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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# Redevelopment of Montello Primary School

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*Brought up by Ms Burnet and ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.*

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## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Ms Rattray (*Chair*)  
Mr Harriss

House of Assembly

Ms Butler (*Deputy Chair*)  
Ms Burnet  
Mr Wood

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Committee has the honour to report to the House of Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* on the -

### **Redevelopment Montello Primary School**

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve the Redevelopment of Montello Primary School to upgrade existing buildings and infrastructure to improve accessibility across the school site and to provide contemporary learning environments, and driveway works to improve the safety and flow of student drop-off and pick-up.
- 2.2 The school is situated uphill from the Burnie City Centre. The campus comprises original post-war weatherboard clad buildings, later two storey additions, a general-purpose hall and administration area, and two double classroom demountable buildings. All buildings are well maintained and remain serviceable but suffer from problems including glare, sun and noise in windy conditions.
- 2.3 The additions of the past are now very restrictive for contemporary needs. Level changes prevent disabled access, toilet blocks are remote from learning areas, and classrooms are disconnected from each other, from common areas and the outdoors. These issues prevent an easy flow from one education setting to another and makes supervision difficult.
- 2.4 The learning spaces at the school comprise a series of non-contemporary, disconnected single classrooms that are split over three main levels, and accessibility does not meet current standards. Limited space does not allow for group, team or individual learning. These environments prevent interaction and the sense of community to enable formal and informal learning.
- 2.5 Bathroom facilities are also old and remote from learning areas leading to long journeys away from teacher supervision.
- 2.6 Office spaces for teachers, administration, support workers, specialists and management teams are limited. This means that many staff share spaces, which makes one-on-one student support difficult to provide. Furthermore, there are no rooms available for professional support staff to operate within the school to assist children and families.
- 2.7 Outdoors, there is a lack of support for, and connectivity to, outdoor learning opportunities and the sports courts are also in need of base repairs and resurfacing.
- 2.8 The proposed works have been developed through the design process to meet the highest priorities of the school. The key concept for the redevelopment is to bring together the Kindergarten to Year 2 students and Years 3-6 students into two well-connected learning communities. Each of these will enable students and

teachers to collaborate in ways that are not possible within the current and very restricted layout. The main elements of the proposed works are:

- Construction of a new two-level building in the existing courtyard to create opportunities for flow between existing and new learning settings and provide a central location for the school's maker space. This building also includes a social stair/auditorium which links the two levels and is available for groups to gather without having to interfere with activities in the general-purpose hall.
- Creation of a new pedestrian forecourt which links to the publicly accessible school areas of reception, hall and dining area.
- Relocation of the administration and reception functions to create a welcoming front to the school.
- Creating professional support offices in the former administration area.
- Replacing the existing disused toilet block, which is in a remote location, with new individual private toilet cubicles in multiple locations nearer to learning spaces.
- Improving the accessibility of school buildings with a new lift to give access to the two main floor levels with a ramp for access to the half-level change.
- Removing two existing demountable classrooms. One demountable will be relocated for the ongoing provision of Outside School Hours Care. The second demountable will be removed from the school.
- Reorganising and extending the drop-off and pick-up area so children are not required to cross any roadways.
- Repairing one of the outside ball courts.
- Relocating the kitchen garden so it is closer to the new dining room and outdoor learning settings.
- Improving the early years outdoor learning areas.

2.10 The school is presently split over three main levels making access for people with disabilities impossible to many areas. The new building will include a lift to access the two main floor levels with a ramp to the half-level change into the existing southern wing. Full accessibility will be achieved to all building areas including toilet facilities.

### 3 PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is

The following table details the current cost estimate for the project:

| DESCRIPTION                 | COST ESTIMATE |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Construction                | \$8,600,000   |
| Consultant Fees             | \$800,000     |
| Statutory Fees              | \$30,000      |
| Furniture/Equipment/IT      | \$200,000     |
| General Project Contingency | \$58,000      |
| Artwork                     | \$80,000      |
| Project Management          | \$142,000     |
| School Administration       | \$40,000      |
| Total                       | \$9,950,000   |

## 4 EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday 3 July last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to the Function Room at the Cradle Coast Authority, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

### Proponent

- Todd Williams, Director Facility Services, Department of Education, Children and Young People
- Min Harman, Acting Deputy Director Infrastructure Delivery, Department of Education, Children and Young People
- Dion McCall, Principal, Montello Primary School
- Christie Denman, Architect, David Denman & Associates

### Public

- Natalie Bugg

The following Committee Members were present:

- Hon Tania Rattray MLC (Chair)
- Ms Jen Butler MP (Deputy Chair)
- Ms Helen Burnet MP
- Hon Dean Harriss MLC
- Mr Simon Wood MP

### **Overview**

- 4.2 Mr Williams provided a brief overview of the proposed works:

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... Thank you for the opportunity to formally present the proposal to redevelop Montello Primary School to provide contemporary connected learning spaces, improvement throughout the school for accessibility, much-needed support spaces to help the learning at the school and support the students. Together with the connections throughout the school, as we saw today, the levels at the school are challenging, and the redevelopment will certainly help to provide that at-level access, indoor and outdoor, for the students.

- 4.3 The Department's submission also provided the following background and overview of the proposed works:

*"The project will provide priority redevelopment works identified through the Concept Plan...In 2021, the Tasmanian Government made an election commitment to provide \$7.1 million for the redevelopment of the school. Community feedback was considered and the Tasmanian Government commitment has been supplemented by additional funds of \$2.8 million, together with a \$50,000 contribution from the school.*

Extensive community and stakeholder consultation has assisted in defining the scope of works to include contemporary learning areas, improved accessibility and safe student drop-off and pick-up for the total \$9.95 million investment...

This project will redevelop existing buildings to manage safety and security, vehicle movements and arrivals, accessibility, and the provision of contemporary learning environments.

Reconfiguration of the Years 3-6 learning areas will provide improved connectivity and contemporary learning environments to create spaces that cater for a range of users, learning styles, group sizes, and flexibility for multiple uses and changes of use over time.

Driveway improvements are proposed including an extended on-site driveway area for student drop-off and pick-up to improve safety and flow.”<sup>1</sup>

### **How was the Redevelopment Prioritised within the Department?**

- 4.4 The Committee understood the need for an upgrade of the school had been recognised for some time. The Committee was interested to establish how the need for the redevelopment had been prioritised, and how the project budget had been determined:

**CHAIR** - ... I understand that it was on the top 10 list for a number of years of schools needing to be redeveloped, and the original project amount was in the order of \$7.7 million.

I'm just interested in how that price tag was arrived at and whether it was a Department or perhaps a government decision of how the funds have been put together and the estimate for this project as it stands today?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Certainly. Yes, we go through an annual process of prioritising the school capital submissions. Through that process the priority 1s that are identified are submitted through our annual capital process to government for consideration. In that, we, the Department, does include an initial cost estimate that is not based on a detailed project plan. It is based on a square metre rate that we believe is appropriate to achieve the outcome. The detailed process that we've been through with Dion and Christie and the project team identified some challenges on the site - more challenges than we had expected. In listening to the community's priority needs as well, it was identified that the traffic management concerns that we saw and spoke about today and the accessibility concerns were important to resolve, as well as focusing our effort on improving learning areas in the school. Through that process we secured additional funding of \$2.8 million, and with the school contribution of \$50,000 that takes the total project funding up to \$9.9 million.

- 4.5 The Committee sought to explore why the redevelopment had not been undertaken earlier:

**Ms BUTLER** - As a supplementary question to the honourable Tania Rattray's previous question, this school was for 10 to 12, maybe even 14 years, identified in the tier 1 high priority range. For the record, can we ask why the school was not in receipt of the significant works that it is finally getting now? Why did it take such a long time for this to come to fruition?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The release of the capital priority rankings has been in place, I think, since about 2018...

As I said previously, all priority 1s are submitted to government for funding consideration. We are reliant on the government to provide the funding to progress our redevelopments. In recent years we have received considerable investment to upgrade schools and we're much appreciative of that. It is reliant on the government of the day to allocate funding, which is,

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<sup>1</sup> *Montello Primary School – Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, 3 July 2024, Department of Education, Children and Young People, page 3.

obviously, also related to the state finances and the availability of state finances. The Department is always continuing to put forward its list of priorities. We're very pleased when we receive them to get the best outcome that we can for the schools that receive the funding.

**Ms BUTLER** - But there is a decade of newspaper articles, community advocates, different members of parliament and representatives over many years - over a decade - talking about the problem with disability access and the standard of the school and calling out for that where other schools, which were also within that tier of priority, were funded appropriately?

