

PUBLIC

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET AT HENTY HOUSE, LAUNCESTON ON FRIDAY, 18 MARCH 2016.

NORTHERN SUPPORT SCHOOL RAVENSWOOD CAMPUS, LAUNCESTON

Mr ROBERT WILLIAMS, DEPUTY SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT SERVICES; **Mr TONY LUTTRELL**, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER; **Mr CRAIG WOODFALL**, OPERATIONS MANAGER, LEARNING SERVICES NORTH (FORMER PRINCIPAL NORTHERN SUPPORT SCHOOL); **Ms CHRISTINE BROWN**, PRINCIPAL, NORTHERN SUPPORT SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION; AND **Ms SIMONE JAMES**, ARCHITECT, ARTAS ARCHITECTS, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Ms Rylah) - Thank you for appearing before the committee. The committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. A committee hearing is a proceeding of the Parliament and this means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom, without the fear of being sued or questioned, in any court or place out of parliament. It applies to ensure Parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries. It is important to be aware this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceeding. This is a public hearing and members of the public and journalists may be present and this means your evidence may be reported.

Mr WILLIAMS - This project has a budget of \$6.6 million, as stated in the brief. As you can tell from the visit today, there is a dire need for an upgrade to this school. This is because the school was built for another purpose and then occupied by the Northern Support School. The Northern Support School is over two sites and the department is very keen to see it on one site. The Ravenswood site is an extremely good site with a lot of land. Even after this reinvigoration, there is room for further development if that ever comes about in the future. It is a great site as it is flat and suits the characteristics of the children who go there. There was an extensive period of consultation. We went backwards and forwards on a number of issues, especially the pool and the size of it. This project has had more consultation than most others. That is understandable because of the complexities of not only moving two sites to one but bringing in children with higher needs from the Newstead site into the Ravenswood site. We thought it better to make sure the consultation was done properly and not rush this. We do not have a school association representative here today, but through that process the school association has indicated very strongly that it is very supportive of the model we have come up with. The school is supportive of the model we have come up with. You could always do more. With this project we have really stretched the limits to get as much done as we can with the infrastructure that is there and putting the new infrastructure in, such as the new hall and the new pool. This is a therapeutic pool, which is quite an expensive item to build. It is not the same as an average domestic or commercial-type swimming pool.

We have done a lot of consultation and at the end you will hear from the school and the school association. They are very excited about the prospect of this change coming because as you saw today at the site different levels, uneven playing areas, roofs with leaks. All those sorts of things

PUBLIC

that should not be a mark of public education, especially for kids with significant challenges in their schooling. We do it for them and the teachers who work extremely hard to deliver those services.

CHAIR - I acknowledge and appreciated the presence of the school association while we were visiting the school.

Mr WOODFALL - The previous principal, Margaret Ridgers, said she was concerned - she had been there a long time, 10 years - and she talked to me about taking over and being involved, so I went and worked a year with her. At that stage I questioned the two campuses and she said, 'We can't do anything differently.' I said, 'Why is that, Margaret?' She said, 'We will never get a pool again and we'll never get a hall again.' I said, 'I don't think that's right, I think we have to fight for what we need.' 'No we will never get it again,' and that was the thinking she had. I was a bit more brazen and upfront, so when I had the chance I put it out there to the department, through Ms Banks initially, and through Learning Services, and said, 'What are we doing, what's the future? This is what I think should happen.' That is where it got to that point, because I don't think the two campuses was benefiting the children, benefiting the staff and it was a drain on the school's budget with two offices, with buses and with wasted time.

We were trying to create a vision of a centre of excellence, but to do that across 115 staff with many part timers across two campuses wasn't working. There were a lot of justifications to move together. Everyone agreed, but the reason we couldn't do it was because of the fear of not getting what we wanted. I thought, I will take the plunge and it's either going to end badly or it's going to end well. I will live or die by my courage on this one.

Peter Heathcote, who was involved in the process right from the start, said to me, 'Don't worry about the finances that's not your problem. Your problem is to advocate and strongly suggest what you want.' I think he regretted that soon after because it did drag on for a long time. Strategically, to be quite honest, I felt that sometimes when you are a voice in the department it was really handy to have a school association, so I made sure we had a strong school association and Brent was really strong in the process. We came out with three things that were non-negotiable from the school association's point of view.

