether that needs to be public facing.

By way of example, the student behaviour policy should be public facing, because not only does it place requirements on our staff about how they deal and engage with and implement that, but there are also broader requirements for other people about how they might undertake that work. So it's really the audience and who that is.

Sometimes we'll find that a number of policies are public facing, then the procedures are internally facing, because they are to deal with the day-to-day operations and accountabilities of staff.

Mrs BESWICK - When you are looking at a stakeholder group, how are you determining that they shouldn't have access to it? You said if it does affect a range of stakeholder groups, you might give them access to it.

Ms BURGESS - In this space there is a legislative framework. Not for all policies, but for a high number of policies, there is a legislative framework that determines who has access to, or who should be able to see, those policies and procedures. Where there are legislative requirements, for example, a parent must ensure that a young person attend school, then that requirement immediately says it needs to be public facing.

Firstly, we would look at the legislative environment, and if there was no legislative environment, then we'd be looking at the functions and requirements of the procedure or the policy, then make a determination on that. If it involves external stakeholders or working with the department, we'd need to make it public facing.

Mr FAIRS - Minister, as we know, there are particular challenges on the west coast for families, students and the workforce. Do you think it's acceptable and are you doing enough as Education minister to support west coast schools?

Ms PALMER - Great, thank you very much for that question. Can I begin by saying what an incredible job our staff do on and in our west coast schools. This was certainly very evident when I went to visit in July. It was amazing to watch how they operate, and also to recognise some of the challenges that they face in the job that they do.

PUBLIC

We want all of our schools to have the resources they need to ensure, as the Acting Secretary and I have said many times, that students are known, that they feel that they are safe, that they are well, and importantly, that they are learning. That is why our government is investing \$3.5 million over four years for the hard-to-staff teacher incentive program, and investing additional \$15 million towards building and upgrading housing for 25 teachers in our rural and remote communities. That's including the west coast of Tasmania.

These houses will be tailored to better meet the current needs of our staff, for the staff that are there, but also in a bid to attract teachers to some of these more hard-to-staff schools and to some of these remote locations, so that they are going home to a beautiful environment at the end of a long day. New staff can also access rental accommodation at just \$10 a week and also receive assistance with relocation expenses.

Our government worked with stakeholders to ensure incentives are in place in the 2023 Teachers Agreement to attract and retain teaching staff in isolated schools. As a government, we increased financial incentives above those agreed upon through the agreement, and these additional incentives include an increase in the initial settling-in payment from \$2759 per year up to \$6000 per year, and an increase in payments for completing a full year of employment in Years 4, 5 and 6 from \$5523 per year up to \$8000 per year.

Teachers will also be paid time to attend urgent personal business and to receive a travel and accommodation allowance when they need to have, perhaps, specialist medical appointments that they would need to travel to go to. All these added incentives are obviously in addition to a teacher's salary that they would be receiving. As of 2024, our west coast schools have a lead principal to provide additional leadership and support to our principals at Strahan Primary, Zeehan Primary, Mountain Heights and Rosebery District Schools.

Through my department, comprehensive consultation around issues affecting these schools has been undertaken. These consultations have included targeted face-to-face consultations with teachers and leadership staff, plus representatives from the West Coast Council and the Queenstown Child and Family Learning Centre. To help us better understand what their needs actually are and to collaborate with them, particularly on those long-term strategies. Our government absolutely values the work being done by our schools on the west coast, and we'll continue to work with them to find ways to support them and to support their community.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, I heard before that you said you didn't know the cost of the deal for Tasmania. I find it very hard to believe you sign up to a 10-year agreement and you don't know what the total cost is for the state.

Ms PALMER - As I've said, this is a very exciting time for our government schools. It has been wonderful to be able to negotiate with the federal government to a position where we will see 100 per cent funding, at the very least by 2029. My focus will be on trying to achieve 100 per cent funding in a shorter time than that. Now we move to the stage that we have that base agreement, we have to work through a bi-lat with the federal government as well. I'll do that with the federal Education minister. We'll be looking at what that trajectory needs to look like, and that's the modelling work being done now involving Treasury, DPAC, and my department.

Mr WILLIE - In the announcement, we heard that there was \$300 million from the federal government flowing into schools over the agreement. How do you not know what the state contribution is?

Ms PALMER - It's not \$300 million from the federal government - that would be lovely, wouldn't it? To get to 100 per cent full funding the state needs to play its part, as we've always done, and the federal government plays their part. That is what that \$300 million is. It's not just from the federal government.

Mr WILLIE - How are you doing modelling if you don't understand the total contribution?

Ms PALMER - That's the work that's being done now.

Mr WILLIE - No, you need a total contribution over the life of the agreement and then you can model it over the years. How are you doing modelling if you don't know the total cost?

Ms PALMER - It's worked out on percentages, so the Tasmanian government, our full contribution needs to get to 77.5 per cent, the federal government needs to get to 22.5 per cent, and it's worked out on those percentages. Now we go away and do the modelling, and that's when the actual dollars step in. The negotiation was not around dollars, the negotiation is around the percentages. What this commitment is, what this agreement is, is what those percentages are.

Mr WILLIE - On Monday, you also said, 'I believe that Mr Clare needs to have a deeper understanding of some of the challenges that we face in Tasmania. I've made sure that he and his team are aware of these challenges and Tasmania's differences.'

The deal you've struck means Tasmanian kids will receive less funding than the Northern Territory. Some of these differences you were talking about, the challenges are very similar in Tasmania; in fact, a lot of the results, it's Northern Territory on the bottom and Tasmania second. How have you signed up to a deal that puts Tasmanian kids at a disadvantage to Northern Territory kids in terms of funding?

Ms PALMER - I need to be a little bit cautious here, because that was negotiated with the states and territories before I became Education minister, and that was already agreed by states and territories to carve out the Northern Territory, and the first time I met with minister Clare I certainly talked him through what our needs are in Tasmania.

As you've continuously said, Mr Willie, you would fight for 5 per cent. I did fight for 5 per cent. I fought for 5 per cent, but the federal government was not in a position to sign on at 5 per cent, and in five days' time, the deal is off the table. There's no deal. This was not a choice here between me saying, 'oh, let's get 5 per cent'. The federal government was not offering 5 per cent. They did not offer 5 per cent to any other state or territory outside of the Northern Territory. The choice I had, with five days to go, was: sign on to an agreement, where we as a state meet our target of 77.5 per cent, the federal government meets their responsibility share at 22.5 per cent, to ensure that we can get funding for our government schools to 100 per cent. The change came with the trajectory. The initial deal that the federal government had on the table was for 2034. That was not going to work, so we moved it -

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - For when you reached - let's be clear, it's a 10-year-deal.

Ms PALMER - So, we said 'no'. Line in the sand at 2029. Now we are going to see full funding for our government schools by 2029, importantly with the 'no worse off' condition attached to this. So, if anything changes in any other state, we have secured that. I am delighted that we are able to deliver money flowing into our state from 2025 for our government schools, rather than say, 'okay, I'm just going to let the next five days roll over, and we will be in exactly the same funding position as we were in beforehand'. This is a great thing. Millions of dollars are going to flow to our non-government schools. We are going to see what we have been calling for: 100 per cent funding. And I know it's your job to twist it and make it look as negative as possible, but this is millions of dollars -

Mr WILLIE - No, I care about this. I'm a former teacher.

Ms PALMER - And I am a parent, Mr Willie. This are millions of dollars flowing to our government schools. The option was money flowing in on a shorter trajectory with a 'no worse off deal' - no worse off deal - or nothing. You seem to be advocating for 'nothing'.

Mr WILLIE - No, I'm advocating for using your power, your position, as collective states. You've got higher revenue states, Labor-governed states, saying that this is a bad deal and they're holding out, and that's what you should have done and used your collective power instead of selling out.

Ms PALMER - Just to be clear, you are saying that I should not have signed a deal, and I should have rejected millions of dollars? I just want to be clear. You are saying, on the record, that I should have rejected this deal and not seen a potential \$300 million. That's exactly what you've just said. It's exactly what you've just said.

Mr WILLIE - No, it's not what I'm saying. You were rejecting the deal up until Monday, minister.

Ms PALMER - And the trajectory changed -

Mr WILLIE - You were rejecting the deal up until Monday, and then you changed -

CHAIR - Order.

Ms PALMER - And the trajectory changed, and we got a 'no worse off deal', and now we're going to see potentially \$300 million flow to our government schools in the next five years. This is a wonderful opportunity for us, and if any of those bigger states can get a different deal, we also get that deal. It was absolutely imperative, the 'no worse off deal'.

CHAIR - Last question Mr Willie, and then Mr Bayley.

Mr WILLIE - For transparency, this document was being waved around at the announcement. Will you table that? It's the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. You must have that as Education minister, that document?

Ms PALMER - Yes, sorry, what are you asking?

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - I'm asking you to table it.

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice. Mr Willie, I'll have to take that question on notice.

Mr WILLIE - Okay. I can provide this to you as part of that process.

Ms PALMER - I'm happy to take the question.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I'm keen to keep talking about funding, but shift sideways a little bit to school levies. Specifically a Greens RTI has shown that there's some clear discrepancy in the way that levies are brought about in schools and by schools. Claremont College, for example, has about half the number of students of Rosny College, but Rosny is bringing in about six times the amount of Claremont in levies. So what I'm really interested in here is whether the government makes any additional payments to schools to balance out some of the discrepancy in levies they receive.

So just to try to unpack that little bit, some schools are in socioeconomic demographics where there are perhaps greater proportions of students who, you know, don't need to pay the levies because of their status - concession card holders and the like. So there's this clear discrepancy where there is additional funding going to through the levy program going to schools in areas and disadvantaged areas are losing out in many ways twice I guess you'd say.

Ms PALMER - Yes, thank you very much. I'll hand over to Kane Salter, who's the deputy secretary of business operations and support. Thank you very much.

Mr SALTER - Thank you. In terms of providing equity across the schools, the government has the student assistance scheme which provides relief from levies, and schools get funded where that relief is provided. So I think it was back in 2019 or 2020 that the government increased the eligibility status for STAS so that anyone that's got a healthcare card or equivalent can get access to the scheme. So that's one way that schools are supplemented for the income they don't get through levies. The other mechanism, which is part of the fairer funding model, is that based on a school's SES or needs basis, that does impact the level of funding through their school resource package. Those two elements contribute.

Mr BAYLEY - But essentially, you're telling me, which is welcome if I'm hearing you correctly, that the levy funding shortfall that a school suffers, I guess, but due to the student assistance scheme, is reimbursed by the state. So that's really welcome and I appreciate that, but there's still some differences in the actual amount that each school will levy students. Different schools in different SES areas may levy a lower amount. Is there any mechanism to sort of balance it out across the board or do you just directly reimburse dollar-for-dollar what was foregone via the student assistance scheme?

Mr SALTER - Through the minister, there's a policy that defines how schools set levies that provide some parameters and they are to do that in conjunction with their school association so there can be some variability in what schools set, based on taking into account their local context. If part of the question is, is the STAS amount related to what the school charges or a set amount, is that -

Mr BAYLEY - Broadly, I think that's what I'm getting at, yes.

Mr SALTER - I'll just have to double check that aspect. I can do that and then come back before -

Mr BAYLEY - Before the conclusion of the hearing?

Mr SALTER - Yes.

Mr BAYLEY - Okay, thank you. I'd appreciate that.

Ms PALMER - We will try to get that information for you before our time expires.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. We had another example in the RTI. Montello Primary in the state's north west and Montagu Bay Primary in the state's south, they're two primary schools of the same size. Last year, Montagu Bay brought in \$77, 000 in levies. Montello brought in \$16, 000. Part of that might be because there are more students on student assistance schemes, but part of it is also because that Montagu Bay charges 65 per cent more in levies than Montello. That is what I'm keen for you to clarify, understanding it is that sort of discrepancy you are going to come back and answer?

