



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Jo Palmer MLC

Monday 23 September 2024

MEMBERS

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC (Chair)
Hon Dean Harriss MLC
Hon Sarah Lovell MLC (Deputy Chair)
Hon Bec Thomas MLC
Hon Kerry Vincent MLC

IN ATTENDANCE

HON JO PALMER

Minister for Education, Minister for Disability Services

Jenny Burgess

A/Secretary, Department of Education, Children and Young People

Sue McKerracher

A/Deputy Secretary Keeping Children Safe, Department of Education, Children and Young People

Trudy Pearce

Deputy Secretary Schools & Early Years, Department of Education, Children and Young People

Ingrid Ganley

Acting Executive Director, Disability and Reform

Katharine O'Donnell

Director Education Regulation, Department of Education, Children and Young People

The committee resumed at 3.49 p.m.

Output Group 1 - Education

1.1 In School Education

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, for appearing before our Estimates Committee A, initially your Education portfolio. I invite you to introduce the people at the table and apologise for Tim not being here but maybe watching, and then make an opening statement should you wish to. Then we will go to questions.

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly. Thank you very much, Chair. I do hope our former secretary isn't watching, but if he is, we send him our very best wishes. I want to introduce Jenny Burgess, no stranger to the committee. Jenny is in the Acting Secretary position. Also, at the table today I have Kane Salter, who is the Deputy Secretary of Business Operations and Support. We also have a number of our other deputy secretaries joining us today, who will come to the table when need be.

CHAIR - Do you want to make an opening statement on your Education portfolio, minister?

Ms PALMER - Yes, certainly, thank you. The Tasmanian Liberal government is committed to ensuring that every child is known, safe, well and learning. The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) budget contains \$266.7 million in new and additional funding over the 2024-25 and forward Estimates for the Education portfolio.

As the Education minister, I believe that every student entering our schools has immense potential and it is our duty to set them on a path to lifelong success. High-quality and equitable education empowers individuals, families and communities to build a better and brighter future for themselves and for Tasmania. We can do this because of the dedicated and hard-working staff of the department, including our principals, our teachers and our support staff, and I thank them.

Since becoming the Minister for Education, I have made it a priority to visit our schools and Child and Family Learning Centres across Tasmania to listen and learn about what more we can do to help improve our education outcomes.

My key objectives as minister are to ensure that every young person can read when they leave our school system so they have the foundational skills they need for life, to create a cohesive and engaging education system that supports lifelong learning and skills, and ensure we are providing the best possible facilities to support the wellbeing of our learners and workforce to thrive with a major program of upgrades through the school building blitz.

Education is a fundamental priority to Tasmania and that is why the 2024-25 State Budget continues the Tasmanian government's record investment into the education and care of children, young people and all Tasmanians so they can lead positive lives and have bright futures. In your hands, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. I will go to Sarah first, if you like, and then I have a couple to follow up with.

PUBLIC

Ms LOVELL - Thank you, Chair. Minister, the policy and parameter statement shows efficiency dividends of \$81 million in Education. I understand that you have said before a number of times that there'll be no cuts to schools or in schools, but there are a lot of programs and staff that are critical to education delivery in schools that do not sit within the department. Have you identified where those savings will be made?

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much for the question. I will say at the very beginning that this is a really difficult process. We are very much approaching this as a team from me and my office in that ministerial capacity through to Jenny and her team. The budget efficiency dividend that needs to be achieved in the Education portfolio is \$11.8 million in 2024-25. It is \$23.9 million in 2025-26, increasing to an estimated structural reduction of \$36.4 million in 2026-27.

Operating efficiencies are subject to consideration while protecting frontline services. In schools, our school principals will continue to operate on a business-as-usual basis in filling their allocated positions. They will not be asked to implement vacancy control processes in their schools. Teacher allocation methods will remain consistent with the school resourcing standard and the Fairer Funding Model. For example, schools will have an increase in resources where there is a demonstrated need, such as increased enrolments or it could be students with a disability, which is the process that we have now. The immediate focus is on achieving the 2024-25 efficiency allocation whilst in parallel working through strategies and actions to achieve the estimated structural reduction of \$36.4 million in 2026-27. I can tell you we have not settled on those budget efficiencies; we are working through that now. As a new minister, I want the opportunity to have a look at the work that the department has done to date, but we have not come to a position where I can tell you where that is.

What I do want to share with you is some of the areas that I have asked the department to have a focus on and to come back to me with possibilities. I will just list those now for you. Looking at the review establishment management, so that is budgeted FTEs, considering DECYP required response to the commission of inquiry, there may be an opportunity to pause or stop current non commission of inquiry effort and re-divert resources to the commission of inquiry work within the commission of inquiry for funding allocation. This is not a vacancy control process; it will not impact on the delivery of any key government priorities and will not impact on frontline services. There will be no forced job losses. We are certainly not expecting any forced job losses in the short term with this strategy.

I have asked the department to look at ceasing, pausing or scaling back non priority activities that are not priorities of this government or are not commitments funded in the 2024-25 State Budget; capturing salary savings that occur through genuine vacancies and the timing of filling those vacancies and then looking at reducing expenditure on non salary costs with no impact to frontline activity. Some examples of that would be staff travel, staff transport, consultancies, looking at office expenditure and equipment at office accommodation, staff ICT costs. We will continue working through this. It is not easy for any of us, but it is what we have to do and we will do it, and this department has an exceptional track record when it comes to working within its budget. It really does have that and I am very grateful to the department for the track record that they have in this space and we will continue to work together as we pull together the package.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. So, you talked about frontline staff. What would you or how are you defining frontline staff within DECYP?

Ms PALMER - Yes, Thank you. I am going to pass to the Acting Secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. So, within the category of frontline staff would be those logical ones that you would all understand, teachers, teacher assistants, facilities attendants, as well as those staff that directly work with children and young people who provide those more allied health professional areas such as social worker, speech and language pathologists and psychologists as well as our nursing staff. Then we have got roles like literacy coaches, so they are both embedded within schools, but then we have got coaches who coach the coaches in the schools, so they would be classified as frontline services as well.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. I think a lot of the concern has been around those roles like allied health that are not employed directly by schools. I think that will be reassuring for people to hear that those staff are considered frontline. Will they be quarantined from any vacancy control or cuts?

Ms BURGESS - I think you will have seen over the years of funding in this portfolio that we have actually been trying to build those areas of allied health professionals because we realise that they provide an additional support to the students in our schools. It would not be envisaged at this point in time that we would actually reduce any of those roles. Thank you.

Ms LOVELL - The relief coordination is something that has been talked about, having a centralised coordination of relief teaching. Is that something that will still be delivered, or is that quarantined, I guess, from any efficiency dividends? I know that's something teachers are relying on.

Ms BURGESS - I think any functions that help schools do their day-to-day business would need to be off limits from any levels of reduction. We know that on a day-to-day basis, there are reasonably large numbers of staff across the state that don't attend. We need to be able to support our schools to be able to have staff in front of children so that they can learn.

Ms LOVELL - Is that central coordination of relief something that's still in the pipeline?

Mr SALTER - At the moment, where staff in schools undertake that relief coordination role, they get an allowance. We certainly want to move to a more efficient process across the system. That's still in the planning.

Ms LOVELL - That's something we've been talking about well before I was even elected, actually. I remember that from a previous role. Minister, the ordinary DCEYP budget, does indexation return to CPI in this Budget, or is it still frozen as it was in last year's Budget?

Unknown - I will hand to the money man.

Mr SALTER - The indexation that is applied is consistent with all other agencies.

Ms LOVELL - Is that back to CPI?

Mr SALTER - I think the non-salaries is two and a half or two per cent. The salaries is 3 per cent, I think.

PUBLIC

Unknown - Before you go off the budget efficiency dividend -

CHAIR - Minister, when you were talking about the challenge of finding the savings that are going to be required, you mentioned shifting of the budget FTE positions, or pausing the work they're doing to focus on the commission of inquiry effort. Can you indicate what the people involved in that work, who may be transferred across, were actually working on? Something has to give, unless these people are going to work double time. We have to be realistic.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we absolutely do. To be clear, what I listed there is -

CHAIR - Ideas.

Ms PALMER - We're putting ideas on the table.

CHAIR - I'm interested in what the work is that these people might be doing currently.

Ms PALMER - The secretary might be able to address that. This is very much, 'We have to find a way to do this' - Jen and I sit with the team and go, 'What can be on the table, no, it can't be that, it can't be that.' We are massaging this. There's a way through.

CHAIR - I'm sure there's a lot of 'No, it can't be that's'. I'm wondering what this might look like.

Ms PALMER - I'm happy to go to the secretary for further information on that, but I just want to be clear that these are the things that we are putting on the table for discussion.