There couldn't be a reduced standard of facilities and that was overarching. The three elements they wanted was the hall, the sensory room because we understood the importance of our students being regulated, and the pool, which was contentious. Early on there was talk that there was going to be therapy pool, it was going to be a spa and not a pool. That discussion went for a long time.

I also wanted it to be a centre of excellence because I believe it has that capacity and it should be used in the role of building capacity across all of our schools if we're thinking about kids at the centre and disability. My feeling is that the outcome has to have everything we need and I have apologised to Peter at different times about any angst caused and me waving the school association banner and hiding behind that saying, 'It's not me, it's the school association.' It was a rigorous debate but I am confident that we got to it. I wanted all those things.

The other thing I was conscious of was the feedback I got from the other schools. I visited other schools and I went to Adelaide and visited schools. I went interstate to visit schools on other business not just specifically to do that. Overwhelmingly, the feedback was the day the last nail was put in we were too small already. I wanted to make sure there was an ability to future proof it right from the start. Safety and future proofing were the two overarching things and I think we've achieved that.

PUBLIC

If classes need to go onto the end of that senior wing they can. If we need to put two more classes we can put two classes there. Do I think the school needs to be bigger? No, I think it is in danger if it gets any bigger, it loses what it has and that is a real challenge but it can be bigger. If we go to more of an industry-focus or a vocational-focus at the site we can do that.

I feel comfortable to put my name to the work done and the end result.

Ms BROWN - The Northern Support School is certainly a centre of excellence, not only working within it, but working within the whole of our northern region for supporting students with disabilities. I think we have a really important role there and it would be difficult to do that from where we are at the moment. We need to think back to those students who are there and how we are best meeting their needs. The old facilities that were built for primary school x number of years ago are not twenty-first century for the learners we have now. Whilst our students have challenges, it is beholden to us to give those students every chance they can to make the most of what opportunities can come their way. We can do that through a much better facility and also for our teaching staff. It is difficult to work in some of those circumstances at the moment. It is something we can do to help make it better for the staff, students and our wider community because over time they will be more and more involved in the school.

Those two things from the vision we have, that Craig started and I am very passionate about keeping it going, in making that campus the centre of excellence for special education. We need the right facilities to be able to do that.

Mr FARRELL - For a little background, I saw a foundation stone that was about 1956. It was opened by Mr Cosgrove, when he was premier. It represents that era well.

Laughter.

Mr FARRELL - What was the reason for having the school over the two sites?

Ms BROWN - Historically, in Launceston we had four special schools. St Michaels, which had a focus on learning disabilities. Elphin Rise which focused on behavioural challenges. St Georges, located in Amy Road at that time, and focused on the students with intellectual disabilities. Then we had Elonera which had the students with severe physical and multiple disabilities. The building that is now Newstead Heights is attached to St Giles and there was a working relationship between Elonera and St Giles. Eventually Newstead Heights was created out of the work that was happening there. There were four different elements.

As we went through phases of education, inclusion became an important part of how we work with children with special needs. The St Michaels and Elphin Rise Schools both ceased to exist because students moved into mainstream schools as part of the inclusion process. St Georges and Newstead Heights stayed on in their own right. St Georges in Amy Road outgrew its campus. and opportunity came to move it to Ravenswood Road. It was co-located for a while with other flexible programs and things that have worked out of that campus over time. Each of them were individual and in recent years, Newstead Heights and St Georges were combined under that overarching notion of a northern support school.

Mr FARRELL - Currently students move between both sites, is that how it works?

PUBLIC

Ms BROWN - Students at Newstead Heights tend to stay there for the majority of their program. The students at St Georges access the pool at Newstead Heights, so they are backwards and forwards, going from the St Georges Campus to Newstead Heights. All our classes access the therapy through the pool.

Mr WOODFALL - If there is a performance, the only space big enough is at Newstead Heights. The whole St Georges Campus goes to access, like visiting once a term.