Mr SALTER - There's still the two aspects. There is the school within the parameters of the policy and based on their local context can set their fees. That can be a difference in the levies in themselves and, as communicated, we'll come back on the STAS amount that goes to each school.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, teachers continue to burn out in record numbers with unmanageable workloads a major cause. They're asked to be so many things, and they do an incredible job - I wouldn't want to be a teacher for quids, but they do a fantastic job. Given that the teachers exodus is driven by workload and has not abated, existing government initiatives have proved inadequate. What immediate additional steps will you take as minister to substantially alleviate workload issues driving psychological injuries.

Ms PALMER - I can address part of the question you have asked, about the stress we see in the workplace for teachers. It's been a question that I have been asking principals and teachers as I'm moving through schools and I am aware that, as communities change, as society changes, schools reflect what is happening in society.

We are seeing rates of trauma and we're seeing the issues of society reflected in our children in the education system. One of the things that I've been really focused on and I spoke about this with the education union at I think it was their branch council, where I spoke about working with the department on doing an audit - for want of a better word - of what we ask of our teaching staff. What is in that body of work that they are doing on a daily, weekly, monthly basis, year in, year out that we could either consider stopping? We could look at pausing? What are our priorities in what we're asking of our teaching staff?

It's been made clear to me that the workload on our teachers is intense. As a department, we want to look at what levers we have that may be able to alleviate some of the pressure on our workforce.

One of the really important things we know in the literacy space is ensuring that every child has that one hour of literacy teaching in the classroom. That is something that we would see as a priority. Are there other things that we're asking teachers to do that perhaps are not a priority and we could release the pressure valve on, because we're looking at our educational outcomes? They're not where we want them to be for Tasmania, but we have an amazing workforce, incredible teachers, principals and allied health workers that are working in our schools. What can we do to better support them? The conversations that I've been having with teachers has really clearly said, 'Can you please not give us any more to do?'

That's a body of work that I am looking at with the department, to the other part of your question, I'll refer to the acting secretary.

Ms BURGESS - I can outline a range of strategies that we are undertaking. We are hearing our workforce and that the conditions and the complexities of working in schools nowadays is far different than it was 10 years ago. A number of strategies that we're trying to put in place to help that is in the curriculum space. How do we make sure that we provide the curriculum and the resources that are necessary so that teachers don't have to do as much of that thinking and planning.

A classic example of that is the scope and sequence work that we've been doing in the literacy space. There are step by step elements of the work so that schools and teachers don't have to do that, that is there for them. That work, more broadly across the curriculum, started through the COVID space. That was one of the benefits of COVID, it was, 'How can we flip to make sure that we're putting the support for teachers where it's needed most?' One of the areas we heard from was that curriculum resource area.

The other thing is the systems work. We're on a journey with our systems to support schools, particularly where we've got students to make sure that they're safe or that they have additional learning needs, we've prioritised that safety element for those students.

Now, by way of example, we are moving towards all schools using electronic student learning plans. The learning plans are there, we're able to harvest information from them; they don't need to rewrite them. They're there in the system and they only need to adjust them as they as they need to. We are trying to systematise the work of teachers so that isn't seen as a burden, but as a support. Schools are being provided with more admin time, with admin staff, so that those areas that are not involved in teaching - that core teaching time - can be done by other people within the schools.

Another example is the data dashboard. We've really moved leaps and bounds in our way that we can systemise the way that we present data to schools. Now we have real-time data feeds to schools. Rather than having to go and work out, 'What's our attendance rate? What's that looking like? Do we need to adjust our strategies?' they get a real-time feed that they can drill down to see what their attendance rates are looking like and what they need to do. Before, that would have been a manual calculation, but it also lets them know whether they're on track to meet their learning targets and their learning goals for students.

There's been the revised reporting to families. In partnership with the unions, we worked through an approach that allowed parents and families to still understand about the progress of their children, yet reduce the burden about how that might be reported which means less report

writing, because we know teachers wanted to go above and beyond for families, so while we had minimum expectations in that reporting space, schools wanted to give more.

We've narrowed that more, we've clarified that and reduced the expectations in that. There are a number of ways that we're trying to achieve that. We're not there yet, and that's the work of our department to make sure that we are being responsive to the needs of schools and taking away things from them that they don't need to do so they can focus on the day-to-day work of teaching and learning.

Ms JOHNSTON - You have quite clearly outlined a number of things that you're doing in that space. Despite that, psychological injury claims are on the rise and they've increased from 32 per cent for teachers and 40 per cent for other educators. Clearly, what you're doing is not enough. You, as a PCBU (person conducting business or undertaking) minister, you outlined that you're looking at an audit of workloads. When will that audit be completed or concluded? How would that be communicated to parliament and to the teaching community?

Ms PALMER - My priority will obviously be communicating that to our teaching staff, and I'm looking at a couple of different areas in this space. I'm looking at what we can do right now that can alleviate the pressure on our teachers.

But then, the next stage is what we could do in a more mid-term strategy, whether we look at pausing this section of work, this requirement that we're asking about teachers, to ensure that there aren't other consequences to pausing that work, or is there something that we can stop?

I don't think there's a quick fix with this, but I do want something for right now - a lever to pull right now to release some of that pressure. There is a bigger conversation here about what's the impact of what that might be, but what are some other strategic ways of thinking that we can ensure our teachers are in a position where they can spend that time in class, they easily can meet that one hour of literacy that we are asking of them, and that they feel really empowered in their role as educators?

It's going to be a really interesting body of work. We'll do that looking at it from a department space, but also consulting with our stakeholders as well so that we can get an understanding from their perspective about where they would like us to be looking at what we could focus on.

Ms JOHNSTON - Do you have a time frame around completing that work?

Ms PALMER - I can't give you a date on that. I would hope that before the end of this year there is something that I can do, a lever that will be available to me to try to make a difference.

But I don't think the body of work finishes there. The stress that our teachers are feeling is a real, deep concern of mine. I'm very committed to trying to find ways to relieve that pressure so that they can do what we want them to do, which is teach our children and share their knowledge and their passion for education with our children.

Mr FAIRS - Minister, as you know, I'm very passionate about helping our young people in the community, and I know that's very close to your heart as well. Staying in school is

obviously a key point to their development. What's the government doing to improve retention of young people in government schools?

Ms PALMER - Yes, it's a really important question, so I thank you for that. I am pleased to confirm today that in 2024 we have had an increase, small as it might be, of 2 per cent in our retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 in our government schools. This increase in retention can, in part, be attributed to the increased diversity of learning programs that are available in our schools, and the additional supports that are being put in place to support our young people.

Our young people are being supported to develop a personalised, localised and customised plan for their future that helps them to smoothly transition from the junior years of high school into those senior years. Our schools and our colleges provide young people with a wide range of options, including school-based apprenticeships, vocational education and training, Big Picture Learning - what a phenomenal success that has been, and we want to see the Big Picture Learning with TASC-accredited courses and UTAS High Achiever and University Connection programs.

Students can choose to study at their local secondary school or college, or they can undertake shared enrolments, because we know that works for some kids to have some time in college and some time perhaps in their district school. We can also enrol with Virtual Learning Tasmania, the government's online learning provider for senior secondary students, and that's regardless of where they live. We've invested in ensuring that students benefit from qualified career practitioners to support their decision-making and planning their own pathway. We've invested in digital platforms which can be accessed anytime, anywhere, to help young people understand the choices that are available to them and then to be supported in that decision-making process. That's including Careerify and the digital course guide.

We've increased the number of VET learning opportunities that are available across our schools, and there's been a significant increase in the number of schools offering VET: 28 schools in 2022, up to 35 schools now in 2024. We want this to grow so that we can reach a target of 50 per cent of young people undertaking VET by the time we get to 2030.

We've invested in a range of services and resources to further support our young people. There are specialised teams, such as Back on Track - they work directly with young people to support engagement in approved learning programs.

We've invested in improving data systems to allow schools to track and to be really responsive around student engagement. We've invested \$3 million in the take home borrowing system.

We deployed 927 devices and 891 hotspots for students in Years 7 to 12; we did that in 2023. In Libraries Tasmania, \$2 million was invested to support delivery of a program for parents and carers to learn how to best support their child's digital learning.

The schools are providing pastoral care for young people to ensure that they are safe, well and known, and that they are learning.

We've also created a Digital Inclusion for 21st Century Learners framework to determine more flexible opportunities for young people in the way they want to access their learning.

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I think we all know not all kids learn the same way; not even siblings in the same family all learn the same way. So, we have to be able to adapt and be flexible to that.

We know there's always more that can be done, and we're open to that. We want every young person to have that meaningful pathway and learning. With the Youth Jobs Strategy and the independent review into education that I announced earlier this year, we certainly look forward to understanding what else we could possibly be doing in this space so that we are on a positive trajectory.

Ms DOW - Minister, I understand that you've been to Montello Primary School in Burnie and visited the site, so I would have thought that you would have a good understanding of the conditions at the school with the fact that there are four toilets for 200 students. Your government in the past, back in 2021, made a small commitment of \$7.1 million to upgrading the school facilities. There was additional funding then provided when that original money wasn't enough for what was planned, post-COVID.

Minister, why was there only another small amount of \$2.5 million in the Budget for Montello Primary School? Quite clearly, there is the need for more capital funding at that school. Why wasn't a greenfield site or a totally new proposal and redesign for that school campus ever thought about by your government?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I've actually been to Montello twice now. The first time was to spend time with their fantastic principal and also the student business manager there, which was a great opportunity. I did that very early on in my time as Education minister. The first visit was a thorough walk through the school. Then, I also made sure I was still there at school pick-up time, because we knew that some of the concerns of that school community were around safety.

In 2021, we had an election commitment to deliver an upgrade to Montello Primary School, with an initial commitment of \$7.1 million. It was never envisaged that the proposed works would redevelop the whole school. However, they will enable significant areas of the school to be upgraded, with learning areas, the student bathrooms, and that pick-up and drop-off area. Accessibility right across the site needed to be greatly improved as well.

Since the original budget was developed, the construction industry has seen significant cost escalations by up to 40 per cent in recent years, which we're all aware of. In 2023 the former Education minister approved an additional \$2.5 million from existing departmental funds to be allocated to this project. This, together with funding from the school and the minor works program took the total project budget to \$9.95 million. The concept plan for the proposed works at Montello Primary School was released for the school and for the community to consult on in November 2023. The construction tender for the redevelopment of the school was released on 27 April 2024.

In evaluating the tenders received, it was identified that additional funding would be required to deliver the concept plan that had been developed. That was part of the conversation I had with the principal and the business manager on my first visit to Montello.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works hearing for the project was held on 3 July 2024. During the hearing, existing safety concerns at the school were raised, which central areas of the department had been unaware of at that point. So, the government is

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certainly committed to delivering, in full, the concept plan that was presented to the committee, that was consulted on, and also addressing the safety concerns.

Ms DOW - What about those other additional things that were highlighted during the public works committee, like the sash windows?

CHAIR - Ms Dow, you'll be able to ask additional questions on this and continue a line of questioning. Can we let the minister finish her answer and you'll get an opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Chair. The government is committed to delivering, in full, the concept plan that was presented to the community, and addressing the safety concerns. That is why you'll see an additional \$2.5 million that's been included in the 2024-25 state Budget for Montello Primary School. That is taking the total project budget to \$12.45 million. A building contractor has now been appointed, and the works at Montello Primary School are expected to commence in the coming weeks - a very exciting time for Montello.

Ms DOW - The other question was, why there was never a greenfield site new development considered, which I believe was the original concept put forward by the school and previous principals? I want you to give me a commitment today, please, that you will continue to work with the school community. They're still not satisfied with the level of works that are proposed through that concept plan. There are still things that they want to see fixed into the future, and they want the attention of your government on their school community, to make sure they get what they deserve. They've been waiting for years for a redevelopment of their school.

As you said, the disability access was absolutely appalling. You had students that weren't able to go to school because they had broken their leg and couldn't access the classrooms and the toilet block. Downstairs wasn't able to be used. There are numerous issues that they have put up with for years. I ask you to give them your ear and compassion, and to make sure that they get the school environment that they deserve.