I don't think you really answered the question of why this was not prioritised in that huge period until now.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Well, the Department did prioritise it as a priority 1 site with the other school sites that were on the list and submitted it to government for funding consideration. That is the role that we play. Government then makes its decisions on the priorities off the list that they choose to fund.

**Ms BURNET** - ... We went through the site this morning and it was very eye-opening to see the challenges of the site and situations where we have classes being interrupted or children getting from point A to point B through other classes or other goings-on in the school. I understand this had been identified as a priority 1 school or proposal. Would you say this is a major redevelopment of this school site?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - It will certainly provide major benefit to the school and therefore it can be termed a major redevelopment. The focus is on providing that benefit to the school.

## **Project Budget and Scope of Works**

- 4.6 The Committee asked the Department's witnesses how the budget for the works was set and whether it was considered sufficient to undertake the scope of work identified:

**Ms BURNET** - I note that last year there was consideration of the Cambridge Primary School development. I think it was \$15.1 million in the project budget. This is clearly a fraction of that - \$9.95 million - and on a very challenging site. Is there any particular reason why we have arrived at this amount? Is it purely what the budget has been allocated by the government or how do you make those decisions?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I think there are two elements to that. If I reference Cambridge Primary School, yes, it is a \$15.1 million redevelopment; \$8 million of that is for redevelopment of the school to provide learning improvements and \$7.1 million of that is a partnership with council to provide improved outdoor amenities, gymnasium, and car parking. I just needed to separate that \$15.1 million out. The \$9.95 million is a substantial investment in Montello Primary School and will provide a lot of benefit to Montello Primary School.

**Ms BURNET** - Thank you. I suppose there is a supplementary question: is it enough?

...

**Mr WILLIAMS** - With any project we have there are challenges to resolve all issues on the school site. Some stats that we have are that 70 per cent of our assets are over 50 years old and 35 per cent of our assets are over 70 years old. With that comes a lot of challenges and the challenge that we have and the responsibility the Department has is to invest the money that is allocated by the government to get the best benefit that we can for the school. Undoubtedly, as you have seen, there are challenges on that side today. I hope you also see that the investment will provide significant improvement to the learning areas that we are talking about, and the connections, the disabled access, and the support areas of the school, which are much needed.

...

**Ms BUTLER** - What we're learning from today's tour and also this committee now is that what the school requires is a lot more than what it's getting from this project. What it requires to be up to standard and to have windows closed properly, solar and so forth; that it is underfunded to a certain extent. If there was more funding available this could be a better learning environment for the school community. Is it a patch job because of lack of funding?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I certainly don't believe so. I think the priority of the funding is being vested into the learning areas to provide contemporary learning. That's what the focus of our proposal has been, as well as ensuring the safety in the drop off and pick up zones, providing appropriate support areas for the one-on-one learning. So, I don't agree. I believe that absolutely the money is being invested to focus on the priority of learning.

- 4.7 The Committee was aware that many projects were encountering an escalation in costs. Given this environment, but recognising the significant need for the works before the Committee, an assurance was sought from the Department's representatives that the entire scope of the works would be delivered:

**CHAIR** - ... the overarching question if this redevelopment doesn't come in on budget as we know what happens with budgets at this point in time right across any area, does the Department go back to government? In this case would they say, this is a really important redevelopment for this school community and the safety of children and safety and access, we need some more money. Is that how the process would or could work?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes, absolutely. I'm not pre-empting the outcome of the tender process because the ... valuation committee is working that through.

Through that process, though, we always take an opportunity to work with a builder to see what value management they can bring to the table. Not being disrespectful at all, but builders look very differently as to what architects do. There may be reasonable practical options to put on the table that we should rightfully consider in considering value for money.

Will it take away from the amenity improvements we're trying to achieve? If it does, then we're not interested in that. But will it provide a practical, robust, builder's solution that doesn't take away from amenity? Then, we'd be silly not to consider that.

Should we find that the outcome of the tender means we have a budget problem, we've been through a very lengthy process with the school and the community and I do appreciate the patience because it has taken a while to get to this point.

A very valuable process and time to get to a good point to work through the priorities. Absolutely, and the Department and I believe, the Minister has openly said, we're committed to delivering the scope of works that are presented. That's a long way around me saying yes, we would be going to government to say we have a problem and we need help to resolve that funding issue.

**CHAIR** - So, we won't be cutting corners. If the committee decides to approve this reference, there'll be no corners cut?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Our commitment is to deliver the scope as presented. I always have my fingers crossed in going to a tender process because it's a true test of the market at that time. And I continue to be surprised. Sometimes it's positive; sometimes it's negative.

- 4.8 The Committee understood the project scope was the result of a master planning process. The Committee sought to establish what elements of the school's master plan were being prioritised, and what had been cut from the scope of the works, given the budget committed for the project:

**CHAIR** - ... With regard to the original master plan - and Todd said in his previous answer to a question that this has taken a long time to get to where we are with this reference - can you give me some indication of what was cut from the original master plan? You talked about a cover over the outdoor court areas and you said that was cut. Was there anything else that was cut from the original master plan that you'd like to share with the committee?

**Mr McCALL** - Yes, with the original plan of \$7.1 million the project working group worked through that stage and came up with a master plan. Then that went to the quantity surveyors and was costed and came in a lot more than \$7.1 million.

**CHAIR** - The outdoor roof was one?

**Mr McCALL** - That was one of the things that went.

**CHAIR** - And another court?

**Mr McCALL** - The other half of the netball court went as well.

We prioritised the pick-up and drop-off zone because that was going to be on the street so we brought that back into the building because that was a priority for our school and our parents, which meant that the learning area in prep to year two has not made it through to the final round. The staff resourcing area is going to be a bare shell. Any desks, joinery, and those kinds of things within that staff resourcing area are not included. The early childhood playgrounds which will be through the middle, where we looked today - in the original plan, it was a lot more comprehensive and had a lot more features to it. When that building came in, the civil construction costs were quite high so we had to cut down in that area. That is where the netball courts and the early childhood playground and a lot of that was cut during that process. That is part of the reason why it took so long because it was a very hard decision to make.

- 4.9 The Committee sought to explore further the elements that had been prioritised, and the compromises that had been made in determining the scope of the works. The Committee also sought to understand if the process for prioritising works was the same across all schools:

**CHAIR** - ... Given we have talked about the compromise this reference has delivered for the school community, for the Department right across the small budget, can you give the committee some indication of what aspects of this design you have had to really compromise on to fit it into the budget? Are there some aspects that would have been much better if you had a better budget and been able to deliver more contemporary learning in a particular area? Is there anything you can share with us?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... as I have said throughout this process, most projects that we have do have challenges and challenges to deliver on priorities. Our focus has been to prioritise the areas to get the most improvement for learning outcomes. It is not unusual for a project to have to focus in on those priorities.

...

**Ms DENMAN** - Going through the design process, we have three interconnecting buildings with access issues. To bring all those together we really had to deal with the entire footprint of the school. Sometimes, we can isolate an area and do improvement in one area, because the rest is functioning okay. But in this instance, particularly the issue of access, required us to resolve circulation around the entire footprint of the school. From that we have achieved some really good outcomes regarding the entire school now being under one roof. If it is raining, they are not moving from outdoor classrooms across to the main building getting wet. We have much shorter travel distances from small breakout groups or the reading and mathematical small group environment versus being with their home groups. By doing that, we have resolved a lot of the inherent planning issues that are limiting what the school and the teaching team can achieve because of either time getting lost, such as getting children from one place to another

and supervision. It has allowed for a lot more flexibility within the teaching opportunities because there is good visual connection and supervision.

That has all come about because we have had to resolve this circulation requirement throughout the entire building, to make sure that it is accessible because of the level changes and stairs everywhere. So, that in itself is a great outcome. But then to spread the budget across the entire footprint limits the amount of improvement. That is where the extent of carpet and extent of new window replacement, they are the things that we've been struggling with and having to weigh up and manage, because we can't just look at one corner and get that 100 per cent right because the other areas are okay. It's been a matter of having to spread the scope of work across the entire footprint.

That's where the compromises are, in the level of individual parts coming up to perhaps what you might like them to be, in terms of standard. I also consider that in terms of allowing Montello to be put in a good place to move forward, it allows all of those things to be dealt with in time. We're not leaving a large ticket item unresolved. We've resolved those, and it's just that constant improvement and upkeep, in my opinion.