When I arrived at the school there were five classes at Newstead Heights - that is currently the case - and three of those classes were traditional Newstead Heights classes, with a high percentage of students in wheelchairs. There were two younger classes that were closer to St Georges cohort and then a class of leavers left. Suddenly there was three and two. At the end of next year there is potentially going to be four and one of the traditional cohort. That is not to say there are not some students with those ability issues and wheelchairs in there, but they are combined with the more able-bodied students. That whole segregation has disappeared. I am not sure why it has reached that stage but in the senior classes there is still the traditional Newstead Heights cohort. You can reach the stage where you have five students in wheelchairs sitting around, they all have really complex communication needs, non verbal to a large extent. I look at those classes and I have thought, 'Where is the vibrancy? Where is the engagement?'. They could do with a leader who busts into my office and says, 'I really wanted to meet everyone'.

I felt like, we will keep you over there because you are all wheelchair kids. I think they would be much better off to have some of these richer dynamic experiences that some of the St Georges kids bring. There is a concern with safety and as long as we can keep those guys safe, because they may be PEG fed, it leads to a much richer environment, a more stimulating environment, for the students in wheelchairs. It is a better representation of society and it is better for them to develop some good friendships.

When the St Georges kids come over, through respite, where they are all together they know each other and they can say 'Hi'. We have a leader's dinner once a year which is a real highlight and it almost takes to the end of the night before the guys from Newstead Heights, in their wheelchairs, and the others, it takes a fair chunk of the night for them to grow. If we were all on the one campus it would be a much richer experience for these guys in wheelchairs. I think we have moved beyond that- you are in wheelchairs so you are over there, you are able bodied so you are over here.

Mr FARRELL - While we are talking about the current building, I was surprised to see that you had to reverse buses in the car park to load the students in and surprised that there have not been any incidents so it has obviously been fairly well managed. I note that your new design will have a bus turning circle. You were describing to us when we were on site about the bus loading and how that can be interrupted by wet weather and you have to load somewhere else. I wondered if you could explain that for us while we are on the record.

Mr WOODFALL - Currently, they line up outside and the brain, like normal kids, likes repetition, particularly autistic kids. Wet weather, suddenly, we are not lining up there, that is just regulation, we are in another room. The danger of losing visibility from the person ticking off that bus to coming around the corner, running through rain to get to a bus causes confusion and it has to be managed. You also have children running because it is wet, running around buses and you are loading one bus but you also have other buses reversing in while you have kids running out to the bus.

PUBLIC

It is far from an ideal situation, the current concept, and one of the architects said, simplistically, we have to reduce the amount of area that those buses infiltrate into the school. They are running deep into the school, that is a risk in itself, let us get the buses right at that point and do not let them come any deeper behind a fenced area. The current model is they line up at the same spot every day regardless of weather and straight away normal routine is going to be a much more regulated area.

If it is wet they are walking through an undercover way to access their bus so that has solved the problem. Basically we say, 'First bus ready, are we ready for Evans Square? 'No, we are still waiting for Lockie, he is in the toilet.' 'Let's wait for Lockie, right the whole bus is here, the Square bus can go out'. The fence is chained, I do not know if we have this detail but this is the stuff we are thinking about, unhook that, okay you guys are right there. I think it is going to be a much more effective role, based on similar to what happens at the Southern Support School and Adelaide North Special School.

Mr SHELTON - Madam Chair, while we are on school buses and as a previous school bus operator, and I know Craig is the driver of a big red bus, the only issue I would add and there has been substantial conversations around the design and fantastic work by architects and I can see that everybody is on the one page. You are not expecting too many questions I am sure but the design of the turning circle, considering that everybody moves in and out of the left-hand side of the school bus and you are bringing the other school there, and presuming your classes all finish around about the same time, so there are more buses to be lined up. Has the turning circle been designed properly? I do not know the size of the bus fleet, how big they are, but have you lined it up to get it parallel to the walkway? It seems a little tight to me for a large bus. If two or three buses are lined up at the one time, that is going to prove a hindrance for the carparking area and access to further along. I presume that has been discussed and everything is suitable?

Ms JAMES - We have designed the turning circle to accommodate the largest bus we can get in there so there is sufficient room for the bus to swing around. It is a low kerb, with similar design as a transit centre in terms of being able to pull up next to the kerb. We are very confident we can get a bus in there. It is tight - I would rather say it is economical. We are confident we can get the bus in there and sufficient room to be able to queue buses. We have quite a reasonable driveway at the moment to get buses in where they wait, one bus will come out and the next bus will go in.

Mr SHELTON - So the buses will stay out on the road in the driveway?

Ms JAMES - Yes. If they get stacked up, there is room for them there.