Ms PALMER - They certainly have had quite a bit of my attention. I had that wonderful time, that wasn't rushed, to go through the school with a member of my team, which was really great, to see some of those issues which the initial funding had been committed in previous budgets. It had been stepped up to respond to the increase in construction, and we've stepped it up again. Now we have that \$12.45 million commitment. The next time I went to Montello Primary School, it was to have lunch through the 'school matters' program, where again I got to sit and share a meal, talking to students, the principal and the teachers who were there. It has been wonderful to be engaging with the school, and I've appreciated being able to visit the school twice in the last couple of months. I'll see if, through the Acting Secretary, if there's anything to add to that.

Mr SALTER - You posed the question about a greenfield site. When we look at making recommendations to government on school needs and we look at the building condition for the whole school, we can make significant differences through redeveloping sites rather than going a greenfield build on all occasions. Taking that approach also enables more schools to get significant redevelopments. If every site was a greenfield new build, then you would see fewer schools getting important upgrades that they need.

Ms DOW - My other question to you, minister, is around the old university site in Burnie, which is the old UTAS campus on Mooreville Road. I understand that there's been representation made to you by the council around what they would like to see for that site in that area. What are you doing with that site? I've had a number of people make representation to me, particularly about the need for more childcare facilities across the Burnie region, and that being an ideal location.

At a time when we have a housing crisis, not enough accommodation for TasTAFE teachers - which was confirmed this week in Estimates - you have difficulty in attracting all types of professional staff because of the housing shortage across the state. Why do you have a building that's sitting there empty, doing nothing, space that could be used in our community to improve services that are provided across our community? What are your plans for that site? I appreciate you updating the committee today.

Ms BURGESS - We do have plans, but given that the facility site is in Kane's portfolio, he has greater levels of knowledge than me.

Mr SALTER - As you identify, it is an important asset. We certainly want to provide recommendations to the minister as to how that can be used for service delivery within the Education portfolio, including Children and Families and Youth Justice. We expect to be putting some recommendations to the minister about how that asset can be utilised in the portfolio. The minister can then make some decisions from there.

Ms DOW - When would we expect you to have made that decision? When will the community know?

Ms PALMER - I'll be looking forward to receiving that advice from the department and then I'll carefully consider it and make an announcement. No date.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, just to follow the line of questioning from Ms Johnston around alleviating pressure on teachers. It's incredibly welcome that this is acknowledged and accepted that you need to do something, and something urgently, in that area.

Obviously, teachers are managing their own time. They're not doing unnecessary activities. The real question is, the work that they don't do - what happens to that, and who does it, and how is that going to be funded? My understanding is, in terms of some of the ICT programs and other things, there's less money going into some of those programs which may ultimately alleviate the administrative burden and so forth. The question is, are you prepared to prioritise elements of the Budget into this, and how are you structurally going to make it work?

Ms PALMER - With the greatest of respect, I'm not sure that all teachers agree that everything they're being asked to do is where they believe the priority is. This is why I'm having those discussions with stakeholder groups, but also with teachers themselves. I have been very fortunate to secure a teacher in my ministerial staff with decades of experience, who has been a teacher before and after COVID, and is able to give incredible insights to me about how this works on the ground and in a school. That's part of the work that we need to do, and further discussions that need to be had.

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There are varying points of view about where the priority should be. So, that's what I see this job as being - pulling all of that together, then sitting down with the department and really stepping through: What can we do? Where's the priority list? Here's the non-negotiable, and perhaps we could have a thought process in this category over here. That's the work that we want to do. As I said to Ms Dow, the member for Braddon, before, that we would like to see a lever pulled before the end of this year to try to release some of that pressure. We will also be looking at this really strategically. Sometimes you can find yourself in a position where you just keep adding and adding and adding. My commitment from where I'm sitting is that if you want to add, you have to take something out. Let's balance those priorities.

Mr BAYLEY - I guess it's difficult to see that with a diminishing budget.

CHAIR - Given that it's 4:30 p.m. we'll go to a break. Given that Mr Bayley has only asked one question, we can pick up with Mr Bailey when we come back. Given that time taken for breaks must be made up, I'll encourage members to be as quick as they can.

The Committee suspended from 4.30 p.m. to 4.37 p.m.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, a question about the three-year-old kinder pilot that was promised for Bruny Island at the beginning of last year. Eighteen months later, there's still no action that's been taken to begin the necessary renovations for the kinder to open. There's currently 10 children who would be eligible for this program by next year, but if it doesn't start by 2025, there will only be two three-year-olds on the island who'd be eligible for the program in 2026.

We're really interested if you can give a commitment to open this facility in 2025 for the school year, regardless of the condition; whether you'll give a commitment longer-term to build a new fit-for-purpose facility, as opposed to just a renovation; and also whether the trial period started when you announced it or when you open it.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I'm going to seek some advice on that question and then I'll pass to the acting secretary. But, with your indulgence, Chair, I'd like to correct the record, if that's okay?

In a question that was asked of Mr Fairs, the member for Bass, with regard to some figures that I laid out for incentives for student teachers, I want to correct the record. I should have said - and this came through from the Teachers Agreement - that, when a teacher is relocating, they are eligible for a \$5000 Centrelink payment, then, as soon as they begin, on commencement, there is a payment of \$2759, and on completion of each year of service in the first three years there is a payment of \$2759, and then on completion of service for years four, five and six of continuous employment there is a payment of \$5523, and I apologise I read out the wrong figure.

CHAIR - Now to Mr Bayley's question.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much. I'll pass to the acting secretary, thank you.

Ms BURGESS - The Early Learning for Three Year Olds is a very exciting initiative. Unfortunately, it hasn't moved as quickly as we would have hoped for a number of reasons, one of those being that we've been really committed to working with the sector as well as

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working with local communities to make sure that what we're going to be offering is going to be fit for purpose.

We have the trial site at Bruny Island, we've established the local enabling groups so that work can progress, and we're still working through the logistics of that. As you would appreciate, with any site that three-year-olds have access to, it needs to ensure that it meets the national quality standards. We've been working with the regulator, the Education and Care Unit, to make sure that the building is fit for purpose so that it can have little people in there.

We've also established community inclusion workers to make sure that we're working with the community in a way that is responsive to their needs. In discussions with the working group that we've established, we're not yet ready to commence that trial this year. We have talked to some communities - but I'm not sure whether it is at the Bruny Island one - about if we haven't got the facility ready would they want us to start a service. But, certainly in the context of some communities, they actually want to wait until we've got the physical site ready and then roll out the service.

Mr BAYLEY - And so, is that the case with Bruny? Like, next year, is not an option? You mentioned you're not ready this year, but is next year an option?

Ms BURGESS - We're absolutely working towards next year for all of them.

Mr BAYLEY - You are? Right. Thank you very much.

To the minister: I appreciate that it's, I guess, retrofitting a facility to make it fit for purpose in the short term or medium term, but have you got an aspiration - will you give a commitment to building a new fit-for-purpose facility on Bruny Island, or advocating for?

Ms PALMER - That's not something that I've been looking at the moment, but I'm always open to having discussions. We've really laid out our capital commitment in the infrastructure space, but I am always open to having discussions. We know how important the first 1000 days are of a little one's life and the department is certainly working on this particular project, and it will be good to see that come to fruition in 2025 for Bruny Island.

Mr BAYLEY - Chair, there was just one more element to that question which was around the trial period. I assume it would be logical to start on the day that the little people start as opposed to when it was announced. Is that fair for stakeholders to assume?

Ms BURGESS - That's correct? As you'd appreciate, there are a range of complexities that we need to work through with regards to how the trial operates, how the funding works, what that looks like from provision. We chose five communities that were really complex for us and that's why we're doing a trial. We didn't want to go with areas where it was easy to solve. We wanted to go to those communities where it was far more complex for us so that we could test the parameters of the model. So, yes, we won't start the clock ticking until such time as we get kids in there, but the idea is that we learn from those and once we've distilled the complexities, the issues, the workforce issues, we'll then be able to say, okay, we're next and how can we scale up.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you, that's very helpful.

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Ms BESWICK - Minister, there have been bans placed on school excursions for activities such as laser tag due to its being considered not to meet community expectations. Earlier, you confirmed that policies that affect external stakeholders should be published publicly. With that in mind, can you please point me to where the policy around appropriate school activities is published on the Education website? The ban on some of these activities does have a significant impact on some of our family businesses.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much and I will seek some advice.

Ms BURGESS - We'll just look to find that out for you, but, I do need to correct the record while I am here. I was of the understanding that the attendance policy was public. It is not public. There is a significant amount of information on the attendance policy that is public, but the actual document in and of itself is not public. In the meantime we'll look to find that for you.

Mrs BESWICK - Do you accept that people who are hoping to support the school with excursions and incursions would want to know what the standards are that they need to meet to meet the risk assessments, et cetera, for the organisation?

Ms BURGESS - That's absolutely part of it. It's also about whether it is aligned to the curriculum. By curriculum, I mean the whole aspect of the curriculum and supporting the whole child rather than just formal curriculum. We do need to make sure - because we've got those children and young people for such a small, well, it's a large amount of time, but precious time - that we need to make sure that the work that we do with them and the opportunities that we provide them are very much based on their learning needs. We would have criteria, but the other element that we need to mention is: how is it delivering on the school improvement plan; how is it aligned to the key focus areas of the school; and how appropriate is it for the age and stage of the child?

Mrs BESWICK - That's what I'm saying. How is that sort of information communicated to these organisations and businesses that could be supporting you in that?

Ms BURGESS - We'll find out that answer for you.

Mr FAIRS - Thank you, Chair. Minister, unions and the Tasmanian Principals Association often talk about the challenges of recruiting staff to our remote and regional areas and that the accommodation in these areas is dated and not meeting the needs of the current principals and teachers. Can you advise what the plan is for the \$15 million to rebuild or upgrade teacher housing please?

Ms PALMER - Thank you and this is a really important part of supporting our workforce, and, as a government, we absolutely recognise the importance of the role this plays in continuing to attract high-quality teaching staff and school leaders to work in the remote and regional parts of Tasmania and what we can do to encourage them to put roots down in a community because we know there are great benefits to the community and to schools when we see teachers in an area for a number of years.

In the 2024-25 state Budget, we're investing \$9.1 million across four years of our overall \$15 million commitment to build or to upgrade housing for 25 teachers in our rural and remote communities. Those communities include - as I was talking earlier - the west coast of Tasmania

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- teachers who are at Zeehan, Strahan, Rosebery and Mountain Heights. I'm also talking about areas like Flinders Island and King Island.

When I visited the west coast as part of that trip, I asked if I could have the opportunity to see some of the teacher residences and yes, I must say they were dated and they certainly were in need of a refresh. I was very grateful, in particular, to the principal of Mountain Heights who actually took me to his residence. It was lovely that he gave me the opportunity to actually look through his house and we were able to discuss some of the things that he found difficult in moving there and being in that particular accommodation.

I really want to make sure that we are doing everything that we possibly can in our remote and regional schools to make it a really attractive proposition where people want to go to work. I know that accommodation availability and suitability are key factors that teachers are considering when they determine whether or not they would want to make that move.

It's important to me that we can offer them somewhere that's warm, that's inviting, that they can go to at the end of the day, so I'm happy to announce today that the first upgrades delivered through this funding commitment will be to a unit complex of 14 residents in Queenstown, with these works scheduled to occur over the Christmas and New Year leave period commencing in late December of this year.

These works will include upgrading of bathrooms and kitchens, double glazing, insulation, installing heat transfer kits where it's viable, and also some painting that I felt needed to be done. The broader Teacher Residences Program will also see construction commence on up to 22 new residences progressively over the next six years and these residences will be located in our greatest accommodation demand areas including the west coast, Scottsdale, Smithton and Flinders Island.

The design and location of the new residences will be determined in consultation with schools and their staff, with the tender for the first tranche of the new residences expected to be released in the second-half of 2025.

There are currently 132 residential properties for teachers across the state - many of which are dated; and providing more modern and fit-for-purpose residences that our teachers and school leaders require will certainly help ensure that we're encouraging them to stay in our regional and remote areas on a more long-term basis which, as I said, has such a positive impact on our learners as well as a really positive impact on the community more broadly. That is certainly something that I've had a bit of a focus on in the last few months.