Ms BURGESS - When we've got a broader understanding around the things that the minister has outlined, there will be and there is continuing effort across both our executive board and our senior leadership team across the agency to make sure that we are doing the more urgent and important work that will deliver outcomes for children and young people. As a matter of course in an agency we are always prioritising and reprioritising our work. Therefore, if we have contained numbers of staff, as we do at the moment, it's about how we prioritise both the commission of inquiry and the government's agenda. Then we work through how we continue with the other pieces of work. We'll prioritise staff to where the effort is needed and required to make sure that children remain known, safe, well, and learning. Once that's done, we'll be able to look at areas that might not need to be urgently undertaken, to prioritise into those areas that will be.

CHAIR - I hear what you're saying. I'm just trying to understand what some of these areas are. They should not be put on hold. Acknowledging the need and urgency of the commission of inquiry's recommendations - and some of the time lines have been exceeded in a positive sense, I might say, I'm trying to understand what some of the work that was being done that is able to be put on hold.

Ms PALMER - I guess what we're quarantining - which is a good word that the member for Rumney is using, is that there will be no impact to child safety or to frontline workers. They are the two lines that cannot be crossed in these conversations. I do not know if you have any more that you can add.

PUBLIC

Ms BURGESS - There are areas of policy work that are on a cyclical basis and need to be undertaken simply to keep up with contemporary practice. Rather than elevating those, we slow them down and put staff into policy areas that require more urgent effort. For example, the Sun Smart policy, you would appreciate that across the Department of Education part of the portfolio, we have a high number of policies.

If we assess that there was a limited risk in delaying the policy review of the Sun Smart policy, then we would say, okay, deprioritise that, move that staff member onto an area where it is directly going to impact the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

CHAIR - You do not really know which areas these are; that is what I am hearing you say.

Ms PALMER - That is the work that we are doing now. They are the discussions that we are having now.

CHAIR - Because I know we have had, in other committees looking at the programs and matters, this is before the commission of inquiry, and looking at supporting students' learning, obviously that is the key, that is why we are there, to support support children not only to be educated, feel safe, and be known - and the majority of that, and most of your employees across education, will be direct service deliverers.

I am confirming, in my mind, that it would be very challenging without cutting people and you are suggesting that there will not be vacancy control or anything like that going on, even across the other areas, the policy areas or may that occur in policy areas rather than frontline?

Ms PALMER - From the very beginning, the discussions that we have been having - when you hear the narrative, perhaps in the media, about who is going to be cut, and I have come to the department and said I want to know 'what.' I am not looking at 'who,' I am looking at 'what.' As Jen has laid out, what flexibility do we have in some of those policy areas? What are some of other areas where we can achieve? We are very much focused on the first 12 months, but I am looking at 'what'. That is the headspace that I am in as a minister.

CHAIR - One of the reasons I am asking this is because, in a previous Public Accounts Committee inquiry into following up on an Auditor-General's report, into retention particularly, it seemed to me in the evidence from the department, there were lots and lots of new programs to address very real need across the school, across the whole education system effectively. One of the things that we could not ascertain then, was what the outcomes from these programs were, because you can run all the programs you like, if they are not having a positive outcome, then why are we still doing them?

Are there any programs you have identified that perhaps are not delivering the outcomes that were expected or are desired?

Ms PALMER - Certainly not that I have identified at the moment, but that is the exact type of thinking that we will need as we move through this.

CHAIR - There is myriad of them, the programs across education, are they all being assessed for their outcomes in terms of the benefiting children?

Ms PALMER - We are working through this methodically. We are looking at all of those programs. As I say, the absolute priority is the safety of children and looking after our frontline services.

Ms BURGESS - There are areas that we look at. For example, if a funding agreement for an external organisation or an approach was coming to the end of its time frame, we would look at the effectiveness of that program to see if it needs to be reshaped or adjusted, and if the funding levels were right and appropriate for its delivery. Through that usual practice, we then determine if funding could be reduced without an impact on learner outcomes or if we need to think about aligning that program with another program that might be doing a similar sort of thing. We do look at that as usual practice to ensure that they are delivering on their intended outcomes.

Ms PALMER - If I could just add to that, just because something's always been done doesn't mean it always should be done, and just because something's always been done a certain way doesn't mean it should always be that way. The department looks at that as part of its everyday business because we have to have an outcomes lens over this.

CHAIR - Obviously, as you said, children's safety is paramount, but so are their educational outcomes.

Ms PALMER - Absolutely.

Mr VINCENT - A little bit of self-interest here with a growing number of grandkids coming through the system. A lot of broad statements in amongst that, but the programs you're talking about, like literacy, are fairly key focuses from what I can gather. Are programs like that still going to be at the fore?

Ms PALMER - Yes. Literacy is one of our government's priorities and we've done some pretty amazing things in that space. As I mentioned in my opening comments, lifting literacy is a priority for us as a government. I've seen firsthand from my visits to numerous schools the benefits of implementing that systematic and structured and explicit approach to the teaching of reading and it's not just in our primary schools, it's across our high schools as well. We know we need transformational change in our schools to ensure that every young person can read when they leave the school system. That's why we're rolling out a program of structured literacy development for all kinder to year 2 students in government schools by 2026 and the national Year 1 Phonics Check for all year 1 students.

In our plan for education, we have extended this commitment through the 2024-25 Budget, providing \$3 million over two years to extend structured literacy tuition to all children in years 3 to 6 at all government primary schools by 2026, mandate at least one hour of structured literacy per day in all primary school classrooms from 2025, and invest over \$800,000 over two years to ensure decodable readers, which help children sound-out words, will be available in all schools and in our libraries and in mobile libraries as well.

Our first step with decodables is to place a starter pack of curriculum-aligned decodable readers in every government prep class for the start of 2025 so students can actually practise their phonics knowledge and we certainly remain committed to full implementation of the 23 priority recommendations of the Literacy Advisory Panel in its report in June 2023.

Early evidence tells us we are on the right track and when visiting schools across the state, I've heard from principals and from teachers on the ground of the impact this is actually having on progress and the outcomes in our primary and our high schools.

I went to Invermay Primary School back up home in the north of the state and they've been using an evidence-based and explicit-structured approach to the teaching of reading and the Year 1 Phonics Checks for some time now and that Naplan results, which just came back, reflect an evidence-based approach works with 80 per cent of the year 3 students achieving either strong or exceeding in reading and they are so, so proud. It was one of the first things they said to me before I'd even walked out of the office and into the classroom was they are very proud of what they're achieving with their reading.

As Minister for Education, I'm proud to confirm that in 2023 Tasmania became the first jurisdiction to mandate the introduction of structured literacy in all schools and across all school years following acceptance of the Lifting Literacy report recommendation to a minimum schooling guarantee. We are committed to offering the best evidence-based opportunities to all students so that they can realise their potential. As a state, we are leading the way; Tasmania should be really proud of that with our approach. This government is committed to an evidence-based, structured and explicit approach to the teaching of literacy, and we're confident that not only will students leaving school be literate, but they'll also be able to engage fully in the rich array of learning opportunities that are offered to them as a result of being able to read. We are very much focused in the literacy space.

CHAIR - [Inaudible]?

Mr VINCENT - I wasn't expecting all that. What I'm worried about is that I'm going to have [inaudible] skills now with my little ones at home. So, you'd better have something for grandparents to brush up on now, I think.

Ms LOVELL - Can I have a follow-up on that, Chair?

CHAIR - Yes, sure.

Ms LOVELL - I've got some questions on the phonics program and the new readers, but later on, given that you've raised it now. Minister, you said you're starting with the readers being available in every kinder class. Is that from -

Ms PALMER - Prep.

Ms LOVELL - Prep class?

Ms PALMER - Every prep across all of our government schools.

Ms LOVELL - From the start of next year?

Ms PALMER - Beginning in 2025.

Ms LOVELL - Okay, and will they be delivered in other classes through all schools? Is it needs-based, or how will it be administered?

Ms PALMER - We know that decodable readers are an essential resource to help Prep to Year 2 learners practise their decoding skills, which is one of the skills that competent readers need. The decodable readers are actually helping children to sound out words rather than guessing. I know that they are already being used in a number of schools now, so the \$800,000 commitment in this election commitment is to ensure that we can get them into every prep class across all of our government schools at the beginning of next year. Did you want to add anything to that about where other decodable readers are? We know there's been a lot done with decodable readers.

Ms BURGESS - There would be a number of schools that already have decodable readers. The value-add that we are doing at the moment is to make sure that those decodable readers being rolled out to schools are very much aligned to version 9 of the Australian Curriculum and to our new scopes and sequences that we have, so there is a clear line of sight between the curriculum, how the teachers are teaching, and how those decodable readers are lined in that space. It doesn't mean that the decodable readers already in schools won't be valuable; this will just add an additional level and layer of benefit to those schools.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. Sorry, the funding that's committed in this Budget will get the decodable readers into every prep class next year, and then will there be a further rollout into Grade 1 and Grade 2?

Ms BURGESS - Correct. That will occur over the next two schooling years, in 2025 and 2026.

Ms LOVELL - That will include the schools that already have decodable readers, they'll be replaced with these? Okay, thank you. That's helpful.

CHAIR - Just on that, the children who are in Prep this year who haven't had access to them, is there any plan to assist those children to catch up? Some of the children will be fine - or not fine, but some of them don't have the same challenges learning to read that other children do. How will those who have missed something vital be supported?