Mr FARRELL - The concentration of the bus issue is because you mentioned 90 per cent of your students come to the school by bus, which is very impressive.

Mr WOODFALL - In the future NDIS will maybe take over the bus service and there was a review to come in line with that. The review this year was about what could happen and there were strong cases put forward. Rather than assuming those people would automatically assume a spot, it was almost set from scratch and reviewed again. In the end everyone had good cases to be allowed on those buses, so it continued. It works well and is one of the happiest parts of the day. Those kids get off the bus and it is high-fives and big smiles. With the buses, there is that wide internal driveway and quite often they queue up there any way as another bus is turning around and backing into the current area.

PUBLIC

Mrs TAYLOR - Somebody said the school was not built for this purpose. I do not care whether it was built for this purpose or not, it needs upgrading. The fact you have leaking roofs, mould, rising damp et cetera, is disgraceful that we should still have schools in that condition. Regardless of who it is for, this needs to be upgraded.

What an impressive learning environment I saw today. I know your facilities could be a whole lot better but it was nice to see the kids acting like they were in happy place, and the teachers also. In relation to having been at mainstream schools where there are students with various disabilities, I often see them being not quite so happy as they appeared to be in your school today. With you looking at being a centre of excellence and improving the facilities and bringing it all together, I am glad you are thinking about future-proofing. If I was a parent of a child with a disability, I would be thinking, why would I send them to a mainstream school if I could send them to your school, because it seems to me it's good. I am thinking that as your facilities are improved, you may find there are other families opting to go?

Mr WOODFALL - There could be. There's a placement committee process. Interestingly, while there are some parents who almost, even though their child is not eligible and they miss eligibility, will do anything. By hook or crook they want their student there. There are equally parents who have not come to that position, for whatever reason, that a special school is not for them - 'my child will not be going to a special school' - and feel equally as passionate about that. Sometimes that changes over time. Sometimes I've had enrolment meetings where there are two parents, father and mother, and one is for it and the other is not for it.

In one case it was pretty awkward and I felt I had to walk a very fine line not to take sides. We walked around and the young child knew so many others, got such warm greetings from other kids he met, that by the time they got back to the office the person who was against it had totally transformed their opinion and said, 'I've never seen my son so happy.' There is that sitting in the middle and there are both extremes.

Mrs TAYLOR - I'm sure that's what every parent wants, the best place for their child wherever they see that. In terms of future-proofing that, numbers, but also you talked about future development which might be trade training or post school age. I know you have the space, but will the facilities you now have cater for that extra level of education in terms of staff rooms? You now have 115 staff. That is a lot. I know they are not all there at once, but still there is a big staff and staff facilities, toilets, and all that stuff. Do you have capacity for more?

Mr WOODFALL - That is part of the reason the staff room is on that side of the building where it is flat out to the courtyard. If it was ever felt that it did get bigger there is scope to go out that way. Off classrooms, there is scope to add extra classrooms. If there was industry there is scope there. We are sort of covered through all those sorts of areas, whether it be staff facilities, even the senior staff offices sit out in an area where if they needed to be extended they could be.

Initially, lots of things were considered. Do you turn the school around this way? Do you turn it this way? In the end it came from the fact that industry through to staff and then to the wings of dividing the school for safety and age appropriateness and respect - that a grade 11 student wants to feel like a grade 11 student, and he is in the grade 11 area or grade 10 area. A junior student should feel safe all the way down to the active play area. The concept behind seemed to meet all those concerns.

PUBLIC

Mrs TAYLOR - You are satisfied you have capacity there if you need extra capacity?

Mr WOODFALL - Yes.

Mrs TAYLOR - You've talked about driveways and better bus movement. I think it is great and terrific that you have turned it so the school hall can now feed straight onto the buses, I think that's great. You've also done a lot of good about the play areas and the passive areas, making all of that more accessible. I was quite surprised to see how many trip hazards and difficulty that students who are not so mobile would have and I would have, walking across those internal spaces that are supposed to be play areas. I imagine you can't do much playing there. I think that is really good. I like what you're doing.

Mr SHELTON - I declare a bit of an interest here with a Down syndrome grandson at St Giles. I mentioned earlier about the pool, and the question around a fair bit of this funding comes from the sale of the existing Newstead property. This is more for my own benefit than anyone else. The pool, I predict, depending on who buys it, would go with that and therefore this inquiry isn't looking into St Giles, but the simple question is the pool and that Newstead facility is up for sale.