**CHAIR** - ... Can you just give me some idea of how much of the existing buildings, the old ones that won't be refurbished, will have any facelift on the outside?

**Ms DENMAN** - The exterior of the building will remain as you see it. All of the work is in the interior spaces, with the exception of the connections to the outdoor learning spaces which have decks; the connection out to the kitchen garden off the dining room; and the connection from the prep to grade two out to their learning environment. We have focused 100 per cent on where the internal learning spaces connect to outdoor learning spaces, and the rest of the aesthetic of the building hasn't really been afforded any attention, because we focused on what will directly benefit the students.

...

**Ms BUTLER** - I'm still trying to grapple with the low amount of money that's been provided for this development, and it clearly isn't touching the sides of what is required.

...

I'm just wondering where the other schools which went through redevelopment were required to find this amount of cost efficiency in their refurbishments. I recall Penguin was about \$20 million; Cambridge was about \$15.1 million; Sorell was \$27.48 million. This went from \$7.5 million to just under \$10 million.

Were other schools required to skimp and save as Montello has had to skimp and save? Is there any basis for why this school is being underfunded? Or other schools and even schools close by? I don't want to take anything away from those schools at all, but why is this particular school being asked to compromise on safety for kids in their drop off and pick up area? Also, they might have to skimp on such things as not being able to have properly surfaced courts for the students to be able to utilise, or play equipment, or skimp in their early years area, and such things as solar installations and so forth. Why is this school is being asked, especially after waiting for such a long time for the funding, -well over a decade they've been crying out for this school to be upgraded. Why have they been asked to try to have to cut costs so much compared to other schools? Have other schools also been put in that position?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - As I've already said, every project that we go through has challenges and we examine the priorities in every project that we work on. There is a lengthy list of investment that the government has made over the last five or six years, and those projects range in size from \$500,000 up to the \$25-26 million for Sorell.

It is difficult on the surface to compare them, because they're not apples for apples and it is challenging to line those up. There is a range of schools that have had redevelopments that are less than the \$9.95 million redevelopment.

**Ms BUTLER** - Have those schools also been asked to compromise on safety for students in those redevelopments? Because this school committee has, it's pretty obvious from today's committee. We appreciate the fact that funding is finally being made available and no one wants to deny the school that; but why are they being asked to compromise so much?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - We are not asking the school to compromise on safety at all, and I was very clear that safety is paramount, and we will work with the school on doing that.

**Ms BUTLER** - That's not what the evidence has suggested today. We're getting children's fingers that could be guillotined. We have been hearing today about children's fingers. They can't open certain windows. We've been hearing today that you can't guarantee the safety of the children getting on and off buses, because of costs. We've heard that school services - and we know there has been history at the school of students with broken ankles and so forth, and from uneven surfaces as well, and I'll be getting to that question soon, about how many students have been injured at the school.

We know that there are lots of compromises, and so I'm just wondering whether - or why - this school in particular has had to compromise because of funding, where other schools haven't had to compromise as much, because that is pretty much what I'm getting back from the evidence I'm being provided.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - No, we're not asking the school to compromise at all and the safety issue with the transport that I heard from Dion was more around parent behaviour -

**Ms BUTLER** - And cost.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The traffic solution that I believe we've put forward is a good solution to help improve what has been problematic for the school -

**Ms BUTLER** - For the cost, it came down to.

**Ms HARMAN** - It's also about the availability of outdoor play at the front of the school as well though, and maximising those flat spaces for the early years and the kitchen garden and those elements.

**Ms BUTLER** - But my question is about whether other schools had to find the same efficiencies as the Montello community?

**Ms HARMAN** - A number of schools. It's very normal for schools to have to prioritise works and certainly with the Sorell redevelopment, there was considerable prioritisation required. The Lansdowne redevelopment was mentioned earlier, that was a much smaller budget and it looked at a specific area of the school. It didn't try and fix the whole site. Christie touched on it earlier, the difficulties of this site have meant that we have had to look at a development that goes across the whole site, which has been challenging, there's no doubt about that. But I suppose in other instances, we've looked at the highest priority area of a school and not tried to go right across that school site, which is what we're looking at with this proposal. But yes - with every redevelopment we do, there's difficult decisions to make, to prioritise works.

- 4.10 The Committee also sought to understand what consultation had been undertaken to help define the scope of the project, and the level of acceptance within the school community:

**CHAIR** - Are you able to describe the consultation or how that worked with the school community to arrive at what has been presented to us today?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes, certainly. The consultation and engagement process is an important part of what we do and we introduced that probably about four or five years ago. Up front, we engage and have forums with the staff, students and community to listen to what the priorities are. That's done up front and during the process as well.

**CHAIR** - So more than one visit - one lot of communication?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Absolutely, yes. There was the initial consultation process and that helped hone in on the priorities and form what we have today.

Also, when we had the concept plan with the additional funding, we went back out to the community 18 months after that initial phase to have another check-in to go - we listened and this is what we provided and that forms the basis of what's presented today. It's an invaluable process that brings a lot of benefit to our projects.

...

**CHAIR** - The community, particularly the school community- have they decided, we are happy with what we are going to get, or are they saying, no, this is not good enough? How is that conversation panning out?

**Mr McCALL** - We have a variety of responses.

...

There are a lot of parents who see \$7 million at that point in time and now \$9.95 million as a lot of money to them and some people would struggle to visualise what you could do with that or how much that is. I have some parents who are thinking that we are going to be able to build this big fantastic new school with that amount of money...

There are other parents who do have a good, strong grasp on that and are in the construction industry and know what is achievable with \$7 million or \$9 million, and they have been coming to me all the time.

Also, some people within our parent population have a really good understanding of the disability access codes and things like that, so they know how much that is going to cost. That is all reflected in that 'Get Involved' campaign and that community feedback, and you can see some of the responses there. From the word 'go', the strong feeling from the parents is that \$7.1 million was not enough money and when it was then increased to \$9.95 million, I still have been told that it is not enough money.

**CHAIR** - The school association - do they have a formal position?

**Mr McCALL** - The school association has given this plan their approval, their tick. At that point in time, I do not think they would have given the approval if we were leaving the pick-up and drop-off zone on the street. That is part of the reason why this process has taken a bit longer. We went back to the drawing board and put that back in. But you use the word 'happy', I am not sure that they would use the word 'happy' now that we are not doing the early childhood classrooms.

**CHAIR** - They are resigned to the fact that this is it.

**Mr McCALL** - Yes. They have said, we will prioritise the safety of the kids in the pick-up and drop-off zone over the learning areas of the early childhood - which is a difficult decision to make.

**Ms BURNET** - I can see that this is like Solomon's choice, it is very difficult to weigh one against the other. I am interested in the community consultation. I can see that there was a significant amount of engagement, from what I have read, and not a bad response rate and involvement, which is good; but can you describe how it was that the community members, people who responded, came to those priorities and whether you get the impression from them that those are being met?

**Mr McCALL** - This would be the same for all sorts of developments that go on. A survey is put out and some questions asked to prioritise those. The priorities came through very strongly for the Montello rebuild and some of those were not achievable with the budget. For example,

a lot of parents who really wanted a school gym built. That's not achievable with \$7 million or \$9 million, or if you did, that's all you would build. Some of those priorities haven't happened; but there have been other priorities along the way that I feel that within the budget that we've been allowed, we've been able to try and address and meet those as best as we can within that dollar figure. Christie's done a good job, especially with the disability access. You saw today all these little multi-levelled levels into the side of the hill bring it all into two levels, and that will be good once it's happening. The reality is that it has used a lot of the money to make that move happen, which means that there is less money for some of that other stuff that are still probably strong priorities, but haven't been able to be achieved.

...

**Mr WILLIAMS** - If I may just go back to the consultation process. We absolutely value that process. I'm very proud of the initiative to put that in five or six years ago, to engage and listen up front, and we're very open about that. We released the outcomes report for everyone to see what the community and the school have said. And through that process, we then release our design, which hopefully is representative of what we've heard. And we did that again through the second phase of the consultation process.

My view is that that was well-received, because we did not receive any strong opposition to that plan.

### **New Build or Redevelopment?**

- 4.11 The Committee was aware that some in the school community, and the former school principal, supported a completely new school build on the school oval. The Committee sought further information on this proposal and whether it had been formally considered as viable option:

**CHAIR** - ... It was suggested, not only by a couple of people that I spoke to but also in here, that it should have started again. If it started on the flat surface, which was the oval area, and built a whole new school, then you wouldn't be dealing with a lot of these issues. I asked that question on site and I'd appreciate the response on the public record, just so those people know that I've asked the question. Why didn't we have a new build, a greenfield site, given the challenges with the site?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... The proposal was to redevelop and reuse, and that's a particular focus of the Department.