Mrs BURGESS - This won't take away from all of our other classroom assessments that we do with children in the Prep year. If we know, through our evidence and data, through our formative assessments, that students need more support, we will be able to provide that. They should be getting it now through other mechanisms, but they will be able to receive it into the future as well.

CHAIR - Through the utilisation of the same resources - decodable readers and that sort of thing?

Ms BURGESS - Decodable readers are one resource that we would be using.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, can you provide us with an update on the negotiations with the Commonwealth on SRS funding? I understand that the deadline to reach an agreement is the end of the month.

Ms PALMER - Yes, for sure. It was one of the very first things that I turned my attention to when I became Education minister. I came to the party a bit late, but our previous Education

minister had been very much involved in the conversations. We have seen two states sign up to deals. The Northern Territory was carved out quite separately because of issues that they had there and Western Australia was happy to sign on at the 2.5 per cent. At the moment, Tasmania is standing firmly with all the other states and territories. The offer that's on the table from the federal government is 2.5 per cent and for states and territories to put in 2.5 per cent. We firmly believe that we must see 100 per cent funding in our government schools and that the federal government should be providing that full 5 per cent, not 2.5 per cent, so we are standing with the other states and territories.

I have had a number of conversations with Jason Clare, the federal Minister for Education. We are absolutely wanting to work with the federal government, but at this stage we are standing firm, which is what our stakeholders have asked us to do, to see full 5 per cent funding from the federal government. We are constantly in conversation with stakeholders about this, but in particular with the federal government. This is something that is front and centre in all the national education ministerial meetings that are held, whether they're online or in person.

Ms LOVELL - It's been reported over the last few days that Mr Clare is considering diverting that funding to other areas of education like early childhood education and care if agreements can't be reached by that deadline. How close are you to reaching an agreement? I think stakeholders and certainly people I've been speaking to, we all support 100 per cent SRS funding, but I think the priority is to secure the funding, not so much where it comes from.

Ms PALMER - As I say, the unions have been quite strong in this space here in Tasmania, but nationally as well. We are hoping that, for the moment, states and territories outside of Western Australia and the Northern Territory stand firm in asking for the full 5 per cent from the Commonwealth. But as I say, as a new minister in Tasmania, I've been working in good faith and in constant conversation with Mr Clare on this. Tasmania is doing a good job. We're not there yet with our full 75 per cent funding allocation, but we are on a very strong trajectory towards that. We want to get the very best outcome that we can get.

Ms LOVELL - Are any programs or projects in this Budget contingent on securing that full funding from the federal government? Or would they be impacted if that agreement can't be reached?

Ms PALMER - Not that I'm aware of, no. We're not counting on anything; it's very much in that discussion phase. We are working as a group of states and territories but there are separate discussions as well. Where I believe that Mr Clare needs to have a deeper understanding of some of the challenges that we face in Tasmania, I've made sure that he and his team are aware of these and Tasmania's differences. At the moment we stand firm with the other states and territories, excluding the two I've mentioned, wanting the federal government to fund that full 5 per cent.

Ms THOMAS - On the doubling of the school lunches program to 60 schools that was announced in the Budget, it appears that the funding for this program is for one year only in 2025-26. Can you confirm that is the case and whether there's any intention to discontinue it beyond 2025-26? If not, how will it be funded and where does this appear in the budget papers?

Ms PALMER - This is a really exciting thing for us. We support the healthy eating and the physical wellbeing. This has been a brilliant program delivered through School Food

Matters. We have had 30 schools over the last two years and this additional funding that we're seeing now is about taking it to that next level. There will be 15 new schools to come on board in 2024-25 and the next 15 will come on board in 2025-26. It is extending that pilot program to those 60 schools.

We have to ensure that we are achieving the outcomes that we want to achieve. It's a really exciting program. I've had the opportunity and I'm sure other members have, as well, of sitting down, eating and sharing a meal with a number of different schools now. Hilarious conversations in the prep class at Beaconsfield Primary School.

It certainly is something that we are really committed to. We are also supporting the organisations that support School Food Matters through Loaves and Fishes as well to ensure that not only are we providing food through this program but that it's nutritious food. The only complaints that I've had so far from kids is that they would like us to extend the menu options. Maybe that's something we can look at.

Ms THOMAS - You won't get any disagreement from me about how fantastic a program it is. My question is on page 43 of budget paper 2 volume 1: it appears that funding of \$4.967 million is allocated in 2024-25, then \$9.633 million in 2025-26 and nothing in the forward Estimates beyond 2025-26. You mentioned it as a pilot.

Ms PALMER - It is a pilot program; this is the extending of the first part of the pilot was the first 30 schools; the second part is the next 30 schools, so we will have 60 schools and from there we would be looking at the outcomes and we would assess that. If it was to go to the next level and become something more permanent, then we would have to look at that governance structure. That would probably be different to what a pilot program can be.

Ms THOMAS - It's a pilot program that's funded into a 2025-26?

Ms PALMER - Correct.

Ms LOVELL - This is one of the measures that the government has pointed to as, I guess, a cost-of-living measure, as well as a program that delivers good outcomes for children in schools. It's been said that this program will save families up to \$950 a year. How has that been calculated?

CHAIR - In the absence of Treasury tool at this stage.

Ms PALMER - I'm advised that those calculations would have been done by our government and I would assume that the resources they would be leaning on there would be the Menzies report, although that might have come out a bit after that. The Menzies report has been really good in taking some of the anecdotal evidence that we've heard and turning that into a proper resource for us to look at.

I'm happy to take this on notice and to check, but I would be assuming that it would be a simple calculation of what the average school lunch would cost, multiply that by how many lunches are served and that's going to vary for different families because some families could be at a school where a hot lunch could be served a number of times a week, to another family that could be at a school where it is only served once a week.

Ms LOVELL - That would be good if you are willing to take it on notice. I guess my questions are really whether that assumes, and I imagine it is done the same way, that there is a value placed on a school lunch, multiply that by number of days, number of weeks in a year.

Specifically, my question I suppose is that up to \$950 a year, is that based on five days a week? Are any schools providing lunch five days a week? How many? Just whether that is a realistic figure that a family could be expecting to save in Tasmania currently with the program rolled out the way that it is?

Ms PALMER - I think if I can take that notice through you, Chair, and get the details of that calculation. I think otherwise I am just telling you as a mum what I think school lunches cost on a day-to-day basis and how that would be calculated.

Ms LOVELL - When you are counting this, without the school lunches being provided, some children would not eat. That is not a cost saving to the family; it is a benefit for the child to actually get to eat. Well, I have got schools like that for sure.

Ms PALMER - We do know that there has been unbelievable anecdotal evidence just from visiting schools, talking to principals, talking to teachers about how much more settled the class is after they have actually had a hot lunch. It is anecdotal but I think teachers are in a pretty good position to be giving that sort of evidence in talking about how children are able to learn, I mean, you cannot learn if you have got a belly that is hungry. It is also other advantages as well, just around the environment, groundsmen who have come up to me and said you can tell when it is a school lunch day, wrappers are not all over the playground, such a reduction in plastic, single use wrappers coming to school.

We also see peer group pressure in a positive light. Everyone else is eating the broccoli, so I will try the broccoli even though grandma has tried it a thousand times and dad has tried it and we would not eat it, but because everyone else is eating it. We are actually seeing children trying new foods, nutritional foods, vegetables, different flavours, which you know all goes towards healthy.

Ms LOVELL - You do not need to convince us. I think it was a Labor policy actually before it was government policy, so no arguments here.

Ms PALMER - It is a good one.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you, minister. I have a few questions about the tiered system of education. If you can explain what are the tiers and what is the purpose of this system? I am particularly interested in Tier 4, the Tier 4 program and the outcomes for children in the Tier 4 program. I have got some specific questions, but perhaps if you can describe the purpose of the tiered system, particularly Tier 4.

Ms PALMER - Through you, Chair, I would like to ask Trudy Pearce if she could come to the table. Trudy is the Deputy Secretary of Schools and Early Learning.

Ms PEARCE - Sorry, can I just capture what element of the tier program that you were seeking to understand?

Ms THOMAS - Yes, I am particularly interested in Tier 4, the Tier 4 program, what the purpose of that is and what hours the children in Tier 4 are required to be in school. When they are not in school, is there a requirement that they are supervised or otherwise engaged? How many children are in the Tier 4 program? What is the cost and has there been any analysis of the outcome so they are my specific questions.

Ms PEARCE - Tier 4 programs, we call it T4 and that picks up the continuum of approaches that we have to re engage students picking up Tier 1 as quality teaching right through to Tier 4 and Tier 4 program is really a re-engagement program and they operate statewide. They provide highly personalised learning programs for what we would indicate being at the T4 level quite significantly disengaged students. We currently have over 150 students supported statewide in our T4 provision and the idea is that we are trying to work them back to re-engage with their local school or their school.

Ms THOMAS - What hours - it probably varies if it is highly personalised learning programs?