Mr WILLIAMS - It will be.

Mrs TAYLOR - All of it?

Mr WILLIAMS - Unless the government makes a different decision, it will go on the market under the rules under the Treasurer's instructions through an open commercial sale. It is up to the government if it wants to do something different because it is a specialised facility. I can't speculate on that, but we would normally send it to an open market tender to sell the property. We don't have any remaining use for it.

Mr SHELTON - I'm sure I read somewhere where the funding of this project comes from the \$4 million sale of that property. What happens if that price isn't reached?

Mr WILLIAMS - That property is part of the funding envelope. We think it is worth about \$2 million. Through the consultation process, when we decided to have a pool, a proper therapeutic pool rather than just the spa, the minister decided we would be able to use other asset sales. The Education department has a \$1.4 billion asset portfolio. We are looking at using some of our other asset sales to fund that.

CHAIR - It's not cash-flow dependent on this project?

Mr WILLIAMS - No, the building is going ahead. We've cash flowed it and it's going ahead so it's not dependent on the sale. The sales, when they come in, will go towards paying off that cash flow we've used.

Mr SHELTON - We've been taking about the pool and it highlights in the report that the cost estimates for the hydro therapy pool haven't exactly been nailed down.

Mr WILLIAMS - That's because it is not a standard pool; it is highly complex. We've been getting good results on tenders. They've been coming in under what the quantity surveyors have been thinking and we've been able to go back and say, 'We can do that extra bit'. We think what we've scoped will definitely be available within the funding envelope we have but it won't come

PUBLIC

down until we have tender offers coming in that we will get a sense of whether there is any more capacity in the package to do anything else. There are other things - a great long list of things - you could keep on doing at this site. If we get a better tender, all the money that has been allocated to this - the \$6.6 million - goes to that site; it doesn't get siphoned off somewhere else. If we get a better tender result, other things can be done with it.

Mrs TAYLOR - If it comes in under tender, what does the school want to do that you aren't able to do now? What is next on your list? You should think about that because the tenders have been coming in under budget.

Mr WOODFALL - To be honest, it is pretty good, so we are happy. I had a vision around this site. Our students access bikes for lots of reasons - exercise - but also because it's regulated, repetitive, rhythmical activity and quite soothing to ride a bike. The thought of having a bike track around the edge of the school - we've got money donated towards that. I didn't realise how expensive concrete per square metre was, so that was a bit of a shock to me. In saying that, there is a real strength in us continuing to develop community partnerships. I was trying to bring in about \$50 000 a year through Rotary [inaudible] sponsored communication thing so we have probably \$50 000 to \$60 000 that we've brought in towards school improvement. We are probably going to sit there and wait and see how this unfolds and then we will see what our projects are. Although that takes time, work and presentation, it is not only about the money, it's about the awareness of where students with disabilities fit into the community. It's about building those community partnerships richer than that. This is like a lifetime's work of getting community partnerships. You wouldn't have even been able to achieve this but, at the same time there is future work around things such as bike tracks. Could one day we get an outdoor learning classroom for the garden? At the moment, how would that work? Could we extend the shed with some of the wood-working equipment and combine with some extension activity to garden? There are all those possibilities but nothing pending.

We are learning more about play equipment with swings. We also have \$25 000 worth of requests to put in specific type of equipment. We are chipping away with that.

Mrs TAYLOR - It does not seem to make sense to me, that this bucket of money has to be spent on this project. This is what we think it needs, so it is absolutely right we should have enough for what the needs are. If it should come in under tender, why would you say, we will then spend the rest of that money on that site? Why wouldn't you consider putting that to another site that might have greater needs or to the next project? Why we have to spend it if it does not need to be spent?

Mr WILLIAMS - This one is a different because we are funding it partly from the asset sales, which is not through consolidated revenue but through our internal management. The money that normally comes through the appropriations and if it is for a particular school, like Rose Bay recently, we have to spend that money on that.

Mrs TAYLOR - Why?

Mr WILLIAMS - Because the budget papers allocated it to a project.

Mrs TAYLOR - We vary the budget all the time. The upper House received an extra appropriations request.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIAMS - We do. This project is likely to have a -

Mrs TAYLOR - I can understand you should still spend it on education or a school.