We have an ageing portfolio that we need to bring up to a contemporary standard and Montello isn't any different to that. I firmly believe that we will be able to do that with the investment that we're making, rather than rip apart, throw away and start new.

It is a reflection of the aged asset portfolio that we have right across the state, and a desire to work with what we have and reuse and contemporise - which we have been doing with the support of government and we wish to continue to do. I know that Dion, the previous principal, had a strong view of building a new school. That was not part of the submission that we put forward to government. Indeed, where that was proposed was on the oval, which is a much-needed oval for the school to use as well.

**CHAIR** - I think 'good bones' was what you told me the school had, at an earlier time today.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Despite its appearance, there are good bones there and worthwhile reusing rather than throwing away and disregarding, and it's something that the facility services team is absolutely committed to do because we have a number of schools that are in a similar condition we wish to reuse and repurpose, which is, I believe, the right thing to do.

**CHAIR** - So, obviously, Dion, your school community now has a change of attitude, from the previous principal who you told us has since retired. It came to that resolution that it was a repurposing, not a total request for a rebuild?

**Mr McCALL** - I think much the same as I said before with the gym. the reality is when you look at the price tag of the original price tag of \$7.1 million, it's not a practical solution to propose a brand-new build for that figure.

I know there have been lots of parents and people within the school who have proposed maybe it might be better to spend more money and have new buildings. The challenge that was ahead of me as the principal when I first walked in to the job was to use this price tag of \$7.1 million to make the best possible outcomes we could for it from a teaching and learning point of view. I have put myself into that to try and do that as best as I possibly can. I certainly know from the analytics of the feedback there was a lot of feedback mentioning bulldozers and we should get rid of that and start again.

**CHAIR** - They were pretty clear.

**Mr McCALL** - Yes. The reality I'm dealing with is I need to work with the facilities team and with Christie to try and come up with the best solution within that price tag. And I think we've come up with a pretty good solution within that price tag.

Would we have a better solution with more money? I'd say definitely yes.

**CHAIR** - Were both options looked at of redevelopment or complete rebuild? My understanding was that both options were on the table, let's look at them. Is that the case?

**Mr McCALL** - No, we have not looked at a new build option.

**CHAIR** - Discussions around a new build option?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I've never had any discussion about a new build option, none at all.

It is very difficult to visualise from the plans how what we saw today can be turned into contemporary learning and if I focus on MythBusters and one of the myths was - 'You can't polish a turd' - I love MythBusters and I watched that show, they did promise and show that you can. I don't mean that disrespectfully at all. I say that in the context of reusing and contemporising, modernising. Perhaps, Min who has worked on many projects over a number of years to convert old, aged, unsuitable assets into contemporary learning environments.

**Ms HARMAN** - I believe the work that Christie's done and what the plans show is that we will be providing contemporary learning.

Are we fixing everything on the site? No, because we've discussed that already, but we will provide new contemporary spaces and respond to the support requirements that Dion's talked about and enable trauma-informed practise on this site. I also think that utilisation of the oval to rebuild a brand-new school compared to the importance of the outdoor spaces to that school means redevelopment is the best option.

**CHAIR** - If you built a new school on the oval, when you got rid of the old buildings that are no longer necessary wouldn't you have that as your oval space? Wouldn't you do a swap?

**Ms HARMAN** - You would but you'd be terracing that and you wouldn't be able to achieve that external flat space the oval provides at the moment for outdoor play.

**CHAIR** - In the past that was probably like that before it was flattened.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - With an unlimited amount of money, of course you could achieve a new level playing surface.

## **How will the Redevelopment Contribute to Improved Learning**

- 4.12 One of the key focuses of the project is the provision of contemporary learning areas. The Committee questioned the witnesses on how this could help improve learning:

**Ms BURNET** - Chair, can we hear from the principal, Mr McCall, in relation to the contemporary pedagogy and how that might be enhanced with the proposal.

**Mr McCALL** - ... Currently, it is very difficult for our students to go from place to place within the school. It is a long distance to travel and transitions take extra time than it should. Especially when you are dealing with seven, eight, and nine-year olds, it can be challenging to get those students from place A to place B. For example, our person taking through the library needs to act in a certain kind of way to get those children from one place to another place. It is not starting off in a nice, positive, and friendly way because you feel like a drill sergeant getting children from one place to another, because that is what is required.

One of the benefits of this plan is that the transition to one learning area to the next will be a lot better. I feel that what we are doing at Montello, from a learning space point of view, with contemporary learning, for example, with our literacy program, we have made really good gains with our literacy instruction, particularly with our reading. But at the moment it involves lots of moving around for children going to different groups. It requires children moving up and down stairs, going to different rooms, and that takes a long time. Some of that valuable instruction time is used in transitioning around the school.

**Ms BURNET** - As a supplementary - it's probably difficult because of the different levels for some, as well?

**Mr McCALL** - Yes. For example, we have two grade 3-4 classes downstairs, which was at the bottom of the very big staircase that we saw this morning, and then another grade 3-4 class at the top of those stairs. At the moment, when we are breaking into those groups and we have about 90 children moving to different rooms. Putting 90 children on that set of stairs at the minute is a challenge for me, from a safety point of view it is a concern, but also from a teaching and learning point of view it is a concern as well.

### **Improved Site Accessibility**

- 4.13 Accessibility throughout the school has been identified as a major issue, and the Committee was aware the plans for the redevelopment include measures that aim to address this. When the Committee visited the school, it was very apparent that the topography of the site and the current layout of the school buildings presented significant challenges with respect to accessibility, especially between learning areas. The Committee asked the witnesses to expand on how the redevelopment would improve accessibility across the school:

**Ms BUTLER** - Could you run us through the disability access for the site, with the new plans in mind, and the lift that we saw this morning on our tour, and how the new design and the refit will potentially create a more accessible school.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The redevelopment will provide accessibility throughout the school.

...

...the redevelopment will include a lift and several ramps throughout to ensure that accessibility is provided.

...

**Ms DENMAN** - From the footpath we have provided an accessible path of travel to the principal pedestrian entry, which is the main administrative entryway. That also connects to the kitchen garden, which is fully accessible, which allows access to the dining room space and to the

sports courts. We also have accessible path of travel from the footpath to the kinder entryway as well.

If you have a look at the concept plans in the report, they are a little bit more up to date. We have two accessible car space areas; one adjacent to the kinder entry and one to the north near the hall which provides access via an accessible path of travel to the front door of the admin and also to the kitchen garden and support and the dining room, as per the access from the footpath.

Once you are inside the building, this diagram shows the continuous path of travel, which demonstrates that there is a continuous path of travel to every part of the school. We have achieved that by the introduction of a lift, which connects the lower ground floor with the upper ground floor, and the introduction of two large 1 in 20 ramps.

We have provided a 1 in 20 ramp because that is a gentler grade. It is not as steep. They connect from the centre addition to the earliest wing, which is the southernmost building. We're not quite sure why, but those buildings are approximately half a metre higher than the others on the lower ground floor, and 800 millimetres higher on the upper ground floor. So, those two ramps have been introduced to connect those.

From the learning environments we have also ensured that each indoor learning environment has an accessible path of travel to an adjacent outdoor learning environment. That's demonstrated to you by the arrows where they exit the building out into the play areas.

We discussed the outside-school-hours care facilities. To access that lower facility from the primary school, it would require exiting via the car park, via car to the lower car park, and then entering the building that way. Because of the steepness of the site, it would be simpler to use transport to achieve that, given the discussions we've had with our scope.

We believe that we've achieved a fully accessible outcome for Montello, and complies with the access to premises standards that are set out in the code - to the extent that we've provided an access to each type of space. It is not fully accessible to the oval without assistance, or fully accessible to some player equipment without assistance, but it is accessible to each learning space, each type of space, and to all outdoor learning spaces.

**CHAIR** - So, all the school areas for learning spaces are accessible by somebody in a wheelchair, somebody with a pram, to get around the school except for that after-school care area?

**Ms DENMAN** - But they can get to that building. It is accessible via the bottom car park.

**Ms BURNET** - And the amphitheatre, so that's accessible from the lower ground?

**Ms DENMAN** - Exactly, yes. Via the lift you could participate on the lower ground floor or on the upper ground floor of the amphitheatre. You will always be present and participating.