Mrs PEARCE - Each of the individualised programs is framed around the young person and their contact time is dependent so that would vary amongst all of the students, whether that is at Devonport, Burnie, we have two sites in Launceston and we now have two in Hobart.

Ms THOMAS - And one in Glenorchy?

Ms PEARCE - Yes, in the southern region.

CHAIR - They call that Hobart.

Mrs PEARCE - Sorry, it is a north-west code, isn't it?

Ms THOMAS - When the students in the tier 4 program are not in school, is there a requirement that they are supervised or otherwise engaged?

Ms PEARCE - There are often programs for them to engage with as well as their contact time that they are required to be there. That would be dependent on the individual student. A number of them are engaged in other community-based programs in addition to the time that they are at tier 4. However, that would vary to each individual.

Ms THOMAS - I guess my question, minister, is perhaps more of a policy question in terms of if there is not a requirement that children are otherwise engaged - I know there is concern among the community about children, if they are not in school, they are engaging in behaviour, sometimes antisocial behaviour in the community and there is a perception they should be in school. If they are not in school, they should be supervised or otherwise engaged.

I guess, minister, I am interested in your view on the tier 4 program and the effectiveness of it and the requirement for students, whether you feel there ought to be a requirement that children are supervised or otherwise engaged if they are not in a school learning environment or tier 4 learning environment in school hours.

Ms PALMER - I think, for the detail of that, I would need to go to Trudy, but I would say it is important to remember that the children that we are caring for in that tier 4 program

are pretty disengaged as it is. I don't want to stereotype anyone in that space, but you know, we are talking about children who could have suffered trauma, children who could be struggling with, you know, numerous other aspects of their life that is leading to that disengagement.

The working in tier 4 is really trying to meet those students where they are at and trying to find a way to, I guess, re-engage them and help them to find joy in what can be in education and in what they can achieve and to feel good about themselves when they are re-engaged. Can you add anything to that, Trudy?

Ms PEARCE - You mentioned before data and our data, as the minister has indicated - a number of them were disengaged and through the provision of T4, we are seeing more engagement in learning and in schooling by having a place to go and having personalised programs.

There is that misconception that students who attend T4 are students who are offending and that is not necessarily so. So just wanting to be very clear, they are not students who are offending. They are significantly disengaged and, through this opportunity to engage in personalised programs, which sometimes are pathways into even employment opportunities or pathways back into their local school. That is the focus.

Ms THOMAS - No, let me be clear that I certainly wasn't casting any aspersions. I am referring to a perception or misconceptions in some cases and even personal experience where I have had conversations on the lawns of Glenorchy City Council forecourt - the lawns there - with children who I have been out and had conversations with who are not offending, but they are certainly sometimes causing nuisance behaviour. I say 'Why aren't you at school?'. 'It's called tier 4, Miss. It is called part time' is the response I get and the conversations would ensue. These are often children from significant trauma backgrounds who don't have stable home lives, which you know, breaks our hearts, of course, and I have all the empathy in the world for them and hope that programs like this will support them to have better life chances. However, there is still a gap, I feel, in supports for these children. I know the government and this is to perhaps the Children and Youth portfolio, and we'll have an opportunity to ask some questions around this, is a funding programs like JCP Youth as one mechanism, and I wonder whether, minister, you see that there is a gap there for the time where those children aren't engaged in education and whether there is a role for the Education portfolio in helping to fill that gap? Or do you see that sitting with the Minister for Children and Youth?

Ms PALMER - As in supervision?

Ms THOMAS - And engagement when they're in school hours? When they're not in a learning environment? What is the expectation that they are doing if they can't be at home because home is not a stable environment? They've done their three hours at Tier 4 for the day, then what?

Ms PALMER - I think in this space structured school and being in a place or accountable to someone for six hours a day has not worked because they are disengaged from that sort of formal way of how education is delivered, so Tier 4 is all about trying to find a way that perhaps sits outside of what you and I might term as regular education and how that's delivered and trying to meet them where they're at. Sometimes it's also a capacity thing as well. They might not have the capacity to be engaged six hours. Jen, did you want to add anything?

Ms BURGESS - One other thing is that this year we have prioritised student voice, particularly in the Tier 4 space. As you'd be aware, we do a child and student wellbeing survey to gain and garner information from children and young people about what's working well for them and what's not working so well for them. We didn't have strong data in this space.

One of the things that we've done this year is to really prioritise getting that information from those Tier 4 sites. The survey is now closed. Once we have that data, we can unpack that information and data and work out how we need to strengthen the provision for those students accessing Tier 4 and not what might support them more to be able to re-engage further in their learning so that they are not part-time but can have a whole program wrapped around them going forward. Certainly there's more work to do.

CHAIR - Do we engage with the indie schools at all? Some of these schools cater for these students as well.

Mrs BURGESS - So some of the schools that we have had discussions with are in a similar place and probably might even be more exacerbated than us where the students do attend but they would not necessarily be attending full-time, but as part of our program around access, participation and engagement, we are looking at how we can work more closely with all providers of education- so the indie, NGOs like Life Without Barriers so that we can make sure that whatever it takes for those children to engage in learning is what we need to be doing, and if we need to work across sectors and across boundaries into NGOs to be able to do that, we will do that.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, can you outline how many teacher vacancies there were at the beginning of the last three school years, including this year, so 2022, 2023 and 2024?

Ms PALMER - Just getting that information for you. I will just pass to the Acting Secretary.

Ms BURGESS - Thank you. The advice that I am provided with from behind is that we do hold that information operationally and that we would be able to provide it, but we do not have it now at the table. What we do know is that we have increasing numbers of teaching staff as part of our recruitment approach and that during 2023, vacancies for teaching positions in schools averaged around about 76 FTE and. As of 31 March this year, there were 69.4 FTE teacher positions vacant in schools. The majority of those vacancies are in the secondary years of schooling, but we can certainly get specific answers. Would you be able to say that question again so that we are really clear about what you are asking for?

Ms LOVELL - Absolutely, and we will send that through to you as well.

Ms PALMER - We will try to get an answer to you before the end of the session.

Ms LOVELL - Okay, so if I could get how many teacher vacancies there were at the beginning of each school year? So, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Ms PALMER - The last three years.

PUBLIC

Ms LOVELL - Yes, and perhaps, if it is available, if there could be a breakdown between primary and secondary. I had a second question, which you may also need to take on notice, if you are happy to do that -

CHAIR - Just before you go on to that one, can I just add, is it possible to get, particularly with the senior schools, where those vacancies are?

Ms PALMER - By school or by region?

CHAIR - Well, if you can't get it by school, then by region is better than nothing.

Ms PALMER - We will do our best to get that to you before the end of the session.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. My second question was how many schools had purchased additional teachers above their staffing allocation with their schooling resource package in each year?

Mrs BURGESS - We don't have that detail by each school in our packages, but we should be able to get that information.

Ms LOVELL - That is fine, just the number of schools would be a start. That would be great. Minister, the workforce roundtable that was established, was - I understand - supposed to meet four times a year, how many times have they met this year and when was the last time?

Ms PALMER - The advice that I am given is that I believe that they have met twice. I was at one, so I know there was definitely one, but the advice I am given is that they have met twice this year.

Ms LOVELL - Do you know when those meetings were?

Ms PALMER - Mine was a couple of weeks after I became Education minister. We will see if we can get those dates for you and, while we do, I will just bring Jodee Wilson to the table. Jodee's an acting Associate Secretary.

Mrs WILSON - The Education Workforce Roundtable is scheduled to meet four times a year, and we did meet in March, soon after Ms Palmer became the minister for education and another meeting was scheduled for July and a range of circumstances and member availability meant that was postponed within just a few hours of the meeting, so that is why we were sort of on track for the second meeting.

Ms LOVELL - Cool, and is there a second meeting scheduled?

Ms PALMER - Yes, it has been scheduled for November and I can give you the date of the one that I attended, which was, I believe that is the date I have been given, 20 May.

Ms LOVELL - There was a meeting on 20 May, there was one scheduled in July that was cancelled at the last minute and there's one scheduled in November.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - I've got this sorted. On 13 February there was a meeting. The meeting I attended was on 20 May. The next meeting, the one that was meant to happen, and was cancelled because people couldn't attend; and the next meeting I'm advised is on 11 November.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - My apologies, that took a little bit of checking of diaries but we got there.

Ms LOVELL - In terms of outcomes from the round table workforce plan or actions to be undertaken in the short, medium or long-term, what are you seeing from that?

Ms PALMER - In the meeting that I attended and I will pass to the secretary on this, it was brilliant to have your major stakeholders all in the one room literally around a table, a couple joined online, but primarily they were there in person with the significant heads of the department. It was chaired by the then secretary, Tim Bullard, and it was a fantastic opportunity as a new minister to hear directly from each of those big players in the education space. I will see if the Secretary can add to the rest of your question.

Ms BURGESS - Since it was convened in 2018, there's really been about five focus areas raising teacher quality. What do we need to do to be able to do that? Strengthen the profession by way of raising or elevating the status of the profession? There were then priority areas and actions that were seen to be required and it is good to have both the Principals' Association and the AEU on that group so we're hearing first-hand from those stakeholder groups what is required.