Mr WILLIAMS - This project will probably come up for an adjustment. The consultation period took a long time, we are going to have to re-cash flow some of this money so it fits across the two years.

Mrs TAYLOR - That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about the principle here and perhaps this is not the place to be doing this, but this is a discussion to be had with the treasurer at some point.

Mr WILLIAMS - It is government decision. If they give us \$6.6 million to spend on a project, we have to spend it on that unless they decide. With this project, we pushed it very tight in order to get -

Mrs TAYLOR - I am talking about the principle, I am not talking about this project and it may not come in under.

Mr SHELTON - That is within variances. You do not have to spend the last \$25 000 or if it goes over \$25 000, you find it from somewhere else.

Mr WILLIAMS - That is right. The substantial bulk of the money goes on the project that it has been allocated for. We cannot afford to knock down schools and start again very often, whereas we can get a lot of benefit for a lot more schools if we renovate and reinvigorate them. We take a process of calculating what we think we need. We give advice to the Government on what we think is needed on some of these projects. We could knock this school down and spend \$15 million and have the best school in the world. It is an estimate when you start off with these things. You get a quantity surveyor in. Even then, as you said, Mrs Taylor, the -

Mrs TAYLOR - You are never going to know how much it is going to cost until your tenders come in.

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes. We are expecting, because there is a lot of work in the community at the moment, there would have been tightening up by now. It will come. If we have a project like this, we could usefully put more money into this project of great value for the school and for the kids to the amount we have to spend, even if this lot comes in cheaper. There is a huge long list of things that are not in the scope that the school would have loved, bigger pool, bigger hall.

Mrs TAYLOR - You are not going to make a bigger pool if you have extra money because it is too late for that.

Mr WILLIAMS - No, it is. There is a whole list of things the school would have wanted.

Mr WOODFALL - About the bigger pool, that has also been debatable, as there was some train of thought that we have kids who swim laps in there and that is great, but it is about therapy and water safety and familiarisation. Our physical education staff sometimes say, 'We don't want to take them to the aquatic centre', but from the purest health and safety, physical education and water safety, point of view, once they are at that level we should be transferring those skills to the aquatic centre and other environments. That's how the water safety program works. The danger of

PUBLIC

keeping kids in the pool is they think they can swim and they fall in the shallow end of the aquatic centre and can't swim.

Mrs TAYLOR - And this pool is the right size for you?

Mr WOODFALL - Yes. It was a bit strategic. There was this feeling that bigger is better and we agreed 12 was fantastic but would we want 25? No, we wouldn't, because it is ridiculously big and suddenly not as comforting for those kids who have anxiety. It defeats our purpose of pushing kids back out into the community, to connect with the community.

Mr SHELTON - Whatever you build has to be maintained, depreciated and operated so if you up the size of the pool and it sucks the top end off your school budget every year and that depletes some other projects and facilities, where is the best priority for that money? You have to draw the line.

Mr WOODFALL - There still are some concerns around that. The Southern Support School pool had this big model that was going to do all sorts of things. The current pool is hired by the hospital, St Giles, and offsets a lot of costs. We're not so certain that is going to be the future for this pool so we have to be a bit conservative. We don't want it as a chain around our neck, we want it to be functional.

Mrs TAYLOR - You obviously thought carefully about amalgamating the two sites, and I can understand all the operational reasons, but at the beginning, it might have been you, Craig, who said you mostly have kids with physical and medical disabilities currently on site and students with intellectual disabilities on the northern site.

Mr WOODFALL - As a simplistic view, definitely.

Mrs TAYLOR - So you have considered the mix will be an improvement, and at least for the wheelchair kids it might be better to be in that environment. Will it be for the current students on the campus you now have, that we looked at today, that is going to be improved? Will they be able to cope with having the 100 students and all those disabilities mixed together?

Mr WOODFALL - The one drawback I can see is sometimes we have parents come in and you know it's the right environment for their child. We have classes of various needs. We have a class called 'purple class', which has slightly greater needs and sometimes I will strategically think, 'I am not going to go into purple with this family because that might be a bit confronting right now'. That is a potential risk, that we might take a parent around and they are going to see someone in a wheelchair who might be non-mobile, rugged up, and maybe dribbling. That could be confronting, and I can see that from a parent's point of view bringing in a child. It has crossed our minds but I think putting the students at the centre, all those other benefits far outweigh that. Particularly for the wheelchair students and also the other students, for them to be able to get to know another group of kids. Safety was probably the real issue. There will be some students, although the classes will be combined, where we will say, 'That vulnerable student is not going in that senior class with that student because their behaviour is too unpredictable', so those adjustments will be made. The playground is structured suitably to cater for that also.