Mr WILLIE - Earlier in the hearing, minister, you said - prior to the hearing on Monday in the other place - that you had an early indication there could be an opportunity the federal government was presenting before the hearing. Did that indication come from the Premier's office?

Ms PALMER - No, that indication came from my chief of staff.

Mr WILLIE - And where were they getting their information from? They're obviously getting it from someone - that indication.

Ms PALMER - That indication came from minister Clare's office.

Mr WILLIE - Minister Clare's office, okay, thank you for the clarification there.

Ms PALMER - No problem.

Mr WILLIE - In terms of the state Budget, we're not even through the budget session and this agreement is completely unfunded. It's actually listed in the revenue risks for the state. It mentions the Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes reform agreement. If we take that the state government is paying for half - and there's a \$300 million figure being bandied around - then that's \$150 million across the forward Estimates. How are you planning to pay for this commitment? You were obviously fighting for 5 per cent, and you're not now.

Ms PALMER - That's the modelling work that is being done now. It's not being done in a silo; it's being done with DPAC, Treasury, and my department.

Mr WILLIE - You've added \$150 million to the forward Estimates, and we haven't even finished budget Estimates.

Ms PALMER - As I said, that's the modelling that's being done now. We are absolutely making the most of the opportunity to see federal money flowing to Tasmania. It's a wonderful opportunity for our government schools to see those sorts of dollars coming in, not with a trajectory of 2034, but coming in over the next five years to ensure that we get to 100 per cent funding of our government schools by 2029.

Mr WILLIE - But there is a cost to the state of Tasmania you weren't anticipating when the budget papers were printed. We're not even through the Estimates, and now there's \$150 million added to the Estimates.

Ms PALMER - As I said, that's the modelling that we're doing now to look at what that trajectory may look like, and that's the work that we're doing with Treasury, DPAC and our department at the moment.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, the Closing the Gap agreement sets targets and outcomes that pertain to Aboriginal students reaching their full potential in our education system. Under this agreement, your government also committed to 'transform government organisations so they work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.

Aboriginal Education Services provides critical support for palawa students via in-school roles and programs staffed by Aboriginal people. However, most of these roles are employed on annual contracts, meaning that Aboriginal educators must reapply for their roles each year, and have limited or no employment, and therefore income, over the summer break.

Minister, I assume that you agree that having Aboriginal people directly work with Aboriginal students in our school is important, but do you think it's acceptable that Aboriginal educators, who are themselves from a disadvantaged and vulnerable group within our community, should reapply every year? Will you do all you can to ensure that their contracts are made permanent?

Ms PALMER - We certainly value this part of our workforce. The Aboriginal Education Services provides services to children and young people in a number of ways, first, by tailoring

support for Aboriginal students in several schools with high levels of need, and also by building cultural learning about Aboriginal history and culture through resources like The Orb. Staff also support teachers by offering professional learning so that they are then able to teach Aboriginal history and culture. They also have a resource library, which holds an extensive collection of materials to support learning about Aboriginal culture.

With your questions around staffing, I'll pass that to the acting secretary.

Ms BURGESS - I'm not sure whether you're aware that we are renegotiating the Closing the Gap strategy, and as part of that, what work will fall to our department with regards to that strategy. We know and we're very aware that we have a small number of staff that are on fixed-term contracts, and we're in the process now of going to the State Service Management Office to make sure that they can be extended.

The reason behind the extension, rather than a permanent recruitment process, is because we need to think about how the strategy then is going to work through Aboriginal Education Services, and what we need going forward to make sure that we've got the right people in the right place to support those Aboriginal learners.

Mr BAYLEY - Those who are on permanent ones are in the administration side as opposed to the face-to-face teaching side. Is that correct?

Ms BURGESS - I understand here that we've got a profile of 22.61, and that 18.89 of those are permanent, and 3.72 are fixed-term. We are also slightly under profile at the moment by 1.57, and there is a current band 5 vacant position. We know that there are currently two fixed-term, band 4 Aboriginal education support officers, and four fixed-term Aboriginal program workers, and they're the ones that we're seeking extension to until we know what the medium and longer-term strategy is. Once we know that, we will recruit to those roles in a more permanent way.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, would you be willing to take on notice providing the data of who is in what category of employment and on what kind of contract going back a number of years, even to 2014? That would give us a 10-year profile to understand the trends of employment within Aboriginal Education Services. Would you be prepared to table data on employment and data on funding for those 10 years?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll try to get you that by the end of the session. If we can't, I'm happy to take it on notice and provide that for you, but we will try to get it before.

Mr BAYLEY - Thanks. I appreciate that.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, I'm aware that some students in our alternative learning programs, such as the Big Picture program, are discovering that they're unable to obtain their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) because they haven't completed the basic English and maths competency courses that are required to achieve and receive a TCE. This is despite the fact that students clearly demonstrate not only competency but excellence in their studies through completion of things like a certificate III, for example, and they also are required to submit a university-standard thesis at the completion of their studies.

The attainment of TCE is incredibly important to these students and moving forward in their education. What are you doing to address this particular issue?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I am right on board with this. It comes down to what does success look like? That is part of what I've included in the terms of reference for the independent review into education. Some of the saddest conversations I have had have been with young people who are honestly smashing it out of the park, but because of the way we're determining what success is through an ATAR or through the TCE, we have some of these amazing young people, especially through Big Picture, who - one quite heartbreaking scenario was when the ROGS data came out and it was splashed all across the front of the newspaper that schools were failing and education was failing. She was listening to a debate in the Legislative Council, and she came to me after and she burst into tears. She said, 'I'm one of the failures. I'm one of the ones that everybody is saying is in the failing capacity'. What she is doing is incredible, phenomenal. She is the furthest thing from a failure you could find for a young lady who was 17 at the time and is now 18.

There needs to be a conversation here. I've appreciated being able to advocate and organise for that particular young person to speak with some of the decision-makers around how that's impacted her. She is also advocating now on behalf of other young people as well. How do we say what success is? That's the question. When we answer that question, then we need to make sure that the processes we have in place enable that success to be celebrated.

It is not only impactful for the young people, it's impactful for our workforce as well. Our teachers see young people getting fantastic jobs and attaining all these wonderful levels of achievement, and then in some areas of conversation we're classifying them as a failure. I can't stand it, personally. Everyone learns differently and just because you learn differently and because you're not a round peg in a round hole, that doesn't make you a failure or a success. It is a really great that you have asked.

From our government's perspective, we're absolutely committed and feeling quite passionate in this space. We're absolutely committed to improving educational outcomes for our workforce, and for our young people to feel fantastic about what they are achieving and how they're contributing in their community.

We know that a quality education and how you feel about yourself and your achievements is pivotal to a foundation for a young person to launch themselves onwards for success. This is something that is very much in my line of sight. It's something that we are certainly having conversations about, and that's why I made sure that it was part of the terms of reference that Vicki Baylis, our independent reviewer, is looking at. I'm very much looking forward to the conversations that we'll be able to have when she's done that review.

She's talking to all the different stakeholders in this space, from the university through to our teachers on the ground, through to the voice of young people. In fact, she's even gone so far in ensuring that the voice of young people are heard that if a young person can't put into words how they feel in the submission process, they can actually draw it and send in a piece of artwork to say how they're feeling. We're really excited in this space.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you. I can see you're quite passionate about it and I think I know the young person you've been talking about. I agree, she's an absolute inspiration to so many.

You've indicated that that would be part of the independent review, but this is what I would describe as a low-hanging fruit in terms of how we can help young people achieve and have that achievement recognised. Do you have a timeframe for when there might be a resolution to this issue? I appreciate it will be part of the independent review, but there could be quite simple steps taken now to ensure that young people who are trying to achieve their TCE this year or next year can actually do that and attain that qualification.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. Obviously, it'll be fascinating to see what comes from the independent review. That's a huge body of work and I'm really looking forward to that, but I will pass to the acting secretary. She has some comments in this space.

Ms BURGESS - It's very much the job of our schools and our colleges to make sure that our students who are enrolled with us at the moment are on a pathway to success. As part of that work, they work with councillors and staff in schools to make sure that they have an approved learning program. Part of that approved learning program outlines what success looks like for them at an individual level now. Within the parameters that we have at the moment, which is the legislative framework through the *Education Act*, we know that there are some things that they need to achieve in that space.

The current TCE is one of those. If that's the aspiration of students in our schools, it's absolutely the job of our schools to make sure that the children and young people in the schools and colleges have access to what they need so that they can get their TCE. They need to be scaffolded from years 8, 9 and 10 through to years 11 and 12 to get the curriculum plan and to meet the five standards of the TCE, if that's their aspiration.

If those students feel that they're not on that trajectory and they need to be and want to be, then they need to go and knock on the door of the senior staff in their schools and colleges and say, 'Hey, I'm worried about my ability to attain the TCE, what else do I need to be doing?'

Ms JOHNSTON - Rather than an issue that the students should deal with, isn't it an issue about what constitutes TCE qualifications and requirements? Could we not change that to recognise -

Ms BURGESS - That's the longer-term piece of work. Absolutely. That goes to the minister's view about what success looks like. We do need to contemporise what success looks like for students at the end of year 12. The TCE hasn't fully been modified for a long period of time and there's certainly policy work that will need to be done, I imagine.

I am not privy to the review, but once the minister has those recommendations from the review, she'll ask the department, in collaboration with Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) and the TASC Board, to reconsider what success looks like for students at the end of year 12.

Mr FAIRS - Minister, this is very close to my heart once again, and I know it is yours - the 26Ten program. I was up at the Starting Point Neighbourhood House at Ravenswood recently and at their AGM, and it's fair to say that they were very excited that funding was continuing for them to help deliver this program - as am I; I think it's absolutely wonderful. For people who don't know, it's about teaching adults in Tasmania literacy and numeracy. As we

know, it's an area that we do need to improve on, which is great that we are. Can you provide an update on the actual program though, please?

Ms PALMER - Yes, for sure. Thank you very much. I love how everything is so close to your heart. It's a very big heart that you have, Mr Fairs, and I love that.

Mr FAIRS - It's a big body.

Ms PALMER - Your words, not mine, just for the record.

Our government is continuing our commitment to support the very successful 26Ten strategy for adult literacy and numeracy. It was launched in 2015. The new 26Ten strategy for the next decade is now under development. Over the past decade, the strategy has helped to improve the skills and confidence of so many Tasmanian adults, and I know that you've heard their stories.

The 26Ten Coalition helps to promote awareness and action on low literacy and is well positioned to support the Lifting Literacy framework and the DECYP Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan 2024-2026. Some recent activities include a revamped 26Ten brand style and website to better share information to improve literacy and numeracy, and evaluation of the 26Ten Communities program for the first four communities, being the Huon Valley, Glenorchy, Clarence Plains, and Launceston Northern Suburbs. A fifth community, Circular Head, began in 2022.

The evaluation confirmed these first four met the initial objectives and showed the complexities of the collective impact approach to community-led projects with vulnerable and low socioeconomic groups. The program began in 2021, and it has brought a newfound confidence that can help someone apply for a job, get their driver's licence - there've even been examples where they've been able to help their children with homework, and we know how special that can be.

That's why our government has continued to fund the 26Ten Communities program, with \$640,000 over two years in the state Budget. I know the success of the program - like you, I have visited the Northern Suburbs Community Centre in Ravenswood and have loved watching them go from strength to strength. A great example of this is 26Ten Northern Suburbs learner Rebecca, who was a student, and she actually went on to be named as the first Tasmanian to win an Adult Learners Week award from Adult Learning Australia, which is pretty cool. Rebecca is now employed part time, which is also such great news.

We certainly extend all of our thanks to the 26Ten team, who do so much to help Tasmanians improve their literacy and numeracy every day, and help them step through some of those things that can be quite challenging for them but what they need to do as part of their day-to-day life.