It was also about what do we need to put in place to ensure the short-, medium- and longer-term pipeline of staff are being provided and supported and that we have the courses in place, particularly where we have greater and closer relationships through the University of Tasmania to be able to do that and to provide guidance. This is I suppose where the AEU were key and critical to that around how do we go about recruiting quality teachers into the pipeline.

Ms LOVELL - What are some of those actions?

Ms BURGESS - Certainly one that I am aware of has been around the recruitment campaigns that we have run over a series of years now about what is the way that we work to make sure that we are getting quality teachers so we implemented a more novel approach to the recruitment of teachers who were either beginning or weren't permanent with us. It was almost like a three-staged process where there were also the interviews, but we saw how we brought teachers together or potential teachers into our workforce to see how they interacted in teamwork together so that we weren't just recruiting for people who had qualifications, we were recruiting for people who were the right fit for our organisation culturally.

Ms LOVELL - Are you seeing some outcomes from that in terms of numbers and workforce numbers?

Ms BURGESS - Certainly from a numbers perspective. Our recruitment drives through that process have been really strong. The other thing that we brought through that group is the Teach for Tasmania Scholarship and we have facilitated an application through the Commonwealth for an innovative approach to teaching. We haven't heard the outcome of that

yet, but it's put all minds together to leverage how we might do that. Hopefully, that has elevated the opportunity for success.

Ms LOVELL - I have some questions about Brighton High School and the staffing for the new high school. Can you tell us what the total teacher FTE and headcount is for the new high school in Brighton?

Ms PALMER - Sure, I'll just get some advice on that.

While we're looking for that information, it was really great to visit the school the other day and speak to the principal, Megan Bennell. We were talking about the team that she's trying to pull together, and she was really conscious of not wanting to take teachers from other schools in that area. I mean, it's a magnificent, beautiful school. You can understand that it would be very attractive for teachers to want to be there in that beautiful environment. She's been working on that. I am not sure that her numbers are actually confirmed as yet. I'll just check with the Acting Secretary.

Ms BURGESS - What we do know is that enrolment numbers are still being finalised for that, and part of the resourcing of staffing for that high school will be based on those numbers. We're in the process of finalising what that might look like, but we have made a commitment, given this is a new school site and we're stepping up the years of schooling in a more innovative way, that we will put greater levels of staffing in in the earlier phases to make sure that the transition into that high school and the commencement of that school will be effective.

Ms LOVELL - Those numbers haven't been landed on, is that what you're saying?

Ms BURGESS - Correct.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. When will you firm up those numbers?

Mrs BURGESS - I'm advised that that will be early in term 4.

Ms PALMER - I know the enrollments have been really strong. I think about 130 to 140; they've already got for year 7, and enrollments are still coming, but also in year 11, which are the two year groups that will be starting at the school. I know they're very happy with the enrollment numbers.

Ms LOVELL - That's good. I have the same question for support staff, but I'm assuming those numbers are probably not firmed up yet either?

Ms BURGESS - Correct.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. I'll ask those questions another way later. That's fine. Minister, I have some questions about violent incidents in schools. Do you have data available for the committee on the number of incidences of violence in schools each year? Can you remind me when the new School Violence Reporting system came into place?

Ms BURGESS - Could you clarify what you mean by that? Do you mean the new recording system that changed with the *Education Act* parameters?

Ms LOVELL - Yes.

Ms BURGESS - I'll just check on the date. Thank you for that.

Ms LOVELL - I'm happy to go with the last few years if that's easier.

Ms BURGESS - I'm not 100 per cent sure whether we didn't start it until 2017.

Ms LOVELL - That's okay; let's go with the last couple of years. I'm happy to do that. So, if you've got the number of violent incidences or incidents of violence each year since 2021.

Ms BURGESS - We don't necessarily have it by the categories that label it as violence per se. Is there something specifically that you are looking for?

Ms LOVELL - I'm trying to understand whether we're seeing more or less, increased or decreased, incidences of violence in schools. Given that there are a number of programs and initiatives in place, how do we know whether they are successful or not, if we don't know if that data is trending in the right direction?

Ms BURGESS - Would it be helpful to talk initially about the global data to give you a sense of the trend of the data and then unpack by the category?

Ms LOVELL - We can try that, yes. If that's what you have available.

Mrs BURGESS - It might be helpful to understand the trend in the data.

Ms LOVELL - If you start by telling me what data you have. I assumed you would have data on the number of incidences.

Ms BURGESS - I do have it by category, but the categories are by reason description, which is the new recording code and I'm happy to go through all of those categories. Do you want me to start there then?

Ms LOVELL - Yes.

CHAIR - Would it be possible to table that table because you have a lot of data in that.

Ms BURGESS - I'll start as the table goes and make some assessment about whether that's to do with the nature of the behaviour. The first reason description is, unless you'd like to read these on, minister.

CHAIR - I'm just conscious of the time whether it be more helpful for the committee to have the actual data provided to us.

Ms PALMER - It sets out quite clearly, while it's not all in one group, it's showing the physical abuse of another student and it's showing suspensions across the different years, and it's got comparative from 2018 through to 2023. Aggressive threatening behaviour. I think that would be helpful.

PUBLIC

Ms LOVELL - If you are happy to table that, that would be helpful.

Ms PALMER - There are other things in here as well, damage to property and that type of thing as well.

CHAIR - Are you happy to table the document?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I am happy to table the document. Do you have to sign it or anything?

CHAIR - No. just hand it over. Simple, really easy. Does it have a title?

Ms PALMER - No.

CHAIR - The document referring to incidents of violence.

Ms BURGESS - It is really probably the table that outlines the suspensions by reason. category, both the percentage and the numbers of students.

Ms LOVELL - Right, that's only suspension?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have a number? I'll give you an example, through an RTI if we were able to obtain between the 1 January 2024 and the 18 June 2024, there were 587 incident reports of violence reported by schools and colleges. Do you have a like a total number like that for each year? Do you collect that data? Not necessarily suspensions. I'm not after suspension data, just incidents of violence.

Ms PALMER - That's why I wasn't sure if tabling that was going to help you or not.

CHAIR - Incident reports related to any acts of violence.

Ms PALMER - We will have to take that on notice because that information that will need to be pulled out of the system and compiled. This is the advice that I'm getting.

Ms LOVELL - If that is not information that you're routinely collecting or reporting on in that way. How do you know whether the programs that you've got in place are effective or not in terms of reducing violence in schools?

Ms BURGESS - We need to remember that we have a very experienced group of staff that sit on school sites and are supported by professional support staff and inclusive practise teams that work with the schools at a site level around their trends in their data. In a data dashboard that our schools have access to, they would be monitoring the trends in their data and so that they would be digging deep into the data around suspensions and incidences and from there they would be working with their teaching staff and their student wellbeing and support teams to make sure that they've got appropriate behaviour management practices in place. If they feel that they can't manage that within the schooling context, then they would leverage off the broader supports of the student support teams and the inclusive practice team

to make sure that they are developing the teacher skills to be able to de-escalate behaviours and work with kids to make sure that they're engaged in learning.

Ms LOVELL - I'm surprised that, given the seriousness of the topic that we're talking about, and we've had some discussions around workforce and we know that there's workforce issues and this is a contributing factor, you speak to teachers and certainly their union, they will tell you that this is one of the reasons why people are - they say we don't have a shortage of teachers in Tasmania, we have a shortage of teachers who want to teach. I'm surprised that that this is not something that the department would want to have some closer oversight over or more of a broader understanding globally of how these incidences are playing out in schools and whether it a broader trend that needs more attention or different programs or more investment.

Ms BURGESS - Certainly within schools and early years, we do have a team called the Student Engagement and Attendance Team and one of their roles is to have oversight over all school data and work with those schools where, through them being in more complex contexts, they need additional level of support. We do have oversight, it is at the schools and early years' level and then we have a governance structure within the department that elevates issues both at a data level up to the Learner and School Improvement Executive Committee. That committee is charged with managing risks to learner outcomes and making sure that the data is being monitored and that programs are being responsive to the needs of schools.

Ms LOVELL - You're not able to provide for us the number of violent incidences in schools?

Ms BURGESS - We are able to extract that from the system, but it isn't a routine that we would use. Certainly, there would be people that would be monitoring the data.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. Sorry, I'm not sure if I wrote this note down before we talked about this. Will you be happy to take that on notice?

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll take that on notice so that -

Ms LOVELL - I just wanted to clarify; I hadn't written that down when we were talking about it. If others have got questions on the same topic.

CHAIR - Hopefully a fairly quick one from me. Just with regard to members of the school association, do those members have to hold Working with Vulnerable Peoples cards to be a member of the school association?

Ms BURGESS - Yes, they do.

CHAIR - What would disqualify someone from holding one? What sort of offence would be required to disqualify them?

Ms PALMER - From holding a Working with Vulnerable People card?