CHAIR - In combining the two schools what happens to the FECA - Fully Enclosed Covered Areas? Out of the existing FECA up to some number - 4 737 is what I have written here. What do we end up with in the new design in area that you have to maintain liability for maintenance?

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIAMS - We will get that for you.

Mr LUTTRELL - Newstead Heights is two levels, so the cost of that FECA will be more expensive with the infrastructure, so having it on a flat site will be cheaper from a maintenance perspective, particularly as you've heard the mention of lifts in Newstead Heights. Maintaining lifts is much more expensive than ramps or normal thoroughfares.

Mr WILLIAMS - Because there is a significant amount of build going on, the electrics, the insulation and all of those things will be to a modern standard. Those buildings are not. They have 50-year old insulation, they have 50-year old electrical systems, so there is an efficiency you get when you rebuilt these schools and you include new lights and things like that.

Mr LUTTRELL - I will be reasonably confident, subject to confirmation, that the combined FECA of the existing will be less than has been proposed. We will get that if we can later in the hearing.

CHAIR - My next question is how are you going to manage children who have problems with changes to space? How are you going to manage the construction of this school site? I know it is really not a question for us, but it is a very important one from the students' perspective.

Ms BROWN - It is one we will give a lot of consideration to. There will be some students who will think, 'Wow, building, trucks,' and they will be so excited. All they will want to do all day is watch what is going on, because that is their thing. Then there will be the other cohort that the noise and all of those sorts of things are really going to deregulate them. We will have to work really closely. We will have to do a lot of pre-work once we know who has the tender, and work with them so they understand our students. It is important that whoever is that successful person knows that the banging, crashing and doing all that stuff is going to upset people. We will have to plan around that.

If we know certain activities are going to happen we can maybe have those students actively involved somewhere else where they are not going to be as close to what is going on. There will be lots of different things that we can do as a school and with the staff and we will have to look how we are going to minimise the disruption that is going to be caused. There is no doubt there is going to be disruption, there is going to be noise, there is going to be dust and dirt and all of that, and we have to keep everyone safe. It will be a construction site, which will have its complexities.

Mr WOODFALL - It is still definitely a challenge but they are building a site that will have 15 rooms. There are currently two classrooms that will not be taken into context, so that is 17 if you like. Over at the other campus we don't lose that campus while it is being built, so five classes are effectively over there. We have the construction of 17 classrooms while five classrooms remain constant over there. In the initial planning that Simone and I've talked about we can isolate it. It might mean we lose the sensory room at the back that you saw, and maybe that back half of the school gets sectioned off and four classes go there. Maybe those classes in the front of the school move over to there and the front of the school becomes vacant and no one using it. We are thinking through the stages and that we have half our school over at the other campus anyway. Hopefully that will allow us enough flexibility to section off parts of the school to work on that and do it stage by stage.

PUBLIC

Mr LUTTRELL - Another thing to note might also be that the security and construction covers the school holidays. Having those school holidays gives some flexibility in those more intrusive constructions. Also having a flat layout like it is, you have a range of different access points to a whole range of different parts of the site. That should aid in terms of how you stagger and manage stages of construction.

Ms JAMES - There is certainly capacity within the arrangement of the site and access spots for us to have a well considered staging plan which will go out to tender. There will be some discussions with the successful contractor willing to have the school in terms of understanding what it is that they are working with. It will be relatively easy for us to be able to arrange the works, minimising disruption to the school and functionality.

Mrs TAYLOR - A few little practical questions.

CHAIR - I was going to do the final question on fit for purpose stuff, so you go.

Mrs TAYLOR - What sort of energy rating is the school going to have? Better than it has now.

Mr FARRELL - It still has those big old fan heaters.

Mrs TAYLOR - You are having double glazing for instance?