...

**CHAIR** - What about the ramp, ... what is the gradient there? Is it between 1-to-10 or 1-to-20?

**Ms DENMAN** - There is a variety of types of ramps.

You have a kerb crossing at a driveway or a car park onto a footpath. We have a 1-in-14 ramp, which requires the typical ramp you will see with hand rails on each side. It has certain maximum length and intermediate landings required.

Then we have the 1-in-20 ramp, which also has a maximum length. Because it is a lesser grade, depending on its width, it does not require hand rails; it is an easier gradient for people to manage.

We also have a 1-in-10, which is a step ramp. It is basically the equivalent of a single step over a ramp length of 1900. It is only allowed to be 1900 in length because it requires a bit more effort to get the extra height. They are all stipulated within the Australian standard.

...

**Ms BUTLER** - I wanted to clarify the standards around the ramps. It states here that on the plan key that the variable is 1-to-10 to 1-to-20. It is my understanding that the Australian standard is 1-to-14. Is my information correct?

**Ms DENMAN** - That is a ramp. They have different names but there is a step ramp, which is a 1-in-10 and it is in the standard.

**Ms BUTLER** - Is that in line with Australian standards for disability access?

**Ms HARMAN** - For short distances only.

**MS DENMAN** - Yes, as long as it is a maximum length of 1900, which essentially gives you a rise of 190, which is a maximum step height.

### **Improvements to Student Drop-off and Pick-up**

- 4.14 One of the priorities that had also been identified was the need to make improvements to the student drop-off and pick up arrangements. The Committee asked the Department's witnesses to provide further detail on these new arrangements, including those relating to the bus stop near the school. The witnesses described some of the issues with current drop-off and pick-up arrangements and outlined how the proposed works would provide a safer environment:

**Ms BUTLER** - ...In relation to the drop off and pick up area. It does seem to make sense, however, the bus stop for the students to access - and yes, apparently there is only one bus that does leave and drop off. It looks like the students have to walk across the entrance of the car entrance area, to get to that bus stop.

Could you talk us through that design, because that seemed like a fault which could in turn down the track, lead to a really bad consequence. It could be dangerous.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... I will start by saying, we have had a traffic engineer heavily involved in the modelling and assessing how that situation works. Yes, that would appear to be the case. What we talked about today was also the timing of the arrivals and departures and the crossing guard having the availability to stop the traffic and manage the traffic at the same time.

**Ms DENMAN** - We are obviously inheriting a pre-existing condition. And so, there is only so much we can do. I can't redesign the road as such, but we planned as best we could to limit any conflict between car and pedestrian movement. You have highlighted the one area we could not resolve without any management to help mitigate any problems with that.

We have highlighted the discussions we had on when are parents picking up their children and when does the bus arrive.

There was an understanding the majority of the high traffic flow for pickup will have already left the site by the time the bus arrives and that the children wait with the teacher in the pickup waiting area. Then the teacher guides that group of children up to the bus stop to hop on the bus. They're not moving without supervision or guidance from a teacher, with the addition of the person managing traffic at the crossing.

We actually already have this situation on the site, in that children can still cross the driveway to approach the bus stop. We are really still dealing with an existing condition that is there. We looked at turning circles with the traffic engineer to get buses onto the site. Because of the steepness of the site, we're chasing the hill, so we really would have lost all of the kitchen garden space in order to have enough room for a bus to come in and to turn and come back

out again. It's trying to manage that balance between ensuring the school still has all of its recreation and amenity on site, space for the forecourt, the kitchen garden.

This is a flatter area at the top and the further we chase the hill, the steeper it's getting. The problem compounded rather than resolving itself by trying to get that bus onto the site, so that's where we've arrived, at leaving the bus stop in its current position.

**Ms BUTLER** - Because there is another space further down, adjacent to and for people listening to this broadcast who don't have access to the graph I'll explain.

There is a crossing at the outdoor learning - play - kinder area which goes across the car park, but there's a footpath which runs adjacent to the hall, down past the outdoor learning - play area. Adjacent to - it runs alongside the car park and then there would be space potentially, for students to cross on that crossing. They're not having to go across an entry or exit point, unless I'm reading it incorrectly, but there is a dedicated crossing there.

That could potentially be a really big problem because you're bringing it down to people management as a traffic safety risk. It's important for the record we've raised that as a concern because. On the flip side, is there a bus that drops students off of a morning and how would you manage that?

**Mr McCALL** - Yes. The bus that drops people off before school on the other side of the road near the crossing. They walk across the crossing guard and then across...

...

**Ms DENMAN** - Looking at other areas of the street, there's certain distances in front of the stop and behind the stop that's required and with proximity to the T-intersection and then the corner, further up the end where that second crossing is, advice from the traffic engineers is they didn't fit the requirements for a safe pull in and pull out with the other movement going on.

**Ms BUTLER** - This is the best-case scenario.

**Ms DENMAN** - Yes. there's still room for discussion, particularly with council about where they locate and we're very open to that.

**Mr McCALL** - Yes, I think this is the best solution for this budget.

**Ms BURNET** - ... We talked quite a bit about mitigation of problems this morning when we were on the school tour. Obviously, this is mitigating problems and problems of traffic movement, dropping children off in the morning, picking them up at night and high on the list of concerns of those consulted.

I suppose some school drop-off times limit car movements, and I note there are alternatives, but has that been considered as part of this as an option for your school, principal?

**Mr McCALL** - The current situation is we close our driveway down at 2:00 p.m. every day because we only have a very small amount of disability parks and then visitor parks. Previous to us closing the school down, there were actually physical fights over those car spots and people were turning up at 1:30 in the afternoon, quarter to 2.00 p.m. in the afternoon to make sure they had a pole position in the car park. That's what led us to do that. And then each afternoon at the moment, it's usually myself - not today because I'm here, but I'll be on the mobile phone to the staff on the deck who will then - I'll say, Lucy's mum's here. They'll send Lucy up. We'll safely put her in the car, then the next car will go.

Previous to us having that arrangement in place, it was really chaotic and bedlam. In that little road you saw right near the school hall, people were actually overtaking people on that road because they were annoyed at the fact that someone had to take a couple of minutes to plug their child into a car seat. I feel like we have had to put all this stuff, which is pretty labour intensive, into place to come up with a solution. That is why it came through as such a strong priority for the parents, especially when they were consulted, because a lot of the parents realised the safety of the children was paramount.

## **Project Timeline and the Staging**

- 4.15 The Committee was aware the project had already been out to tender, with appointment of a contractor expected in August 2024. Noting that work cannot commence until after receiving the approval of the Committee, the witnesses were asked if the completion date of January 2026 was considered achievable:

**CHAIR** - ... The construction tender was advertised in April ... Then the parliamentary hearing in July - we've met that. Contractor to be appointed August 2024.

*It doesn't leave a lot of time between this committee's decision and the contractor being appointed. Can you just walk me through where we are with that timeline?*

**Ms HARMAN** - Tenders have been received and the evaluation is underway. It might be a bit optimistic because we no doubt won't have a decision from the committee until August, but we will be well placed once a decision is made - should it be favourable - to award the contractor fairly soon after.

**CHAIR** - ... to appoint a contractor and then start construction - are you talking early August, late September...

**Ms HARMAN** - It varies depending on the capacity of the selected tenderer. Fortunately, things seem to have got a bit easier. A few years ago, it was a was a considerable period, particularly in more remote locations. Six weeks isn't unreasonable.

...

**Ms BUTLER** - Today we heard that the construction will take about two years. Are we going to be able to meet January 2026?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - A little unknown because the criteria on the tender is the value for money consideration, price, time and quality. That's being worked through. We would do our best to try and minimise the impact to the school and timing, such as the start of a new school year. ... There's an element of unknown and we'll know that once we've worked through the tender process. That's our guess at this point.

**Ms DENMAN** - Once we have that preferred tenderer, then we can discuss in detail the staging elements of the project. You're right - it's two years and it is a bit optimistic for January 26. It'll be dependent on working with the tenderer and working with the management of the school.

- 4.16 The Committee was also interested to understand how the works would be staged so that school operations could continue with as little disruption as possible:

**Ms BUTLER** - I know it would just be a loose strategy and management plan at the moment, but what would the project schedule look like? How would the school coexist as a learning provider whilst all this work would potentially be underway? It would be a logistical nightmare. How will you coexist as a school and create or maintain a learning environment for the students whilst this project is underway?