Ms BURGESS - I think that's probably a question for the Department of Justice.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Minister, right back at the beginning, we talked about the additional funding that's been put into education. Are you able to split out the funding that's purely dedicated for the commission of inquiry response as additional funding? That's additional funding for education per say, I don't know if that's possible. I'm just wondering if it is.

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice on that, Chair.

If I take you to key deliverables in the budget papers, it's page 43, you'll see there's quite a layout that shows the money that's in the election commitments. It then separates out commission of inquiry, and you can see that's in DECYP, which is obviously over the Education portfolio but also over minister Jaensch's responsibilities as well. Commission of inquiry is continued down the next page as well. Does that answer your question?

CHAIR - Not specifically.

Ms PALMER - Are you wanting me to break up the commission of inquiry between the two portfolios?

CHAIR - I'll make an assumption and see if I'm correct. Pretty much all of this commission of inquiry funding in the key deliverables that's related to the Department of Education - your portfolio - is new funding or additional funding. Is that correct?

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - Is this on top of the Education budget? If you take out the new funding for the commission of inquiry response, is there additional funding to Education per se? Does that make sense?

Mr SALTER - Yes, there is additional funding outside the commission of inquiry. For example, where the minister's pointed out all the election commitments that relate to education, they have additional funding attached to them.

CHAIR - That's where we get the increase in expenditure on Education? Aside from the commission of inquiry that there was really no choice about - nor should there have been - but the additional is the election commitments? There's not a significant increase in funding to Education outside of the election commitments and the commission of inquiry commitments?

Ms PALMER - Outside of the election commitments?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms PALMER - It's your election commitments and your commission of inquiry that has the additional funding on top of the normal.

CHAIR - I am trying to ascertain if the base budget has gone up or if we just put these new things on top?

Mr SALTER - There are four key elements. There's the normal indexation that gets applied.

CHAIR - But you can't really call it increased funding. Anyway, carry on.

Mr SALTER - It causes part of the growth in the expenditure. There is the existing growth from the state government's commitment to the bilateral agreements, and that continues out until 2027. On top of that is the election commitment funding, and then on top of that is the commission of inquiry funding.

Ms THOMAS - In terms of the funding that is in the Budget, on page 43 of budget paper 2, volume 1, \$7.6 million is allocated to upgrade playgrounds and sports courts in schools across the forward Estimates. Can you confirm what the total is? Is \$7.6 million the total allocation for that - because I thought I read somewhere else it was \$10 million - and how will the playgrounds and sports courts to be upgraded be selected?

Ms PALMER - I can advise that the EOI process will go out in term 4, and then once that process is finished, that will be assessed by the department. The announcement will be at the beginning of 2025 for that process. There was another part of your question before that?

Ms THOMAS - What's the total funding to be allocated, because I thought I read or heard somewhere it was \$10 million, but then on page 43 of budget paper 2, volume 1, the amount across the forward Estimates - unless my maths is wrong, which is possible - added up to \$7.6 million.

Ms PALMER - I'll get him to speak to that.

Mr SALTER - Correct in the forward Estimates over four years: the total is \$7.6 million. The balance of \$2.4 million is in 2028-29, outside the four-year forward Estimate period. The commitment is still \$10 million from the government.

Ms THOMAS - Is there a reason why it's pushed out that far? Obviously, this will perhaps create an expectation if you're putting in an EOI now. I expect there'll be quite high demand from schools for a piece of this funding. I guess I'm concerned that there'll be a lot of people who feel quite let down by getting excited that this funding is available and then perhaps not being successful in their EOI, or that the project can happen anytime soon. Is there a reason why it was spaced out over the forward Estimates like that in terms of the entire \$10 million commitment?

Ms PALMER - I think it is exciting that we are going to see the \$7.6 million. My expectation is that the first tranche of that is going to be rolled out quite quickly. Hopefully, some announcements will be made at the beginning of 2025, and that work will happen. The \$7.6 million over the forward Estimates. I'll just get some more advice.

Mr SALTER - The total CIP program, with the government balancing its election commitments, there's a number of projects that have allocations in years five and six. This is one of those projects. It's a matter of balancing the significant program over more than just the four-year forward Estimates.

Ms THOMAS - Can I ask one more question on that? I assume there'll be criteria that applicants will need to meet in their expression of interest. Is there an intention to seek information on community access to facilities where people are expressing interest? Will priority be given to projects that provide community access to, for example, indoor sports

courts? We know there's a shortage across the state. Where there will be linkages with sporting clubs or partnerships that will be demonstrated, will there be a capacity for priority for those sorts of projects?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I think part of the election commitment was certainly to deliver upgrades to playground and sports courts at schools across the state for the benefits of students and of local communities. I will say that at a number of the schools that I have been to visit, I have been accosted in the entryway by students taking me to look at their sport courts and what they would like to see there. You're right, there is a level of excitement around this. It is good to have an opportunity to have a dedicated bucket of money specific for these types of things, but it certainly clearly states that it is for the benefit of students and for local communities. We are seeing where that's working really well across a number of communities with some really big infrastructure projects, like the one that was just opened at Penguin. We're seeing a number of different groups in the community actually using the most fabulous and enormous gymnasium that's been built there, that the school has all the benefit of when it needs it, and the community has the benefit of that as well.

Ms LOVELL - I just have some questions about the hard-to-staff school incentives. Understanding what the program is intended to do, I'm just wondering if there are any measures in place to take into account experience for teachers taking up those incentives, or to also encourage longer service? So, to encourage people to stay in those hard to staff schools for longer periods of time?

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice. A lot of the details of this are actually being worked through with the Australian Education Union. That's where we are up to with this body of work. The intent here is to attract teachers to those hard to staff schools which are not necessarily schools in remote areas. They could be hard to start for a number of different reasons, because it is in accordance with the state service industrial agreements, those negotiations are underway with the AEU, but our aim is that we would like to have that new model in place at the beginning of 2025. There are two incentive payments for staff who do commit to working at an identified school for a minimum of one year. Under the proposal, the first payment would be paid six weeks into Term 1 and the second payment would be six weeks into Term 3.

I think we are looking at this as a little bit of a pilot in the first year and if we have to pivot, if we think, 'Oh, this is not actually working the way we intended it to', then we will certainly look at that. This is just part of recognition that we have workforce issues that we are seeing across the country and what can we do to try and get teachers into some of these schools.

Ms LOVELL - So, the incentive payments are for a minimum of one-year service.

Ms PALMER - We are setting this up, we are looking at, 'Okay, well here is the intent, here is the outcome we are trying to achieve, is this going to achieve it, working with the Union on this?' If it is not getting the outcome we want, we will not continue with it. We will go, 'Okay, we might need to rethink this, we have got money in the Budget for it and we really want to see what can we do to try and ease the pressure of those vacancies in those hard to staff schools'. This is where we have started, as I say, if it is not getting the outcomes we want, then I would absolutely be wanting to pivot there.

Ms LOVELL - I am assuming the outcome you want is not for people to go there for a year and then go somewhere else.

Ms PALMER - No, because I think one of the really important things is that continuity and children getting to know teachers, teachers getting to know schools, being part of that school community. It was never the intention that this would just be a one off, one year thing, but this is the starting place for this.

Ms LOVELL - Is there scope then potentially for further incentives to be provided for teachers to stay longer? I mean, at the moment if the incentive is only for one year, what is going to stop people from leaving that school then?

Ms PALMER - I think that is part of the work that we will be needing to do in our negotiations with the Union and also in monitoring how this goes. Is there a good take up? What is the reaction to it? We have sort of tried to be quite specific in where we have chosen to put those incentives and the model is allowing for funding for additional years, so that is the discussion that we will be having.

Ms LOVELL - How will you make sure that you are not just moving teachers from other under resourced public schools into these hard stuff under resource schools?

Ms PALMER - That was certainly part of the discussion when we were looking at incentives for hard to start schools in particular, we wanted to make sure we were really protective of our incentives for teaching in remote parts of Tasmania as well. There has been consideration around that. I do not know if you have got any more to add to that.

Ms BURGESS - Just that you are absolutely right. We were very aware of that and certainly the Union, that was a concern of the Union that we did not remove staff from those more isolated, difficult to staff schools. That is one of the reasons why in discussions with the minister, we decided that notion of a pilot was better because we want to make sure that we have got the right incentives in place for the teaching cohort and we might need to nuance that for agent stage as well. We just want to make sure that whatever we are doing is right.

Ms LOVELL - I think just back to what you said a moment ago there, it is not just the remote schools that are struggling with resources. There are other lots of schools would say that they cannot afford to lose teachers. So, I am glad that it has been considered, but what measures are you putting in place to make sure that does not happen?

Mrs BURGESS - Well, I think that is where we have landed for the pilot, so that it did not cross into the isolated schools funding approach so that we are actually running a pilot which has slightly different parameters in place.

Ms LOVELL - I am sorry, I am still not clear on what is going to stop that from happening. I am not just speaking about remote schools, but any teachers can apply to go and work in these hard to staff schools with the incentive program, but what is going to prevent that then causing a problem in another school that has not been identified as a hard to staff school, but does not have additional resources where they can afford to be losing teachers to another school.