Ms JAMES - All the new windows will be double glazed. Doors will probably not be double glazed because if, for some reason, a pane gets broken, it is two panes of glass we have to replace rather than one, which is a practical ongoing thing. Obviously we will try to minimise the risk of that happening by the type of doors we are specifying. We do not have a lot of externally glazed doors. Where possible, all the windows are double glazed and the doors, where the single glaze will be an eco glass, a laminated thing.

We are re-insulating, fixing up all the leaks and minimising drafts. We are upgrading external facades to be insulated as at the moment there is nothing, it is like a tent in some ways. It is getting new efficient heating and cooling systems. We are upgrading all the lighting and the existing electrical structure.

Mrs TAYLOR - Are you having to replace any of the roof?

Ms JAMES - In some places where we are doing work there is work to the roof. Some parts of the roof, believe or not after what you saw today, have actually been replaced. Where the leaks have been and the roof is in good condition that meant the flashing had just failed. That is why it is leaking so we will be reflash around all the skylights where they are in the low section of roof. Reflashing should deal with the leaking issue. Wherever we have got works that are impacting on the roof immediately we will have them upgraded.

Mrs TAYLOR - A guesstimate as how much you are upgrading the energy rating to?

Ms JAMES - I could not tell of the top of my head. We have a consultant who deals with that because we have requirements to meet under the Building Code as well as the department has their own standards that we have to adhere to so it will meet all of those.

PUBLIC

Mrs TAYLOR - A question about the art site money. What are you intending to spend that on? I know we discussed it briefly while we were there but just for the record.

Ms JAMES - It has been a tender process. Two weeks ago we met with the department's art people. There were 10 tenders submitted and we have now got down to three. We are now seeking more clarification around those particular projects.

Mrs TAYLOR - You must have asked for something in your tenders.

Ms JAMES - Yes there was an artists brief that was put up to tender. They all received that brief and read it, which covered lots of the things that Craig has talked about. The needs to be functional, outdoor, and screens giving the children that opportunity to be able to regulate and be calm in that passive area. We have gone back to three of those people to get more information so that it fits more clearly with what we want as they covered quite a range of ideas. We want it to be functional, aesthetic, suit the purpose that in that brief.

CHAIR - Do you believe this project is fit for purpose, that the design and project meets the needs that we need it to meet?

Mr WILLIAMS - Absolutely. We have heard from the school association, from two principals who have worked in the school that it is a good outcome for the school. It has been carefully crafted with the school association and the teaching professionals to deliver a special environment for the children it serves. Our view is that this is going to take a school that needs a lot of work and was not built for the purpose it has, to something special for those kids with special needs.

Mrs TAYLOR - Madam Chair, I would like to hear from the principals whether they think it is fit for purpose and are happy with the project.

CHAIR - Certainly.

Ms BROWN - I reiterate what Robert said, absolutely. It does not fit the purpose right now and the work that has gone into the plan is second to none, and the time it has taken to get to where it is has been well spent. It has what we want and that is what we need and what our students need.

Mr WOODFALL - Early on, when I spoke to the planning group, I said, 'We don't need all the bells and whistles. People who work in this area are pretty grounded and I literally have changed soiled adolescents.' It does not matter whether you are the principal or a TA, you have to be grounded to work in that environment.

We do not need the architectural design, fancy build thing. It would be nice but what we really wanted was functional and that is why we stuck to those things. We wanted a pool, a hall and that regulation sensory stuff and we stuck to that. That is why it was a long process and I think we have achieved that. When we do not have the right environment our work can be so much harder. Those buckets today, it might be a small thing but a person with a disability makes a wrong choice with a bucket like that, another parent can be upset - how has that happened to my child. That can be very costly and upsetting and traumatic. We need it to be fit for purpose.

PUBLIC

The focus has been around functionality and safety. An example of that is to move the art budget, every cent to functional, practical and to suit the needs of the school. We have been able to do that, so it has been good. Long but good.

Mr SHELTON - Madam Chair, I am impressed by Craig's enthusiasm and I take it that it has been his baby from the word go. I have been through a similar process when automotive shifted from Wellington Street to Alanvale. Craig, if you are able to take a deep breath, it is your baby that you are going to have to let go of. You will be well and truly ready for a lovely holiday when you see this constructed. Well done to everybody who has been involved.

CHAIR - Thank you everyone for attending today. As I advised you at the commencement of your evidence, what you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to comments you may make to anyone including the media, even if you are repeating what you said to us. Thank you very much.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.