**Ms HARMAN** - We have prepared staging diagrams, which we don't have today, but that is looking at how we can ensure that the works can progress while there are other classrooms available for the children.

The tender or the requests for contractors is that they work with the school. Certain times have been stipulated, or may be stipulated, where work can or can't happen, depending on its proximity to adjacent learning spaces. They're the sorts of things that would affect the program and the completion dates, to ensure the sanity of staff and children, some work might need to be programmed or slowed down just to ensure that all of that can coexist. Certainly, a disruption, but that is the nature of construction.

We have staged the works. The demountables are the last to be relocated, so they'll be in constant use throughout to allow the other spaces to be freed up while the work's being done there.

We have a plan for how that can happen, and then it will be day-to-day management of that.

**Mr McCALL** - And we are running at less than the capacity of the school as well, which helps with that. From a staging point of view, it's going to be chaotic. There's no way around it, but we will be able to move classes to different areas of the school. There'll be somewhere to move to. We'll work with the builders to try and get some of this signed off on earlier so that we can have students move into those areas as we go along.

**Mr HARRISS** - Will there be certain build works that have to be done in holiday periods or not, or is it anticipated that it can go -

**Ms HARMAN** - There usually is. I'm not across the detail of this program but there's often elements of construction where we time for holiday periods, absolutely - like changing over for a new switchboard or access works. The ones that will be very disruptive to the learning environment of the school and impact on the day-to-day safe operation of the school.

**Mr HARRISS** - Do we know how that sits with completion times, as in spacing the program out, or not really?

**Ms HARMAN** - Not at this point, because that will be a discussion with the contractor.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - And indeed part of the tender submission process that we work through and then preferred contractor and working through that staging plan.

...

**Ms HARMAN** - We also have Christie and Dion and Matt at the forefront of the build process working with the contractor, and we have to ensure we get quality as well. Those timeframes will be set within the contractual arrangements. The school will be heavily engaged through the construction phase and involved in site meetings, and be fully aware of the programme as we go through the construction phase to hopefully assist in the running of the school.

## **STEM Area Windows**

- 4.17 The Committee had seen first-hand the issues with the windows in the STEM area of the school during the site visit. The Committee recognised the significant safety issues with the windows, which were not safe to open as they are prone to dropping quickly and unexpectedly, which created a risk of injury. However, keeping the windows closed presented further issues, in that this results in a poorly ventilated learning environment.
- 4.18 The Committee was very concerned with this situation, with Members expressing their disappointment that these windows would not be replaced as part of the redevelopment. The Committee sought, and was provided with, an assurance that this issue would be addressed, with Mr Williams committing to working with Mr McCall to ensure the windows were safe to use:

**CHAIR** - I note at the bottom of page 4 it talks about how the Department 'aims to provide facilities that minimise cost to building maintenance budgets'. We went through the STEM part of the of the building, and we were informed that the windows were not going to be replaced in that particular area. If you are talking about minimising cost of building maintenance budgets and the minimisation of energy consumption - and I am sure the

member for Huon, Mr Harriss, will talk about that further on - why would there not be a replacement of the windows? Particularly in that STEM building, when you cannot even open them safely because if you did, somebody might lose a finger if they dropped down.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Thank you. First and foremost, we want to make sure there is a safe operation in the school.

**CHAIR** - There is not with those windows...

**Mr WILLIAMS** - As I saw today, yes, thank you for bringing that up.

My commitment is to work with Dion to make sure the school can operate safely.

With any capital project, there has to be discussion around priorities because it's simply not possible to deliver all priorities within funding availability. That's a reality of the challenges that we face with every project we have.

**CHAIR** - I say this with the greatest respect, but this isn't about a priority, this is a safety aspect, from my perspective. I hope it is from everyone else that's sitting here and there and anyone else who knows the school. That's just not acceptable.

I see a strong reason those windows need to be replaced ASAP - a bit like the children's climbing infrastructure.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Dion and I have spoken subsequent to your visit and that's my commitment to work with Dion to do that.

We don't have an outcome of our tender process as yet. That is being worked through and I'm hopeful we get a positive outcome, and we will invest every cent into Montello Primary School. I say that because there is flexibility as we haven't contracted with the builder as yet to do that.

**Ms BUTLER** - One of the main concerns here is there is an investment of \$9.95 million into the school and there's a whole wall of windows which, if they fell, well, what they don't use would actually sever children's fingers. Those windows aren't being replaced as part of that \$9.95 million, and that just seems to be either really stingy or not listening to the needs of the school community: making sure those kids are safe.

If you can't open windows because they're unsafe, surely that would be a priority ahead of other things that are on this list of needs for the school. We would seriously ask that the window replacement is considered because it's certainly not appropriate. Any windows that can't open in a primary school is not appropriate, especially after we've been through COVID.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Absolutely, and my commitment stands to work with them to resolve that. Safety is the number one priority. And yes, through COVID, we examined every external window in every school to make sure that it could open and close safely. I'm very disappointed to see that today -

**Ms BUTLER** - It is a few years ago now when surely, that should have been -

**Mr WILLIAMS** - It's my disappointment.

...

**Ms BURNET** - Chair, I might just ask a question, if I may. I think Mr Williams talked about the guillotine windows that we saw will be addressed; is that what I'm hearing?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes, absolutely. I'll work with Dion to make sure that a solution is in place to make sure the windows safely open and close.

- 4.19 The Committee asked what energy efficiency measures would be included in the works, and, noting that some electrical work would also be undertaken, why the installation of solar panels was not also being done at the same time:

**Mr HARRISS** - ... what requirements are going to energy ratings with the rebuild?

*I know, obviously, when we're doing non-commercial stuff, there's ratings you have to comply with, so that was one of them. Then the other one was if we're going to a \$10 million refurbishment and you were to put solar on at that time rather than doing it afterwards, there would be cost savings.*

...

**Ms DENMAN** - All our new building work we designed to meet current standards and then the extent of refurbishment that we can afford into the existing spaces is obviously budget dependent. That's something that has to be assessed to the extent the scope of the budget allows us to do. When we commit to any new work, though, we are required to comply with all of the energy efficiency requirements of the Building Code.

**CHAIR** - Is there a separate fund that funds electrical upgrades that could be used in the Montello Primary School upgrade? Those funds that are not used from this particular reference - should it see favour - then could be put into some of those safety aspects. Is there an opportunity to do that?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - As part of the capital program, government has allocated us an electrical switchboard upgrade program. I think we're into our third year of upgrading.

*Needless to say, we have a lot of switchboards around the state. A lot of switchboards that are reflective of the age of the asset and we are prioritising that based on the highest need. We have rated every switchboard, based on its condition and we are progressively working that through. Yes, there is -*

**CHAIR** - But if you're upgrading a facility that would require an upgrade of an electrical switchboard, wouldn't it make economic sense to actually do the upgrade, to put solar in and do that all in the one go out of that bucket of money and leave the infrastructure upgrade from this particular bucket of money that may well address other safety aspects? Or do I just make too much common sense here?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I would love to be able to do all of that at once. The reality is it's not feasible to do that. But in saying that, where that opportunity exists, absolutely, we'd take that opportunity if it can align appropriately -

**CHAIR** - Right. So, it could become a priority?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Maybe, and the solar installation likewise. Government has invested in solar upgrades in schools and we are rolling out more of larger scale solar than what has previously been done. We get benefit from that obviously, because the usage is during the day.

*We are capturing the savings from those solar installations and we'll be reinvesting. Likewise, we're into year three of that program, that is gathering momentum. The further we go, the more that we will be able to do.*

- 4.20 The Committee also sought further information on other energy efficiency measures, in particular, ventilation within the school buildings:

**Ms BURNET** - You talked about the enduring quality and building for 50 years. As part of that enduring quality, is there energy efficiencies which will ultimately bring down the cost of power and so forth with the proposed new designs? That also includes proper ventilation - we've just been through a pandemic - and proper ventilation allowed at the same time?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Absolutely, yes, and ventilation is a very important part of the project...

**Ms DENMAN** - We've relied on using passive ventilation for our compliance with the building code. So, all the operable doors and windows are calculated and quantified to ensure that

they're getting enough fresh air in to keep that air healthy. And we also, in our centre addition, have windows that will have a CO2 monitor, so they will actually open and operate to ensure that air is coming in and that will be extracted through the centre of that new central addition.