I look forward to celebrating 26Ten week from 21 to 27 October. You can all pop that in your diaries, and I don't think I'd have to offer much encouragement to those around the table to get involved. Thank you very much for your interest in this great program.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, after years of inaction and spending the first two weeks of the election campaign saying it wasn't your responsibility and attacking me, it's good to see that

the Liberal party, finally, at the end of the campaign, acknowledged that it has a role in early education and care and outside school hours care, and you made some commitments. I'm just interested in whether you can provide the committee with some information around some of those commitments.

One was that you were going to work with primary and district schools that do not currently offer outside school hours care to determine the level of need in their community and if the provision of outside school hours care is right for them. I'm interested in how that work is going. I know from my own travels around the state, there are a lot of families who can't get the care that they deserve for their children, and they can't participate in the workforce the way that they would like to. So, this is a very important policy area and it's good to see after 10 years of not much that you're actually looking at doing some things.

Ms PALMER - I certainly understand the challenges that working families face when they're not able to drop off or pick up their children at regular school times or on non-school days. I get it, having been one of them for decades, along with many other parents, probably some of you around the table.

It was really good to see that in the election the Tasmanian government made a commitment to and has funded through the 2024-25 state Budget \$10 million over four years from 2025-26 to support primary and district schools to establish new and on-site outside school hours care in partnership with early childhood education care providers.

Outside school hours care is currently available at more than half of our state's primary schools and providing families with the care that they need for children aged from five through to 12. They're operated by education and care professionals through both not-for-profit and private providers and parents can access the federal government's child care subsidy if they meet those eligibility criteria.

Our government recognises the significant benefits to both children and families when children are able to attend outside of school hours care service that's located at their school. The government has also worked with the education and care sector to develop and implement the Strong Partnerships Framework, which provides information, tools and resources to support the education and care community and the Department of Education to work in strong partnership to provide services for families.

Within the first 100 days of our re-election, we distributed a survey to schools as a preliminary scan of the current capacities, also wanting to gauge the interest in outside of school hours care; 104 schools responded to the survey and of those, 30 indicated their interest in exploring the potential to provide new OSHC service on site. Of the 104 that responded, 55 said that they had that service and of those, 17 would like to expand the service they have.

The information gathered will form the basis for more detailed engagement with our schools and also engagement with the early childhood education and care service providers - and with families and communities as well - and the department will be providing me with an outcome of that engagement before the end of the year.

Mr WILLIE - Are you able to provide some detail around which schools expressed an interest and which you want to expand?

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - I don't have that level of detail at the table and I would probably like to consider that. I wouldn't like to commit to doing that. I'm not sure how public that process was or whether schools would want that information out.

Mr WILLIE - I am happy for you to take it on notice and you can check those things.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I think that would be best - I'm not taking on notice and committing to answer that question. I would like the opportunity to see whether the department is happy to release that information and the schools are happy for that information to be released. Not always when schools answer a survey do they necessarily think it's going to be on a budget Estimates thing, so just want to be respectful in that process, thank you.

Mr WILLIE - I completely understand that.

CHAIR - Further questions?

Mr WILLIE - Yes, and there's another part to this which was that you were going to undertake a comprehensive property audit to identify government land that can be utilised for the expansion of early childhood education centre services, including outside school hours care and vacation care. I'm just wondering where that's at, given the importance of it.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. This is part of our plan to be reactive in this space, acknowledging the need across the community. It became part of our First 100-days Plan to undertake that property audit, trying to identify government land that could be utilised for the expansion of early childhood education and care services, that's including outside-school-hours care and vacation care. We've conducted that initial audit looking at government land and the audit has identified over 150 sites that could have potential to support ECEC provision. The audits have come through, the sites have been identified, and now we step into the next phase of that work.

Mr WILLIE - Are you able to give some detail around the sorts of sites? Are we talking about health services, TAFE campuses, schools, what sorts of government land are you looking at?

Ms PALMER - The criteria around the sort of land that we were looking at were: is it near a school, is it flat, that type of thing. As we move into the next stage of this body of work, there'll be an opportunity for more information to come out. Where we're at now is that we have identified the 150 sites with potential. The next body of work, actually, I probably should pass over to you, Kane, on that before I just start assuming what I think the next step should be.

Mr SALTER - As you've outlined, minister, the next step is to engage with the sector and the relevant schools and child and family learning centres (CFLC) on that information to consult with them before going wider.

Mr WILLIE - To clarify, your audit hasn't been with other government departments and their land yet or it has?

Mr SALTER - Yes, it's included. NRE.

Mr WILLIE - NRE. Not the Health department?

Mr SALTER - NRE looking at broadly across government.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, limited authorities to teach have increased dramatically over the last couple of years, and currently, teaching graduates who have previously taught under a Limited Authority to Teach (LAT) don't have this experience counted towards their pay rate. However, a minority of teachers on placement programs such as Teach for Australia or the Teacher Internship Placement program that undertake a similar on-the-job experience do have their do have experience recognised and can start work with a two-year pay disparity compared to other graduates with similar experience. They will have to start at a band 1 level 8. This seems fundamentally inequitable.

I asked this question because we're aware of a specific situation where the department has lost a specialist teacher, a language teacher, in a hard-to-staff school simply because they couldn't get equity of pay and couldn't get their prior experience recognised.

Why are certain forms of experience recognised above others? If we all agree that teacher retention rates are a major priority for the department and for the state, should it not be the policy of the government to recognise both these forms of on-the-job training and have that reflected in their pay rates?

Ms PALMER - I'll just make some opening comments and then I will pass to the deputy secretary. A limited authority to teach, which we know is a LAT, can be issued to an individual by the School Registration Board to address a workforce shortage and provide a sustainable pathway towards teacher registration. There are three categories under which a LAT can be issued, which are: school specific, generic relief, or internship. I'm advised there are 452 individuals with a LAT in 2023-24. Of these, 21 are in the 2023-24 TFA cohort, and 34 of them are TIPP (Teacher Intern Placement Program) participants. There's a lot of acronyms across education.

Mr BAYLEY - I guess the fundamental question is equity of pay across those programs.

Ms PALMER - For more details, I'll pass to Mr Salter, the deputy secretary.

Mr SALTER - A person undertaking a LAT, who obtains their qualification, will be appointed as a band 1 level 5, so that being the entry level for a four- or five-year qualified teacher for teachers that are coming through programs such as TFA, TIPP and isolated schools' package. Recognising the particular elements of those programs, they do have a varying level to start at, based on the programs that they're coming through.

Mr BAYLEY - Level 7 or 8, along those lines? There's a disparity of a couple of bands at least, is that correct?

Mr SALTER - I haven't got those levels in front of me, but, yep.

Mr BAYLEY - Can I just ask what the logic is behind that? It sends a poor message to aspiring teachers that if you're in one program, you'll get your experience recognised. If you're in another, you're not. And, as I say, I'm asking this question because of the real-life experience of a constituent who left one of your schools in a very hard to staff area because of this issue,

and I'm sure that's not an isolated situation. What is the logic behind the disparity of graduating teachers through these programs starting on quite significantly different bands?

Ms PALMER - I understand that there is a difference in commencement salaries for teachers coming from different LAT category backgrounds and I need to keep working with the department to understand the reasons behind those differences.

As a new minister in this portfolio, issues with workforce and workforce retention are front and centre. That's something that is very much in our thinking and in our discussions. I don't know if you've got anything to add to that.

I might be able to actually add to that, Chair, if I could call someone to the table if you're happy with that. I'll just check she's in the room; she is. I'll ask Katharine O'Donnell. Katharine is the Director Education Regulation.

Ms O'DONNELL - Basically, the situation is that the scholarships that you're talking about, things like Work for Australia, the programs involve additional learning on top of the ITE qualification. There's additional side programs that are run and additional learning and additional things that the people who are on those scholarships work through, which I understand, although the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) doesn't set the pay rates, is what differentiates them.

Whereas the LAT purely gives an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) student the opportunity to earn some money and some experience while they're working through their program. My understanding is that the reason there's a difference at the end is because the students that are enrolled through the scholarship programs, they are designed to give them more learning support and I guess they come out with added value on top of their degree.

Mr BAYLEY - They come out with additional qualification, effectively?

Ms O'DONNELL - Effectively. That's my understanding.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. Just as a follow-up, we talked about duty of care earlier and I know you took quite a few questions in the committee yesterday around violence in schools but I'm interested in support for tier 4 intervention in schools.

Violence in Tasmanian schools has been increasing and causing great deals of stress and fear for students and teachers alike. This is a serious issue. The Australian Education Union notes that tier 4 support programs - a vital tool for students with complex needs to re-engage with learning - do not currently extend to year 11 and 12.

Teachers in particular have noted and felt the real impact of this as student violence does not simply stop at year 10 obviously. These students still require support and this has been noted and advocated for.

How can year 11 and 12 teachers and students feel safe with no further support for tier 4 intervention in their respective year groups? And will you make a commitment to looking at this and extending tier 4 intervention across into the college system, into year 11 and 12, not just the colleges, obviously.

Ms PALMER - I'll make some opening comments and then I'll pass to the acting secretary. This is something that has been raised with me, where I need to be careful when you ask of me as a minister across the table - will I commit to something? - is seeing Tier 4 for years 11 and 12? What I need to do is make sure that the way Tier 4 is set up is fit for purpose for years 11 and 12 because, for example, if you look at the structure of years 11 and 12 in colleges, students can come and go. There are days when they're not on class hours. It's a very different structure than what we see in year 7 to 10. I have heard the concerns around this but I couldn't make a commitment to pick up what Tier 4 is right now and say, 'Yes, let's put that into years 11 and 12'.

There is a body of work to be done in this space. It is not necessarily taking a program that was designed.

Mr BAYLEY - I appreciate that. I'm hearing you recognise there's a problem and an aspiration to do something about it and implement something more than there currently is across year 11 and 12.

Ms PALMER - At every stage we are wanting to do whatever we can to engage young people, through trying to lift our vet courses, getting the right teachers in the right place, having teachers with experience as a teacher, but also perhaps from an industrial area or whatever it may be. Whatever levers we can pull to keep students engaged, we want to do that. We're trying to find pathways to do that.

Mr BAYLEY - Surely, this is an issue in terms of those year 12 retention rates and more.

CHAIR - Before we go to Ms Johnston, just noting there's probably about just under 6 minutes left. There was an endeavour to table something in response to the Greens' question. I am checking if that was available or if you were taking that on notice.

Mr SALTER - I can answer the status question.

Mr BAYLEY - This is in relation to the levies?

Mr SALTER - Yes. With STAS (Student Assistance Scheme) funding, there's a component provided to schools that is in the general needs component of the fairer funding model and that allocation is driven by the needs factor of the school, so that would differ with SES of the school. For increases in STAS students that occurred post the eligibility change in status, which started in 2021, schools are provided with funding that is equivalent to the average levy amount that the school charges. The school receives revenue for the increases in students as a result of that criteria change to ensure that their school wasn't disadvantaged.

Mr BAYLEY - The average level of school or the average level of all schools, guess what we're trying to understand is the disparity between -

Mr SALTER - The individual school.

Mr BAYLEY - We do still have a situation where some schools who charge less in levies and have less students that are able to pay it are significantly disadvantaged.

PUBLIC

Mr SALTER - There is an equity component to the extent that if those schools are comparatively lower SES (socio-economic status), then they would get greater needs-based funding than the other school.

Ms PALMER - Chair, we have an answer to a question that was posed for the Independent member for Braddon from the acting secretary. It's very short.

Ms BURGESS - That question was about how do businesses know. It is a school responsibility and they must comply with the procedures for planning off campus guidelines which currently aren't public facing. The information about going to the school principal, talking it through with the school principal so that they can then communicate the parameters around whether that activity does or doesn't meet the criteria.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, coming back to an answer you gave earlier about how you are trying to alleviate workload pressures for teachers, one of the strategies you outlined was looking at work in a curriculum space and perhaps making some changes there. My understanding is that for year 11 and 12 curriculum development, that has been impacted by staff shortages and that's a possible area for change. Has the department outsourced development of the year 11 and 12 curriculum and if so, what are the cost of outsourcing and when will this work be completed?