Ms BURGESS - I think these strategies are one part of the broader workforce strategy that we are putting in place because we know too, when we look at the demographics of our staff, that we also need to make sure that we have got a big enough pipeline of staff coming through to make sure that all our schools will be well supported in the staffing.

Ms LOVELL - I am understanding that but, in the meantime, once this incentive is in place and teachers start being moved to those schools, what are you going to do to make sure you are not leaving other schools without adequate resources.

Ms BURGESS - So again, our team in Schools and Early Years are working with our more centralised HR team to make sure that we are monitoring on a week-by-week basis on what is the impact of staffing, so this is just another lens. All the time we are monitoring where we have got teacher vacancies, where we have got predicted teacher vacancies, what that is looking like so this is another input into that strategy.

Ms LOVELL - Just two last questions on this. You mentioned the incentive programs that are in place for remote schools, are the incentives comparable or is the incentive for the hard to staff school more than what the incentive is for the remote schools on the West Coast?

CHAIR - Comparable in monetary value.

Ms LOVELL - I understand that it is not and that this new incentive is greater value than the incentive we have currently in place for the West Coast schools by about \$500.

Mr SALTER - I think it is as the minister said, when we looked at these new incentives we were cognisant of the isolated schools. There is a range of incentives that are applied to those isolated schools, perhaps not just the one allowance that you might be referring to and we are continuing to engage with the union so that we do not have any unintended consequences of devaluing the isolated school incentive.

Ms PALMER - I can actually advise that the isolated school incentive is actually much higher than the hard to staff incentive.

CHAIR - I assume that all staff, acknowledging various levels within that teaching staff, who work under the isolate school arrangement will get the same level. So, does this apply with the hard to staff, you got teachers in these schools already, will they all be uplifted?

Ms PALMER - Yes, they will, we are not wanting to add to tiers across at all and that was part of looking at the money that has being invested to say, yes, we are wanting to attract staff here, but we are also wanting to acknowledge those staff that are there.

Ms LOVELL - Just one last question on this. Is it the intention that these incentives will be rolled into the existing teachers agreement that is up for negotiation next year?

Mr SALTER - Yes, it is correct that the new agreement is up for negotiation, so it would make sense to both parties not to continue with a separate agreement just for the teacher incentive pilot.

CHAIR - There are probably more questions we could ask, in fact there are, but we might move on to 1.2 Early Education if we can so we can try and make sure we get to all the other output groups. So, did you want to leave on that one?

Output Group 1 - Education

1.2 Early Learning

Ms LOVELL - I might be not in the right line, but the Early Years Workforce Development Fund, is that within this Output? Does that sit within early learning 1.2?

CHAIR - It should do.

Ms PEARCE - That's correct.

Ms LOVELL - I know that \$500,000 of this commitment has been allocated through the Department for Education, Children and Young People, DECYP, and \$4.5 million through the Department of State Growth.

Can you elaborate, and appreciating that you're not the minister for State Growth, but we don't have that minister with us, can you explain the breakdown as much as you can?

Ms PALMER - I will seek some advice.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - In the education and care workforce, the government is providing \$5 million to establish an Early Years Workforce Development Fund. That's including scholarships and relocation and retention incentives in remote areas, and \$890,000 to provide funding for Early Childhood Australia's Tasmanian branch to assist with the strategic issues including workforce development and Skills Tasmania, as you've said, and the Department of State Growth is taking the lead with these actions.

The \$500,000 across three years, is for 20 scholarships for psychology and speech and language pathology university students. The scholarships will provide career pathways within the department for recipients.

Ms LOVELL - Are they full scholarships and what's the allocation?

Ms PALMER - Each scholarship is worth between \$15,000 and \$30,000 so there are different scholarships within that.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have any more information on the differences, like the courses and different costs?

Ms PALMER - With the 200 scholarships of \$15,000, it's a diploma and Certificate 3.

And the \$30,000 one is a Bachelor's and Master's, so that's per student to undertake an education and care qualification and work with a Tasmanian early childhood education and care service for two years.

PUBLIC

Ms LOVELL - Sorry, can you repeat the number?

Ms PALMER - The \$15,000 one is a diploma and Certificate 3.

Ms LOVELL - How many? Did you say 200?

Ms PALMER - There are 200 scholarships of \$15,000 and \$30,000 in the \$5 million bucket. The \$15,000 ones would be for that diploma and Certificate 3 and then the \$30,000 ones are for the Bachelor's and Master's.

Ms LOVELL - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Kerry, do you have a question on that?

Mr VINCENT - I do for CFLCs.

Minister, just for clarification under key deliverables. We have \$2 million for six new Child and Family Learning Centres, which I guess this must be for fit-outs or something, but on 2.7 on Page 64, six new Child and Family Learning Centres, but in the notes, it's probably an easy explanation that I've missed somewhere, it says four new childcare centres - Longford, Smithton, Scottsdale and Huonville. I understand there's a good one at Queenstown, but is there anything at Zeehan or Rosebery amongst them, or the west coast? We've been talking about remote education.

Ms PALMER - The four new sites, as announced in the election, have been identified as Scottsdale, Huonville, Latrobe -

Mr VINCENT - Longford and Huon, Smithton and Scottsdale

Ms PALMER - Scottsdale, Smithton, Longford and the Huon.

Mr VINCENT - And this six relates to two that have already been approved, is it? On page 65.

Ms PALMER - Yes, so that is six and five of those have been delivered, and so the sixth one is Glenorchy, isn't it?

Mr VINCENT - And that is going to be it, is it not? As there are no forward Estimates here.

Ms BURGESS - It is nearly finished, Glenorchy - that one, yes.

Mr VINCENT - For any other site to be added like the West Coast?

CHAIR - Sorry.

Ms LOVELL - Just a question about staffing within the Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLC) and particularly in relation to the staffing for some of those, allied health in particular, or staff who work across schools and the Child and Family Learning Centres across the network, so psychologists for an example, how do you manage or determine the need for

where those staff are allocated? Not arguing that staffing the CFLCs is not important because it is absolutely critical, but how do we make sure we are not just taking a psychologist out of a school and putting them into the Child and Family Learning Centre instead if we are dealing with the same pool of staff?

Ms PALMER - Let me just seek some advice on that. I will just ask Trudy to come back to the table.

Ms PEARCE - There is an allocation that is provided to all our Child and Family Learning Centres and especially around the speech and language pathology, as we know early language is so important. All our professional support staff are allocated from a team so it is always very considered around all our staffing so that there is not an over allocation to any one area, so we have a commitment to CFLCs for a minimum of 0.2 speech and language pathology.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have enough staff to not be leaving schools short then? I know early interventions are critical, but there is probably a generation of kids who have not had that early intervention and need that support in school now. So how do we make sure we are not taking from one to provide for the other and leaving one short? Do you have enough staff to do that?

Ms PEARCE - Over the recent years, we have employed more professional support staff across the three domains of school psychology, speech and language pathology and school social work, and so there has been a significant increase since 2014. However, we are still requiring more professional support staff, particularly in the area of speech and language pathology.

Ms LOVELL - I guess that is where the scholarship program comes in. Is there anything else being done in the meantime to fill those gaps while we are waiting for that pipeline of hopefully trained professionals to come through that scholarship program?

Ms PALMER - Yes, so part of one of our election commitments was to see more speech pathologists and psychologists. That is actually looking even further than Australia, like we are advertising far and wide for that, particularly I think it is New Zealand and Canada, I think was also on the list. So, there are a number of international destinations where we are searching to have that expertise come to Tasmania to help with that workforce shortage. We certainly accept that we do not have the workforce in that space that we need and that is why we have done that. I think it is also really exciting that this year is the first year that we have seen graduates from UTAS in speech pathology, which is really fantastic and to see them going out into the regions. I was actually speaking with some of our amazing staff from UTAS just a couple of days ago about this particular cohort of young people and they were saying as part of their work placement, they actually have them in work placements that are in their local communities. So, if you come from the north-west coast, they have your work placement on the north-west coast so that they are strengthening those community relationships. We hope that we will see them inserted right out across the community, which was really good. I have also been advised that we have got good numbers from the scholarship program and they are able to start straight away, which is really good.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have data on how many students are on a waitlist to see a speech pathologist currently and how long they are waiting?

Ms PALMER - I will just seek some advice.

Ms BURGESS - I am going to answer, on that waitlist, with some statewide data as at 31 March 2024, in the discipline of school psychology, the waitlist was 2217, in social work, 380, and in speech and language pathology it was 598. I think it is important also to add that even though there are waiting lists, we do work to triage to make sure that those children and young people that need more urgent support are prioritised.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have data on how long students do wait?

Ms BURGESS - I do, yes. This is the average waiting list time and it is from the data taken from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, for that 12-month period. For school psychology, 250 days for assessment and 198 days for intervention. For social work, 6.5 days, given the capacity issues, 808 students were in that period of time referred externally for support due to caseload capacity; and for speech and language pathology, 179 days.