We have done some improvement to the windows that we've been discussing. I think three bays of those windows are being replaced with new operable doors and glazing to provide access to the new deck and learning area in that part. We have had lengthy discussions about how we balance all of that out to try to establish our scope. There definitely is improvement on that facade, but not in its entirety. There are new doors and operable - I think that is operable doors going out to the deck on that level, so all those new doors will allow to ensure that we have the right result when the project is finished and doesn't prevent further upgrade and maintenance to go on. A lot of those things can be done with cyclical maintenance and five or ten-year plans. So, we've looked at perhaps the notion of enduring quality, in that we don't want to - we're not doing anything that would prevent continuing improvement of all of the parts of Montello, acknowledging that we can't currently - the scope that's on the page is the scope that matches the budget we've been given.

## **Toilet Facilities**

- 4.21 The Committee had seen the toilet block that had been closed because its remote location was not conducive to student safety. The Committee sought further information on the proposed new toilets facilities, and whether the current usable toilet facilities were suitable and adequate until these were built:

**Ms BUTLER** - I have a quick question on the bathroom facilities... thank you for showing us the bathroom facility or the toilet facility and change room facility that is currently not being utilised due to not being safe.

...

Could you just tell us the number of toilets which will be available to the students between now and the build completion because they're not being able to use their normal toilet facilities? They're using the toilet facilities up in the school hall, I believe. Could you for the record say how many toilets that is? Will that be the number of toilets that all students from the school will be using between now and when the build is completed?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... The toilet capacity for a school is obviously very important and is set under the building code based on the capacity of the school, which is 475.

The toilet block that we saw today was isolated, very old and, rightfully, Dion and the teachers have decided that that's unsafe to use. He's done that knowing that he has other toilet options to use. Those toilet options are not in all the right locations; hence the proposal that we put on the table to make sure there are individual private cubicles positioned in all the key areas around the school.

**Ms BUTLER** - That's in the new build. I'm talking about the interim.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Absolutely. Perhaps, Dion, you might be able to give a bit more information on how the toilets are working.

**Mr McCALL** - It is a bit of a pressure. At the moment we have 285 students. The decision we made is that in regard to the four boys' toilets and the four girls' toilets that are in that current bottom location the risks that are presented weren't worth keeping them open from a safety point of view. Currently there are enough toilets for our students to use, but it just means extra travel time and distance. It's more of an extra transition, especially for those children down in the bottom toilets.

...

**Ms DENMAN** - Our first stage of the programmed works is the entire lower ground level, which is years 3 to 6 students.

Those toilets that you saw that are currently out of action will be demolished and replaced in the first stage, so we are addressing that as the first priority, which will result in additional toilets by the end of the first stage.

**Ms BUTLER** - How many toilets are there at the moment?

**Mr McCALL** - ... At the moment we have 285 students and we're looking at 15 to 16 different cubicle toilets, but some of those are in different locations. Some are more appropriate for kinder or early childhood students and different things like that. There are enough toilets, but they are not in the best location or the most convenient location.

### **Concerns Raised by Ms Natalie Bugg**

- 4.22 Ms Bugg, a member of the school community, attended the hearing to relay her concerns to the Committee regarding the proposed redevelopment of Montello Primary School. Ms Bugg's concerns related to accessibility, including compliance with relevant standards and legislation, the need to provide a safe environment for staff and students, the works being prioritised in the redevelopment and the adequacy of the project budget.

- 4.23 Ms Bugg stated there had been a need for an upgrade to the school for some time, to ensure the school complied with legalisation and standards requiring the provision of a safe and accessible campus:

**Ms BUGG** - ... throughout the years there hasn't been, comparatively, to other schools - and unfortunately in this state, many other schools fall into the same problem where they have been just missed for this very, very important funding to bring them up to the legal standards to provide a safe education and a safe access to education for the students, a safe workplace for the staff and for the community.

... However, as I'm well aware, you've all had a walk through this morning from the previous talks, it grossly falls short of anything resembling a safe access to education or safe access for staff or for the community, in many areas, ... The accessibility around the school in that regards, the disruption to classrooms, just through what the current design is. There is so many improvements that could and should be made.

- 4.24 Ms Bugg then suggested the current plans to improve accessibility would not meet this aim, or comply with the relevant legislation and standards:

**Ms BUGG** - Now, the proposed plan that was handed around to us all just before by the Department.

...

Access ramps variable 1-10 to 1-20. If this is the access diagram for disability, I'm sorry to say, but under CBOS legislation, access for disabilities it falls short, because the minimum legal standard is 1 in 14 gradients for any person with a disability. This is a ground or public land, owned by the Department of Education. It falls under those legal requirements, as does anywhere else for a disability ramp in the state of Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - You're saying that anything that meets the 1 in 10 does not meet the standard?

**Ms BUGG** - 1 in 10, 1 in 11, 1 in 12, 1 in 13, does not meet the legal requirements, okay.

Obviously, this very informal Photoshop version doesn't actually give the engineering details as to which area pertains to those shortfalls, or the earth moving that would need to be done to help ensure those gradients could be met safely. It also doesn't mention the width of the paths.

For any of those general paths or general ramp areas sloped, it's got to be a minimum of 1200 wide.

... As you can appreciate if you're on crutches, for example. How on earth, if you've got a path that's this wide or just a metre - and I mean no disrespect to anyone here - but if you're a bit bigger of a size or whatnot or an older student, in that regard, you're arm width is wider than someone in grade one or prep age level to how much width they would need.

If you're trying to walk down a path or a ramp, for example, 900 or a metre wide, you can't even safely get yourself down the damn thing and keep yourself on it, let alone if you're in a wheelchair or you've got to try and turn anywhere to come back the other way. You can't do it safely.

...

The worst part of all of this is that in the Disability Standards for Education Act 2005, which is a federal act, in section 32 clearly states that all areas or all, if you know what I mean, schools should be up to disability standards.

...

... Part of that federal 2005 legislation was that every state and territory in the country was given ten years-worth of extra funding as part of a detailed layout plan, so every school across the country could be brought up to disability and accessibility standards. Please tell me, in your walkthrough today, where Montello meets that for its staff, students, or the community. And please tell me how the Department of Education is providing a safe access to education.

That is a legal requirement, that every school in this country should be accessible for people with disabilities. That is federal legislation. The Department can't hide behind that. They can't cry 'funding' because there was a 10-year staged funding plan for it, so there is no excuse that's tangible.

...

**Ms BURNET** - ... We have concept plans, conceptual plans, in front of us and the proposal is to address those access issues across the site for each of those learning areas and play areas and so forth. I believe that these are concept plans. Can you tell me, and it might be a question that we ask the architect as well or the Department, but your understanding is what we have before us does not comply at all?

**Ms BUGG** - No. A building surveyor would point that out very, very quickly.

...

... A building designer - who is also required as part of any major building project whether it be commercial or residential, in this case a commercial sort of setting - is required to draw up these plans. To do that they must draw those to legal requirement standards. As I identified to you, clearly just the plan alone already shows you it doesn't.

- 4.25 Ms Bugg also questioned the adequacy of the project budget. Ms Bugg was of the view that the project budget would be insufficient to undertake the works required to ensure the school met its obligations relating to safety and accessibility:

**Ms BUGG** - ... The school shouldn't be getting a cheap bandaid solution that doesn't even comply to legal or legislative requirements.

...

... A lot of the thought, if you know what I mean, that has gone into this with the crumbs that they've been given to try and do it, is a good start. However, it's a band-aid to a bigger problem and it doesn't fix the problem. And it is too, too little too late for something that's already years overdue.

- 4.26 Ms Bugg contended the central priorities for the project should focus primarily on upgrading the school to ensure it was an accessible and safe environment which complied with disability access legislation and standards:

**Ms BUGG** - It shouldn't be just about - if you know what I mean - ensuring it looks pretty or a table's going to last the next 30 years, so it cost a couple of dollars extra. Don't get me wrong, I agree those things are important too.

...

**CHAIR** - Natalie, you don't agree that the proposal - because that's what we're looking at as a committee - meets -

**Ms BUGG** - No, it is a massive shortfall to what that school needs to get up to just basic legal requirements.

Don't get me wrong, I fully agree they deserve to have extra things as was spoken about equipment and whatnot, making the classrooms look pretty, extra bits to make it more enticing for a safe and happy learning area. I completely agree that every school should have that too, and funding only goes around so much. However, there are core things - the school needs and deserves those upgrades that have been withheld for years by the Department.

...

**Ms BUGG** - My biggest issue and it has been right from the start of this, okay - now, in 2021, Jeremy Rockliff turned around as a campaign promise in March of that year, claiming Montello Primary School would get \$7.3 million. He committed it not to accessibility or anything like that, specifically about making the school look prettier, making the toilet block situations and whatnot fixed, some parking issues.