Ms BURGESS - It's my understanding that we haven't outsourced any work around curriculum development. We have prioritised based on student need and gaps in the curriculum. So, we have prioritised what's required to make sure that there's engaging curriculum for all cohorts of students in years 11 and 12, and where there are gaps, we've prioritised that work. But we aren't yet outsourced. We've certainly been in the past, in discussions with South Australia around their curriculum, but we haven't purchased any at this point in time.

Ms JOHNSTON - Are there issues with the year 11-12 curriculum that haven't been developed or are on hold at the moment, whilst we're trying to manage workloads?

Mr BURGESS - Again, we've prioritised where the work needs to happen, and that work is being undertaken.

Mr BAYLEY - There's a follow on question from that one that I wanted to put: whether you'd commit to undertaking a review of the model for school levies, including consideration of abolishing levies full stop in exchange for direct departmental funding?

Ms PALMER - I will seek some advice. I'll ask Mr Salter, our Deputy Secretary of Business and Operations and Support, to answer that question.

Mr SALTER - I think there are two components to the question. Asking whether the minister or government will undertake a review, there was a previous review of the levies policy, and certainly happy by the minister to provide details on that review.

In terms of the second component of the question of abolishing -

Mr BAYLEY - I guess it's whether you'd look at that again, given the inequity, and consider abolishing the inequity and levies full stop in exchange for direct departmental funding.

Mr SALTER - The second component of the question around abolishing levies altogether - and that's a government policy decision - but in terms of the example that you've highlighted today, I'm certainly happy to look at that example in terms of how the policy is structured at the moment.

Mr WILLIE - I might do an electorate one to finish with, but it's good to see Rosetta Primary and Princes St Primary receive funding in this Budget. I know Rosetta has, for a long time now, had unsuitable learning environments. It had heating issues, demountables - and I know I've asked you this in another forum - but there is bipartisanship support for the Education department's system now, and they've done a lot of work modernising it. Is there an opportunity, as minister, to take some of this school infrastructure out of the political cycle and fund it on an as-needs basis?

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, it has been funded on an as-needs basis.

Mr WILLIE - It's there until an election cycle.

Ms PALMER - There's an extensive audit that the department does - and I'll get the Deputy Secretary to talk about that - that actually looks at a range of issues that establishes that priority list that is publicly available. We were very cautious in ensuring that through the election, we utilised the work that's been done by the department in that audit to establish that, and I'm very comfortable with that.

Mr WILLIE - I'm well aware of the system, minister. What I'm saying is that you have an opportunity to potentially take it out of the political cycle. It seems that only these schools are funded when there's an election. They sit on this priority list for years, in some cases. Rosetta is a perfect example of that. I've spoken to people at the school community. They were very frustrated that it had to take an election to get funded.

Ms PALMER - We have quite an incredible -

CHAIR - Sorry - in the interest of fairness, I've tried to drag that last minute out as long as possible, but the time for scrutiny on this output has expired.

Mr BAYLEY - Chair, there is one answer outstanding about Aboriginal education workers. I'm happy to take it on notice?

Ms PALMER - Sorry, Chair, we'll need to take that on notice. I apologise, we haven't quite got that information in the time.

CHAIR - The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the minister for Disability Services. If you can do the changeover as quick as possible, if people need a very short break but yes, we'll get it going as soon as possible.

The committee suspended from 5.37 p.m. to 5.45 p.m.

DIVISION 9
Output Group 7

7.1 Disability Services

CHAIR - The time being 5.45 p.m., the scrutiny of the Disability Services portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, including names and positions for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms PALMER - Certainly. Going left to right, introducing Ingrid Ganley, Acting Executive Director, Disability and Reform, Mellissa Gray, Deputy Secretary, Policy and Reform, and Kathrine Morgan-Wicks, Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

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 an opening statement?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I would. Thank you, Chair. It's great to have the opportunity to make some opening remarks. I want to begin by acknowledging Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and original owners of the land that we are on and to pay my respects to Elders past and present. The number of Aboriginal people in Tasmania that report a profound or severe core disability is at 11.8 per cent, and that is higher than the national average at 7.7 per cent as well as the general Tasmanian population at 8 per cent.

As Minister for Disability Services, I am determined to achieve outcomes for all Tasmanians living with disability. It's certainly a busy and a very important time for people living with disability, and for the disability portfolio on the national stage and for our state, with the Disability Royal Commission, the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as well as the usual policy regulation and funding of peak and advocacy services for Tasmanians with disability.

The development of the new Disability Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill will play a critical role in supporting Tasmanians living with disability. It has been 13 years since the last disability bill was passed by parliament and I'm proud that this bill was developed after a long period of consultation and engagement with the Tasmanian disability community. It reflects their wants and their needs, ensuring their rights and protections are upheld while also delivering on greater inclusion.

The bill will introduce some significant reforms for improving inclusion of Tasmanians with disabilities. These include a disability inclusion planning and reporting framework which mandates that government agencies consult with people with disability, a disability commissioner who will be a person with disability, and a disability inclusion advisory council, where the majority of members will be people with disability.

Additionally, the Tasmanian government published our response to the Disability Royal Commission on 31 July this year. We accepted, or accepted in principle, 103 recommendations and wanted to further consider 24 recommendations. We've committed to regular monitoring and reporting of our progress against all recommendations.

Tasmania also continues to work closely with the Commonwealth and states and territories to reform the NDIS after the review was handed down last year. That work continues,

with some targeted consultation on foundational supports underway currently and a range of amendments to the *NDIS Act* passed through the Commonwealth parliament in early September this year, to take effect from early October.

Our disability bill also provides response to some of the recommendations of both the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review, and places Tasmania in a strong position to continue to respond to these important reforms. I welcome questions from the committee.

Ms HADDAD - I wanted to ask you about the funding in table 9.1, which is \$2.8 million for disability reform over the next four years. Could you provide the committee with information about how that funding will be used? Is it new funding or is it funding to continue existing activities like funding particular organisations?

Ms PALMER - I'll pass to Ms Gray to give you the detail of that, but just at a high level, there's so much change happening in this space. There is the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review, and there's a lot of work that we have to do as a state government in mapping out our responses, and in the work that keeps unfolding as we see certain outcomes take form from the NDIS review. We needed to have in the Budget the ability to do that body of work as we move through these stages. For more detail around that funding from an operational level, I'll pass to the Secretary.

Ms GRAY - The funding for disability reform, as the minister said, is to have us well placed for those major reforms: to support them through capacity and capability building for providers and people with disability, promote change management processes, and facilitate market and advocacy.

Ms HADDAD - Does that mean that that funding will be used to employ people within your department to conduct that work, or will it be allocated to organisations that are also adapting to the changes from those various reforms?

Ms GRAY - That funding is available for external funding, not internal funding that's met within disability, and more broadly within the policy and reform team in Premier and Cabinet working closely with the disability policy team as well.

Ms HADDAD - Will it most likely go to existing organisations or will there be some kind of funding process to allocate that funding?

Ms GRAY - We don't know what we don't know yet. We're working collaboratively with the Commonwealth and through the Disability Ministers Reform Council on all of these reforms as they enter our jurisdiction and our state, and it's just to have there so that we have some funding available should we need it as the reforms progress.

Ms ROSOL - The National Disability Advocacy Framework of 2023-25 includes an agreement by the federal and state governments to commit to sharing the responsibility for disability advocacy in their jurisdictions. In Tasmania, your government funds three organisations to provide individual advocacy for people with disabilities. That's Advocacy Tasmania, Speak Out and the Association for Children with Disability.

The Association for Children with Disability provides some systemic advocacy, but the organisation that focuses solely on providing systemic advocacy for Tasmanians who live with

disabilities is Disability Voices Tasmania. However, they received no funding from the Tasmanian government. Why have you chosen not to fund Disability Voices Tasmania, leaving them with zero funding now that their federal funding agreement has expired?

Ms PALMER - The first advocacy groups that you listed there are for individual advocacy, not for that broader advocacy. Through our NDIS commitment that we make each year, part of that amount of money, which is in excess of \$280 million, goes into the bucket of money known as the ILC bucket, which is information linkages capacity. That money is then distributed by the federal government through a competitive process.

Organisations have to apply for that through the federal government and then the federal government makes those decisions. I think it's about \$35 million since 2019 that Tasmanian organisations have received the benefit of through that fund. It's been good for Tasmania because it's double what the contribution was to those organisations before it went through the federal government. This is the process that was set up by the federal government through the NDIS, that this is how these organisations were to be funded.

It was very disappointing when Disability Voices was not successful in their application. I absolutely accept, and have lobbied quite hard as the Disability Services minister for Tasmania, that the ILC funding model really is not fit for purpose. It doesn't address core funding for disability groups. It is program based, so you almost have to look at what's the criteria for this round and adapt what you do to a program.

As disability ministers across the country, we have been quite strong in saying to the federal government, who have been very receptive in this space, that it doesn't work. We shouldn't have disability organisations having to pivot what their core business is to try to fit a funding model. However, that is the model that we have at the moment. Quite possibly we will see that change as we are moving into a space now for general foundational supports that the federal government is going out to consult on now. We believe that could possibly replace the ILC.

I was very disappointed Disability Voices were not successful, but I'm not involved in it. It is with the federal government. Where I see my role as Disability Services minister is in that advocacy space, and I drew this to the attention of the federal Minister for the NDIS, minister Shorten. I laid out for him the importance of this organisation. I asked if there was an opportunity to revisit that or if there were other funding options that might be available to Disability Voices Tasmania.

My office has been advocating strongly for a number of months now. We really hope that we are very close to being able to see success for Disability Voices Tasmania and that they will be funded.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I note that in some of the other states around Australia advocacy peak bodies are funded by the state governments as well. There is capacity for state funding there. In terms of the development of the disability rights bill - I don't know if I say it with 'rights' in it now, because that's the amended title, but the Disability Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill - I noticed that Disability Voices Tasmania has worked collaboratively with you and with DPAC staff to identify amendments that have strengthened the bill. They say it makes it the most rights-focused legislation in Australia.

Within the bill there's a provision for the minister to fund disability advocacy organisations or disability peak bodies or representative organisations. Given that your department relied on Disability Voices Tasmania to improve parts of the legislation, will you commit to funding Disability Voices Tasmania as a state government once the disability rights and inclusion and safeguarding legislation is enacted?

Ms PALMER - I am really grateful for the contribution of Disability Voices Tasmania. It is important to remember that they were one of a number of individuals and organisations that have worked collaboratively with us for two years now in ensuring that the voice of people with disability was in that legislation. We are very grateful to all of our disability advocates - individuals, the Ministerial Disability Advisory Council and the Premier's Disability Advisory Council - who contributed to the bill and to amendments that have been made, not necessarily officially on the floor, but this has been a living, breathing piece of work for a number of years.

We started this piece of work before the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission, so we had to incorporate changes there as well. Then there was the introduction of the NDIS review. At the same time as these enormous things are happening in the disability space nationally, we had to keep looking at, is our bill right? Are we going in the right direction? Do we need to add into that? Disability Voices Tasmania joined with many other individuals and organisations to play a part in that body of work.

As I've said, our taxpayer dollars are already contributing to the federal government bucket of money through the ILC. While we're disappointed that Disability Voices was unsuccessful in that process, we have advocated very strongly on their behalf to look at what other options are available. The federal minister, Bill Shorten, has been fantastic in working with us in this process and I have every reason to believe there will be a great outcome for Disability Voices in the very near future.

Ms JOHNSTON - My question probably straddles the previous portfolio, Education, as well as Disability Services. It has been reported to me that parents who choose, or have no other option but, to home-school because of their child's disability receive no funding support for that home learning. This is despite the fact that if these learners were to attend school, there'd be significant resources required of the Department of Education to support their learning. In effect, it means parents are saving the Department of Education a significant amount of money by not providing this support. It's impacting on these young learners' ability to learn in the home environment. It's largely because of their disability that they can't attend school, or are unsuitable to attend school. What can be done to address this disparity? Parents shouldn't have to be dipping into their NDIS allocation to support learning.

Ms PALMER - I really appreciate the question, but I'm not here as the Education minister, and the people I have at the table with me are not from that department. I would be happy to engage with you on this outside this forum, but I'm here as the Disability minister and sticking in that output group.

Ms JOHNSTON - I appreciate that. Perhaps you can speak more generally to the pressures facing parents of children with disabilities in the learning environment. What is the department doing in terms of disability support to assist those parents more generally so that young people can engage in education?

Ms PALMER - I need to restate that I'm not here as the Education minister, so I don't have the information or the people at the table to address part of the question you're asking. All I can do is make a general statement.

I don't have a child with a profound disability. I grew up in a family with a father with a profound disability, but I can't begin to imagine the challenges of a family, of a parent, of a mum having to assist their child to navigate their way through all aspects of life. I have a huge amount of empathy, but would never attempt to think I had an understanding of what that looks like on a day-to-day basis.

What I can tell you is that it's with these circumstances in mind, it is with these families, parents and children in mind, that we have the Disability Inclusion Bill before the House. Part of the work we've done with that new piece of legislation is to put in place that across every government entity, our GBEs, all of our departments, that when they are looking at policy, when they're looking at new programs, they must have a plan in place for how this impacts and integrates, and has inclusion for people with disabilities. I think that's the greatest thing and I'm incredibly proud of our team that we have this in that legislation.

With the example you've put forward, that would mean, in the Education space, that planning and thinking in that policy area must be inclusive, and those entities will be held to account. That's a really exciting part of the bill and I think it is going to see genuine change across government when it comes to the inclusion of people with disability and the thoughtfulness we are asking of our departments and GBEs.

Mr FAIRS - I understand work will soon be underway to establish the Office of the Disability Commissioner. I'm aware we've had an interim disability commissioner since early last year. Can you please update the committee on what that person has been doing and what this role has achieved to date?

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. I'm pleased that our budget measures this year outline \$8.5 million in funding for implementation of the measures outlined in the Disability Rights Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill. I don't know which title I should be using because it hasn't gone through the House, but you know what I'm talking about, our amazing inclusion bill. Part of that is, of course, the establishment of the Office of the Disability Commissioner.

You are correct in stating that we have had an interim disability commissioner since early 2023. We have been fortunate to have the amazing Mary Mallett. She is a person with a deep passion for advocating for people with disability. Ms Mallett's passion is matched by her years of experience working with people with disability, including extensive professional experience both nationally and in the Tasmanian disability sector, and years of dedicated individual and systemic advocacy for people with disability.

It's been crucial to have Mary in this role for the past 20 months at a time when significant reform is underway in the disability sector. During this time Mary has been focused on engaging with stakeholders, including the disability community, members of parliament, heads of agencies, and commissioners in Tasmania and on the mainland. A key engagement, in particular, has been meeting with people with disability, advocates, providers and other safeguarding entities so that she was able to build her understanding of inclusion of people with disability, service provision and safeguarding issues.

She has played a key role in consulting on the powers and functions of what our disability commissioner needs to have, what we need in place to ensure our disability commissioner is doing the role the legislation is enabling and asking that role to do. As part of that she hosted listening sessions for Tasmanians with disability. She was able to talk them about what they want to see in their disability commissioner, because this is their commissioner. They were very up-front and forthright in their responses, which is fantastic.

She has also been able to work with our disability community as we saw the recommendations roll out from the Disability Royal Commission, when the final report came out, which was an emotional and difficult time for people with disabilities. I recognise the courage of the many people with disability in Tasmania who gave evidence or supported someone giving evidence, and even to those who may not have found their voice through that process but have lived experience. Our disability commissioner is for them.

Ms Mallett been really pivotal in the costings. We haven't done this before. We're looking at other jurisdictions, we're looking at other commissioners. What do their offices look like? She's done a huge body of work over the past 20 months to make sure the office is set up adequately, that it's fit for purpose, and that the role of our disability commissioner is what people with disability want and need. It has given us a magnificent framework from which we'll be able to launch ourselves the minute your House gets it done.

Ms HADDAD - Minister, you touched on ILC funding before, and I agree it was not ideal in terms of funding uncertainty for organisations. I also made representations to the federal government about those three organisations that lost their funding, and also about the disconnect of 12 months between ILC funding expiring and foundational supports coming into play. I think it was unfortunate and I'm happy to put that on the public record today, acknowledging that it's not your government that made that decision.

I understand, with foundational supports replacing ILC funding from next financial year, that states and territories need to develop foundational support strategies co-designed with people with disability. Other states have begun establishing task forces for this co-design work, and attaching funding to it. Has that work begun in Tasmania, and if not, when will it, and is there funding allocated to that work?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for that question. It's certainly been quite the journey moving through the review of the NDIS and the recommendations that have come out. As a government, as a minister, there's a level of anxiety around what this will look like. We are certainly engaged. We are right in the trenches with this, as disability ministers representing our states and territories, doing everything that we can to work with the federal government.

We know the NDIS must be sustainable. We must be really protective of that scheme, but we are seeing where it has become a little bit of a runaway train. We've seen that there are terrible issues with how it's being abused, unfortunately, by some members of our country's community.

As I understand, consultation around what general foundational supports look like is happening now. I'm going to pass to the Deputy Secretary to talk through the work that's being done at an official level.

Ms GRAY - As the minister has said, the development of foundational supports is being jointly progressed by all jurisdictions. Importantly, this work is being oversighted by the First Secretaries Group with the Council of Federal Financial Relations, as well, oversight.

The senior officials from the First Deputies Group and Disability are working together to establish a shared understanding of the vision for reform to the disability support - what is being called the 'ecosystem' for people inside the NDIS, also outside the NDIS. They are also developing an agreed definition of 'foundational supports', and what they need to occur in our jurisdiction as that work rolls out. There is a current focus on finalising our foundational support strategy for consideration at that national level.

There was also a question about funding to roll out. That is, in particular, a good example of what the use of the disability reform funding line item may end up being used for. It is to facilitate engagement or capability and capacity-building as that policy work is rolled out, so that people can engage with that work.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. I would note, I understand the ACT is allocated \$90 million over five years for their version of this work. So, there might need to be another budget request at some point to continue that work.

Ms PALMER - It might be a good opportunity to get that national perspective from Kath.

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - The work that's occurring by First Secretaries and Deputies at a national level on foundational supports is tied also to the negotiation of the National Health Reform Agreement, because of national cabinet's decision that those two items were tied.

There is still a significant policy piece to describe foundational supports. I accompanied the Premier to speak to minister Shorten about the NDIS Amendment Bill, but also to advocate on behalf of the Council of Australian Federation for an intergovernmental agreement to be prepared on disability. We're quite concerned that we've obviously got years of experience now around the NDIS, but we're now proposing major reforms to the NDIS. We're proposing foundational supports shifting to the states. We believe - and certainly the Premier and well-supported by the minister for Disability - that there should be a national agreement on disability that can describe the new 'ecosystem' in which we will be operating.

Now, 'foundational supports' has been currently posed to cover anything from zero up to 64. Certainly, in conversations with states and territories, we've been trying to focus from birth up to, I think, 8-12 years. We're looking at how far the funding being posed by the Commonwealth will stretch, and to what level of foundational support in the community that the NDIS is now not going to cover.

We do want to reassure community that we will be working very closely with them. We don't want there to be concern in relation to that coverage. We also need to push, on a national policy basis, to say what is being shifted to the states and what type of impact that will have on our health system, education system, and through the disability work we already have underway.

Ms HADDAD - My second question goes to the Disability Royal Commission. I'll ask it quickly. You did touch on it in your opening statement, and I acknowledge you've released the

government's response and accepted many of the recommendations. It's another funding question. With the recommendations that you have committed to, have they been fully funded? For those recommendations that were either accepted in principle or subject to further consideration, what can the community expect, in terms of progress, against those recommendations? Is there work and support in investigating those recommendations for further consideration down the track?

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

Ms GRAY - The Disability Royal Commission has proceeded over a number of years and there's an enormous amount of work. The impact of responding to the commission and its recommendations will also span over many years. That is the first point we need to make.

We will be looking at the implementation of those recommendations and considering them in terms of future budget submissions. It is important to emphasise that the Disability Inclusion Bill that members will be considering goes a long way to responding to many of the Royal Commission recommendations. We are working on scoping across, on a whole of government basis, what the impacts of those recommendations mean for our jurisdiction, and we'll continue that work with agencies.

Ms ROSOL - I have a question about the DPAC website relating to disability services. It has quite a few links on it to various documents and forms relating to disability services and people with disabilities. Quite a lot of it is very dated. There's a role of advocacy services in the Tasmanian disability sector document that's from November 2011. There were forms from 2012 that include old department titles dating back to 2011. There were email addresses on the website that include departments that no longer exist, and missing attachments. There were more than 20 dead links, including one to a medication management framework.

I was concerned about that, because that's a place where members of the public would go for information, and so much of it was dated. Why is the information on there so dated now? There are so many dead links. Is it a resourcing issue? Is it a neglect issue? Is it reflective of a broader issue with a lack of resourcing and not being able to keep on top of things like that? When could we expect that the website might be fixed up so it provides accurate, up-to-date information and contact details?

Ms PALMER - It's a good question. I'll pass to our Deputy Secretary.

Ms GRAY - Thank you. I'm advised that as a result of the machinery of government changes that occurred with the move into DPAC, there were a number of items of dated information and, as you rightly pointed out, anomalies identified with the website. There is an active project underway. In terms of timeline on updating that, there is no specific timeline. However, we will work, as a priority, to address that for people living with disability in Tasmania.

Ms ROSOL - Great. Thank you. I have a question relating to some information that was in the Budget. There was performance information for Disability Services in Table 9.9 of budget paper 2. It's on page 283. There's a projection in there that in 2024-25 restrictive practices will be authorised at a rate of 1 per cent of Tasmanian NDIS participants, which equates to 154.6 authorised restrictive practices for the year. When I went back and did the maths on the previous numbers of authorised restrictive practices over previous years, that

figure that's projected is almost a doubling of the 2023-24 actual number of authorised restrictive practices. Given restrictive practices by definition restrict the rights of people with disability, and we're working to move away from them, and that's what the whole Disability Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill is about, continuing with managing that and making sure that we're doing the best we can as a state to ensure people's freedoms, I'm curious as to why there's that projected almost doubling in the number. Can you explain why you've planned for more authorisations of restrictive practices this year?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I looked at that and asked the exact same question of my team, who sorted it out for me in about 60 seconds. I will pass to Ingrid Ganley to explain that to you.

Ms GANLEY - The target that we've set is based on our assessment of the active NDIS participants and knowing what occurs in the sector, what we would anticipate we need to be authorising as restrictive practices. Part of the work we're doing is ensuring that organisations are actually complying with our legislation. We think there's room for improvement in the organisations complying with restricted practices. Through our new inclusion bill, we will be broadening the scope of restrictive practices that our organisations need to apply for. It's accounting for both bringing up compliance and broadening our restrictive practice definition.

Ms ROSOL - You're saying, potentially, that number of authorised restrictive practices, or unauthorised restrictive practices, are happening and so it will be a matter of bringing them into an authorised space. Thank you.

Ms GANLEY - Yes.

Ms JOHNSTON - I think we can all agree that ensuring that people living with a disability should be able to participate fully in democratic processes. Over the last six months or so, concerns have been raised with me that people living with disability have had difficulty engaging in our election, for instance, and accessing polling booths. Even last week we highlighted in the parliament that perhaps parliament itself isn't terribly inclusive when it comes to disability. We recognised Auslan in our parliament, I think it was Thursday last week, which was fantastic. What are you doing, minister, to try to advocate in that space with your colleagues to ensure that the people with living disability can fully participate in our democratic processes?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I absolutely agree with that. All Tasmanians have a right to be able to cast a secret, independent and verifiable vote and the opportunity to participate in our democratic process fully. Even as recently as the state elections and the Legislative Council elections, this hasn't been an easy process for Tasmanians living with disability. I found it extraordinary that a person with disability could actually get on a plane and fly to Melbourne and vote privately and independently, but they couldn't do it here in Tasmania.