...Montello has been screaming out for this funding for many more years after they were legally obligated to have already got it, to fix the school for everyone - let alone maintain it throughout the years. What I'm asking for is not only this and the rest of it - so that it doesn't sit down and sandbag you with pretty, fancy words that aren't inclusive for all students, staff and communities.

- 4.27 Having heard Ms Bugg's testimony, the Committee asked the Department's witnesses to respond to the matters she had raised.

- 4.28 The Department's witnesses provided additional information confirming that the relevant accessibility standards must, and would, be met:

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I'm sure others will support and certainly, welcome Ms Bugg's input into the project. It has been a particular focus, as it should be, through any redevelopment to make sure there's appropriate accessibility throughout the school.

We don't have a choice but to comply with the law. That's what we must do and that's what we do and I believe we are doing that. I'll let Christie and Min also comment around how that occurs in the process of the Building Code and all the other legal requirements in the development application and the like. But rest assured, we do and we always will comply, because that's a requirement. And as with safety, as we've talked about it is paramount. My commitment is to work with Dion, as we work with every school to make sure that should principals and schools need support to ensure safety for staff, students and community members, we do that. We do that every day and as you can appreciate, there's an enormous amount of activity on schools every day. It is front and centre in what we do.

Perhaps if we talk about the process of ensuring we meet the legislation requirements of the Building Code is probably a key point to start with. Perhaps, if we give a little bit more clarity about the spacing or the requirements for disabled access...

**CHAIR** - Well, particularly the reference to the minimum legal standard of being one in 14 minimum. I'm interested in that and sure others are also.

**Ms DENMAN** - I can't say why that is a held belief that one in 14 is the minimum, except to say that a ramp by definition is one in 14 and a step ramp by definition is a one in 10. according to the Australian Standard, which is AS 1421 part 1, which is... the standard for access for disability.

...

... that has already been raised and our office has provided the diagram from the standard that shows that is an accessible ramp within the Australian Standards for access.

That has been clarified within the process. I'd also say that this - which it was noted - that this is a concept diagram. It's not drawn plans to demonstrate compliance. It's a concept to demonstrate the strategy for access and it's dated March last year. We have had nearly 15 months of developing our plans to demonstrate that they're compliant. Those plans -

**CHAIR** - Is there a plan now? This is concept, is there a proper plan?

**Ms DENMAN** - ... the plans were viewed at the tour this morning.

**Ms HARMAN** - But there's also full documentation now of the accessibility through the tender documentation.

...

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... As part of the consulting team, there is a building surveyor involved and that building surveyor has to provide a certificate of likely compliance that the council needs in order to satisfy their requirements. We don't have it yet, it is a work in progress. We have lodged documentation but that has not been finalised yet. From a legality compliance check it is the building surveyor's certificate of likely compliance that is the key part in the planning application.

**CHAIR** - The width of the ramps will definitely be at least 1200?

**Ms DENMAN** - We have to maintain an accessible path of travel of one metre under the code, but they may be greater than that throughout the site. Without the plan here, I cannot reference and tell you but they would be varying in size. They may be one metre where we are limited because we are in an existing building. There may be situations where we design within the constraints that sometimes are given to us, but we still must comply with the minimum standards-

**CHAIR** - Which is one metre and not 1200?

**Ms DENMAN** - That is my understanding, yes. But without having the documents to reference or specific examples, I would not like to generalise.

...

... I do know that our external pathways are much wider.

**Ms HARMAN** - We generally try to exceed those quite considerably because of numbers of students...

...

**Ms DENMAN** - I would add that we have gone beyond the minimum, to provide a greater extent of accessibility than the legislation requires of us.

- 4.29 The Committee also questioned the Department's witnesses on the adequacy of the project budget, and whether it would be sufficient to address the identified accessibility issues and ensure compliance with accessibility standards:

**Ms BUTLER** - ... under the CBOS legislation ... my understanding is that for major works to be conducted in that public space, the whole of that public space has to be accessible - so, that would have to be part of the term of reference. It couldn't just be certain sections of that. Do you think there is going to be enough funding in this budget to be able to meet that standard

for the whole site? There are so many areas of it that need that upgrade - do you think you are really going to be able to do that within this budget?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - That is the plan that we have put forward and that is the plan that we believe.

**Ms HARMAN** - The Department is committed to completing the plan that is on the table.

**Ms BUTLER** - I am not convinced you are going to be able to meet it, but that is just my own opinion. I am not convinced that you are going to be able to meet those standards on this patchwork budget for this project.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - We are having a positive outlook to get the best for Montello Primary School.

**Ms BUTLER** - I really want them to have their upgraded primary school, but I do not believe this budget will cover it.

...

**Mr McCALL** - As you can probably imagine, I've had quite a few meetings with her over this period of time that her son has been enrolled, not just about disability access issues, but about a lot of educational issues. The thing that she keeps coming back to me is that from the word go, as soon as this was announced, she was of the opinion that it wouldn't be enough money to meet the Disability Code, and at that point in time it was \$7 million. And she felt that it needed to be a lot more...

**CHAIR** - And your view is that with the additional funds that have been allocated and the plans that the committee has before it, that there will be adequate funds to meet those disability requirements at Montello Primary School, while building a contemporary learning space for your students?

**Mr McCALL** - Well, I guess the plan that's been put forward, I've been led to believe meets the Disability Standard Code and that I feel that most of the budget we've used has been put in that direction to make sure that it gets there. Where I'm sitting is that the difference between \$7 million and \$9 million, I don't think is significant. I suppose the people who have been advocating to me saying there should be more money weren't talking about the difference between \$7 million and \$9 million, I think they're talking about quite a bit more. I feel that at the end of this project, there's still going to be quite a bit of pressure from the community asking for Montello redevelopment stage two.

### **Does the Project Meet the Requirements of the Public Works Committee Act?**

4.30 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks an assurance that each project meets the criteria detailed in Clause 15(2) of the Public Works Committee Act 1914. Broadly, and in simple terms, these relate to the purpose of the works, the need for and advisability of undertaking the works, are the works a good use of public funds and do the works provide value for money to the community. The Committee questioned the witnesses on this, and Mr Williams provided the following confirmation:

**CHAIR** - ... Does the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes, I believe so.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes, I believe so.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I'll continue, and yes, I believe so.

**CHAIR** - *Do the proposed works provide value for money?*

**Mr WILLIAMS** - *Yes, we've gone through a considerable process to get to this point and propose the priorities that are presented today. Yes, I believe so.*

**CHAIR** - *Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?*

**Mr WILLIAMS** - *Yes.*

## 5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

5.1 The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- *Montello Primary School – Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, 3 July 2024, Department of Education, Children and Young People.
- *Montello Primary School Redevelopment - Access Diagram*, Denman and Associates Architects, dated 14 March 2023
- *DECYP response to PWC request for additional information*, 22 July 2024.

## **6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Committee does hold some concerns with the works as proposed. Firstly, the Committee is concerned the project budget may not be sufficient to undertake the works required to improve both accessibility across the school to the required standard and to provide a connected, contemporary learning environment. The Committee therefore urges the Department to adhere to the scope of the works as presented to the Committee, at a minimum, to ensure there is no compromise made on accessibility across the school or the provision of contemporary learning areas.
- 6.2 The Committee was also aware that other areas of the school had been identified as needing an upgrade, however, the allocated budget meant these could not be completed as part of this project. Furthermore, the Committee is of the view that any proposed works should facilitate future upgrade work that may be proposed for the school. Therefore, the Committee also requests that the works are done in a way that does not preclude, and in fact promotes and complements, a future upgrade to the school to address the schools identified needs.
- 6.3 The Committee also holds significant concerns about the safety of the windows in the school's STEM area. The Committee understands fixing this safety issue is not part of this program of works. However, the Committee does note the commitments made by Department representatives at the hearing and strongly suggests the Department address this as a matter of urgency.
- 6.4 Notwithstanding these concerns, the Committee is satisfied the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed, the redevelopment is expected to provide contemporary solutions to a range of complex site issues.
- 6.5 The proposed works are expected to provide for a safer student arrival and departure, connected and contemporary learning areas for high-quality education experiences, greater accessibility and improved transitions throughout the school, improvements to student bathrooms, professional support offices, a welcoming entry, and improved connections to outdoor learning settings.
- 6.6 Accordingly, the Committee recommends the Redevelopment of Montello Primary School, at an estimated cost of \$9.95 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.