I have been working on this with the Attorney-General and have held a meeting with Disability Voices Tasmania, which is a member of the Tasmanian Electoral Commission working group. We have met with the Attorney-General specifically on this. The Attorney-General is working with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission to identify potential reforms that will enhance accessibility, including phone voting. I also understand that DVT, along with others, has made a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. I'm delighted that the Attorney-General has seen that there are issues here and we need to look

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at what changes need to be made to ensure that this is truly an inclusive process for all Tasmanians.

Ms JOHNSTON - In terms of parliament itself, have you made representations to the President or the Speaker regarding parliament being accessible? Closed captions, access to the building, all those kinds of issues?

Ms PALMER - I've had a number of conversations and have been advocating, certainly with the President and the Clerk of the Legislative Council on some of the issues that I can see. It will be very soon when we will have a person with some sort of mobility issue in our parliament and we can't be in a position where, as a parliament, we are reacting to someone who's just been elected. We need to be looking at that now and I think there's a lot of goodwill. I can't speak for Parliamentary Services - already I can feel the Clerk descending on me - but as the Disability Services minister, yes, I've certainly been involved in discussions with the President.

The member for Launceston, the honourable Rosemary Armitage, smashed her heel, would it be early last year? It might even have been the year before. Just for her, it was a really difficult situation getting her in and out of the Chamber, and her ability to even sit in the seat for the member for Launceston. There were parts of when we were sitting where she had to sit away from her seat.

I'm really passionate. I want our parliament to set, and we should be setting, the standard here. I'm certainly involved in those conversations, and there's been tremendous goodwill for looking at what needs to be done.

In saying that, we have an old building. This is not easy. I've put forward some suggestions without any knowledge or experience in the construction space of what I thought were some really easy fixes. Yes, some of them have drawn laughter, but it is an old building.

Ms HADDAD - I'm sure they were well intentioned.

Ms PALMER - Yes, they were very well intentioned and we have to be having these conversations. Just because it's hard, doesn't mean you don't go there. I acknowledge that there are some really tricky aspects to this, but we have to find a way forward. We have to find a way through that.

Ms JOHNSTON - Just as a final question, will the parliament and the TEC be required to have an inclusion plan under the bill proposed? Are they covered by the bill? I apologise, I probably should have asked that question in the briefing.

CHAIR - Sorry, I know this has been a lot more collegial session, but just for the benefit of Hansard, can we not talk over the top of each other? Sorry to burst everybody's bubble.

Ms PALMER - I'm just seeking some advice.

They wouldn't be included with what we have put forward as government entities in the bill. But the important thing is, with the bill, we have committed to begin a review within 18 months. It needs to start not before the 18-month part and be finished before three years.

Wherever we can see that we can improve this, we'll certainly be looking to do that, but it obviously needs to be done in consultation right across that broad spectrum of our community.

Ms JOHNSTON - Hopefully, the parliament can lead by example.

Ms ROSOL - Closed captions would be an amazing addition to our broadcast.

Mr FAIRS - Minister, the National Autism Strategy is expected to be finalised by the end of the year. Did the Tasmanian government make a submission as part of this strategy? What do you expect implementation of such a strategy will mean for autistic Tasmanians?

Ms PALMER - Such a large number of our NDIS participants fall into having autism and so it was really important that our state had a strong presence in the development of that strategy. Yes, we did make a government submission to that strategy.

Correct me if I'm wrong, Secretary, but I believe it went in under the Premier, but as disability minister I was engaged through that process as well. We made a submission to the draft National Autism Strategy - that was in June of this year - really incredibly important to me, to the Premier, and to our government that the needs of our Tasmanian autistic community were outlined in that submission. While our submission acknowledges that the strategy sits with the Commonwealth, we acknowledge that it will have implications for the Tasmanian Government. We've advocated for a well-coordinated approach to achieve the goal of improving life outcomes for all autistic people, and it's a goal that our government is committed to.

For a small state, we've got some pretty significant numbers, as I alluded to. It's estimated that between 2 to 3 per cent of Tasmanians are autistic, and that translates to somewhere between 11,400 and 17,100 people. Additionally, as of 30 June this year, 5312 autistic Tasmanians access the NDIS and autism is the most prevalent primary disability identified of Tasmanians receiving the NDIS, accounting for 36 per cent of Tasmanian NDIS participants.

All these statistics demonstrate the need for our involvement in the strategy that has a number of key reform areas, including access to services, healthcare, education and employment, and it covers commitments on areas such as social and economic inclusion, diagnosis supports and services, and health and mental health.

It is particularly pleasing to hear that autistic Australians will continue to be involved in the strategy - a clear example of 'nothing for us without us' - and I do want to acknowledge the depth of consultation that was undertaken with autistic people and their families and their carers and their support networks, advocates - also researchers were involved in this as well.

I certainly hope this strategy will provide a true turning point for how our autistic community can be supported in all facets of life, and our government looks forward to working with the Commonwealth after the release of the final strategy to understand how our government will be engaged and supported in the implementation of the strategy. Thank you for the question.

Ms HADDAD - Minister, I also wanted to ask a few things about the Disability Rights Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill and also acknowledge your work on that bill that has been significant, and your department's work. You've already described the complexities of doing

the work on that bill while there were many competing national reforms going on at the same time, and I do want to acknowledge your willingness to work with disability organisations and people with disability to adopt a number of amendments to the bill in the Upper House, and I look forward to the debate continuing downstairs. It was on the list for us last sitting day. It's very sad that we didn't quite get to it. I'm sure you are more frustrated than me.

Ms PALMER - I'm still traumatised. We sat waiting, didn't we?

Ms HADDAD - We were all there ready, but unfortunately it didn't happen.

I do note, though, that the bill establishes a range of different functions, including the advisory council - the Disability Inclusion Advisory Council (DIAC) - and, in schedule 1, 4., it provides that members are entitled to be paid such remuneration and allowance as the minister determines. Obviously, on its reading, I think everyone around this table would probably read that to mean that there is an intention for remuneration, but it could also be read in the opposite way, meaning a future minister could determine that remuneration is zero, because the schedule and clause allow for a minister to determine remuneration. I just wondered, as the minister responsible for the bill and the act once it's completed, can you indicate your intention in terms of payment of members of that council?

Ms PALMER - Are you looking for a dollar figure?

Ms HADDAD - I can go on to my next question which is about the board fee policy - wondering if it will fit somewhere in that board fee policy, because I know that policy already exists and applies to some other consultative boards and committees, but there are different categories, and within those categories there's different steps. If there's an easy answer to say, 'yes, it will be category E' and whatever it might be, then I'd welcome an answer like that. But, if it's going to be remunerated in some other way, also it would be good to have that information.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I'll pass that to the secretary. It was really important that - this this advisory council is going to have to be a skills-based council. What we are asking of this council is to have that level of accountability and to be able to work with the Disability Commissioner and really advocate, and they'll also be involved in looking at the inclusion plans from some of the departments and the government entities that come forward.

My expectation was - and I say this with the deepest of respect - but quite often in the disability space we see volunteer boards, and it was really important that this is a very important board. It will have terms of reference, it will have very clear jobs that it has to do, and so it needs to be remunerated in the same way as if we were asking them to advise on whatever it might be.

Ms HADDAD - It's about recognising their expertise and their skill and compensating that accordingly because we're asking them to share that lived experience and their skills in developing government policies.

Ms PALMER - I'll just see if the Deputy Secretary has anything to add to that.

Ms GRAY - Yes, the council will be constituted in accordance with the Tasmanian Government board and fee policy. We haven't sized the council at this stage because we're

waiting for the legislation, but it will be a fast process. We're already working on the terms of reference for the council, but we have to wait.

Ms HADDAD - I know there's not many minutes left, but do you have to wait for the legislation to be complete before you can determine whether it's a category D, E, F or G board? Well, it won't be G, because that's not remunerated, but I've had some advocates express to me that it should at least be category E, which is policy review and specialist, and within category E there are four levels of remuneration. Does the legislation have to pass before you can make those decisions around its constitution?

Ms GRAY - Schedule 1 of the bill pretty much sets out skeleton terms of reference. We could do some work. We have not at this stage, though. We could do some work now looking at that and assessing it, but there is a formal process that we have to go through to have the council sized and the appropriate level will be determined through that process.

Ms ROSOL - We were just talking about autism earlier, and I do have a question about Autism Tasmania, because I think we're all aware that their funding ceased on 30 June and it's left an enormous hole for many Tasmanians who relied on their services and support, and I understand that your reasoning around this is that the Tasmania already provides funding to the federal government and then the federal government return that to Tasmania through the NDIS or through ILC grants.

I guess I'm just curious why such an important service; you chose not to fund it, because I'm sure that there's capacity. We could fund things if we chose to. I'm wondering if you could just explain why you chose not to step in and provide funding there and maybe give an update on what services or other organisations have filled that gap or are filling that gap for people with autism, please.

Ms PALMER - I'm probably a little surprised at your question because I did ring you to step out specifically the reasons why we were in the position that we were in, but I will do my best to answer this question.

Ms ROSOL - Or if you could provide an update on where things are.

Ms PALMER - I will do my best to answer the question respectfully in a public forum. I certainly acknowledge the role that Autism Tasmania has played in supporting many Tasmanians on the autism spectrum and their loved ones.

It's always a difficult decision and I know it was a difficult decision for Autism Tasmania to enter into administration, and I expressed then that my thoughts were with the staff and the members of the organisation and those who relied on it, who were affected by that decision and the subsequent liquidation of the organisation.

This was not a situation where it was appropriate to step in with any sort of a rescue funding package. The reasons why Autism Tasmania entered into administration are reasons that are best, I think, expressed by Autism Tasmania for the decision it made. When I became aware of the situation, I approached the federal government to look at what appropriate supports could be given to Autism Tasmania. They looked at the situation and also agreed that there were some governance issues and there was not a pathway for funding from the federal government either.

We totally acknowledge that in the advocacy space, there is now a hole for autism across the state. It certainly is not impacting on services for autism, which sit in other portfolios; this is in the advocacy space. I had an online meeting with the Regional Autistic Engagement Network and they have also had discussions with my adviser in my office, to look at what can be done there.

It was great to see that the Premier's Discretionary Fund was able to provide some quick funds to them, which has been able to assist them in setting up their office - the things that you need, like a phone, a laptop; I think they got a portable screen projector.

We also understand that they have applied for the Commonwealth's Peer Support and Capacity Building grant round. My understanding is the successful applicants are going to be notified towards the end of this month or the beginning of the next month.

Ms DOW - I have a question in relation to accommodation, particularly for young people with disability in the north west. I have a lot of constituents who make representation to me about the lack of facilities or the long waitlist to get into accommodation. I know some of those are managed through their NDIS support packages, so I do work with our federal colleagues as well around that, but from a state point of view, I wondered if you're working with the Minister for Housing around trying to increase access for those living with disability across our community, particularly in regional areas where there seems to be a significant shortage of housing options.

Ms PALMER - One of the main aspects of being the Disability Services minister is to be that constant voice across all portfolios. Again, I point to what we're doing with our inclusion bill, which will formalise our expectations about the consideration of people with disabilities around inclusion and supports right across policy in government areas.

But yes, I work with the Housing minister on this, but also with my national colleagues and disability ministers around Australia as well, and advocating in that federal space as well.

Recently, we were able to organise a briefing for my ministerial disability group and we had Homes Tasmania come, so that there was an opportunity for those around the table and online to ask questions of Homes Tasmania. How does this work? What are you doing? It was also an opportunity for Homes Tasmania to hear directly the voice of disability. What do they need? What does this look like? What are some of their struggles? That was a really important thing for those from Homes Tasmania to attend.

Ms DOW - Are you confident that Homes Tasmania, in the work that they're doing, are actually looking at the availability of disability housing across the state?

Ms PALMER - I don't feel that I can step into the territory of another minister's portfolio. What I can tell you is that I'm advocating at every step of the way to ensure the best outcomes that I can for people with disabilities.

CHAIR - And with that, the time being 6.45 p.m., the time for scrutiny has expired. I thank everybody for their cooperation today. It's been a long day.

The committee adjourned at 6.45 p.m.