Ms LOVELL - That is the average, do you have the longest time someone is waiting?

Ms PALMER - I do not know that I have that here, certainly have the average days so you can see why it has been so important that we are looking at what measures we can do to increase that workforce. As I said, exciting to see the graduates for the first time coming from UTAS adding to the workforce. It is brilliant to see that we have got good numbers from the scholarships and that we can get them on the ground as quickly as we possibly can and we continue to look to other jurisdictions across Australia and as I mentioned earlier internationally, to get those filled as quickly as we possibly can and get them on the ground as quickly as we can.

Ms LOVELL - Would you be able to take that on notice at all, the longest wait on those lists? What was the longest period that someone was waiting in those 12 months?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I think we can take that on notice.

Output Group 2 - Libraries Tasmania

2.1 Libraries Tasmania

Ms PALMER - Chair, we'll just need to bring some other staff up to the table for this. I introduce Sue McKerracher, who's the Acting Deputy Secretary.

Mr HARRISS - From the 2023-24 Budget and the current Budget, in the forward Estimates, there's a slight decrease in funding. I note on 23 August you had a media release looking into extending the hours of libraries around Tasmania. Can you talk a bit about the extending hours, and I think feedback has only just closed, has it? I'm interested to know how that will sit in with the Budget.

Ms PALMER - Libraries Tasmania provide a number of critical services for local communities, and the government knows it has never been more important for everyone to have access to literacy and to learning. Our government has invested heavily in the library network to expand services, to increase resources and to remove fees for book groups.

In September 2023, Libraries Tasmania undertook a systemic review of opening hours based on existing visitation levels alongside knowledge of the Tasmanian population and demographic changes. In relation to Library Tasmania's review of opening hours, we've been listening to the feedback from community groups. To be clear, I'll reiterate, as I did in that media release, that Libraries Tasmania is looking to expand library hours. We want them to be more accessible to people who may find it difficult to visit during those regular business hours. I have ensured that the department, with Libraries Tasmania, will be consulting with local communities to get a better understanding of the needs related to opening hours. Where a library would have faced a change of greater than 60 minutes on either side of its current opening hours, such as the change of the day that it might open or the time that it might open, or it might have closed at 4.30 p.m. and we might be considering it closing at a different time - we have asked Libraries Tasmania to undertake some targeted consultation where we know that some of those changes might have a bigger impact. We hope for the better, based on the research that we've done. The targeted consultation includes Bothwell, Bridport, Burnie, Hobart, Huonville, Kingston, George Town, Latrobe, Launceston, New Norfolk and St Helens.

The feedback for that has just closed - it closed last Friday. The consultation will now be considered before a final decision is made. We had some pretty good feedback, didn't we? Some of those communities did engage quite well.

Ms McKERRACHER - We did. I think that they're very modest changes and they also reflect the usage figures that we've seen over the last two or three years. I don't think there were any significant issues with those changes. The thing about making modest adjustments is that we can afford to do that within our current allocation. It's pretty much a cost-neutral thing for us.

Ms PALMER - Just to clarify, at the beginning of your question, you said that you looked in the Budget and you thought there'd been a decrease in funding -

Mr HARRISS - Yes, from the 23-24 Budget.

Ms PALMER - So, the 23-24 Budget was 46 -

Mr HARRISS - Yes, and the forward Estimates in the 23-24 Budget.

Ms PALMER - Then it goes up to 48, 49, 49.451. The numbers I'm looking at are showing an increase. Can I just clarify what you're looking at?

Mr HARRISS - No, if we go back to the 23-24 Budget, last year's Budget, through the forward Estimates, what I'm saying is that this year's Budget overall has a decrease from last year's Budget. Does that make sense? That's what my numbers tell me - of \$300,000 in allocation. Does that make sense?

Ms PALMER - You're saying in the forward Estimates last year in the Budget, it's a different forecast number?

Mr HARRISS - Yes, correct.

Ms PALMER - Okay. I was looking at this thinking I couldn't quite work out what you were - right, okay.

PUBLIC

Mr HARRISS - Yeah, sorry. So, just going off, that's the only way we can see whether it's -

CHAIR - Can you point them to the page you're on, Dean, perhaps?

Mr HARRISS - Well -

Ms PALMER - 54.

Mr HARRISS - Yes, but I'm also talking about last year's Budget - last year's Budget and forward Estimates.

CHAIR - Right, yes. You'd have to have last year's Budget papers.

Mr HARRISS - That's right. It's only a slight decrease, but I just wondered how it worked in with, obviously, if we're talking about extended hours but we didn't cover off on the extended hours.

Ms PALMER - Yes. I understand. Sorry, I was getting a bit confused there, but I am advised that with the money that we're seeing in the Budget, that is certainly - we're able to meet all of our -

Ms McKERRACHER - If I could say a few words about the approach that we've taken in Libraries over the last three years.

We've carried out a workforce planning exercise which didn't result in any job losses, but what it did was it helped us reshape the workforce. We're actually reflecting now the services that we offer. Our workforce was actually built around a 2008 service delivery model. By bringing it into a contemporary phase, we've got the right people, right places, doing the right things.

That was followed by our own internal efficiency piece. So, we've looked at the programs we offer and where we've got programs that may be - we're running quite a few of them, but they're only attracting three or four people at a time. We're looking at those programs that really have much greater impact and attract more people than that.

We're running fewer, better, higher impact programs. That's the process we've been through. We're now at the position where we've gone through the workforce planning, we've shaped the workforce around our service delivery, we've looked at our own internal efficiencies and we've made some adjustments there without in any way reducing service. Now, we're in a position where we can actually look at some more exciting opportunities to deliver new programs. That's kind of the three-year process we've been through.

Mr VINCENT - I've just got one more on the performance information. They're all percentages. Do we have numbers of people to go with that or not? It's hard to work out; obviously, it says percentage of people satisfied with Libraries Tasmania service. So, it's 93 per cent or 90 per cent but related to people. Do we know how many fill out the - I presume that's a -

Mrs McKERRACHER - It's a survey-based response. We would certainly know how many, so we could respond to that. I think what's interesting from our point of view is that we did a census at the start of the year in February and we've got some very good results from that which we can also share.

When we surveyed Libraries in February, we did a census. There were about 9000 people that visited the library on that day; 2255 responded to that; 99 per cent said they felt safe; 91 per cent said that they felt part of the community through their visit; 89 per cent said the library improved their wellbeing; 82 per cent learnt new things; 66 per cent said it improved reading skills and 53 per cent that it improved digital literacy. We are very happy to provide satisfaction figures and we can give you a number who responded to the survey, but there are other devices we use as well. We can take that on notice to come back with that figure if that is required.

Ms PALMER - Hang on. I will just check what is it you want to take on notice. To take on notice has to come through me, sorry.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, numbers of people from the survey, but I can send an email. It is just because you have got percentages marked up here in the performance information but I would be interested to know how that relates to numbers from the survey. Whether it is five people getting back or -

Ms PALMER - Are we able to try to get that information before the end of this session?

Ms McKERRACHER - I will hope it will come through and I will advise you if it does.

Ms PALMER - We will try to get you that before the end of the session.

CHAIR - Minister, 26Ten is funded under the Libraries Output Group 2, is it? In terms of the ongoing funding for that, it looks like it runs out. Can you tell us whether that is the case and how you are assessing the benefit and outcomes of this program for the expenditure that you make?

Ms PALMER - 26Ten is the network of organisations and individuals working together to improve adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania. Our nation leading 10-year strategy, 26Ten, concludes in 2025 and work is underway to look at a new one. We have committed a further \$640,000 over two years in this Budget to continue this program and of course the 10-year strategy is up until 2026, so it is funded to the end of the strategy. We will need to do an assessment around what are the outcomes of that and a review of progress. There was a review of some progress that was done last year and it did show that it is having good outcomes but we will need to do a thorough review of the 10 years and then look at whether we continue with the model that we have at the moment or, as I say, just because you have always done it does not mean you keep doing it. It will be based on those outcomes, but it is certainly funded up until then.

CHAIR - Can you provide a copy the outcomes that were of the previous review you did? When did you do that? You said just recently.

Ms McKERRACHER - Last year.

CHAIR - Have you got the outcomes from that?

Ms McKERRACHER - There is the broader 26Ten program and that is coming up so the strategy will be completed by the by middle of next year and obviously that is a bigger review. Within that we have the employer grants and we have also got the communities grants and the communities grants have been funded through till 2026-27. It is five communities that have been given four years' funding. There was an interim review which happened last year which showed quite positive results and was shared with the 26Ten coalition, which is the group that supports 26Ten. There will be a further review -

CHAIR - But can you share the outcomes with the committee? That is what I am asking.

Ms McKERRACHER - I can, but I do not have them with me, so we will just see if they come through.

Mr VINCENT - Over the last couple of questions I have touched on this a bit but just noticed, because dear old mum keeps telling me about when she goes to the library and I got a shock when I went in there, about services offered now and with changes in reading books and that. I just wonder whether, along with 26Ten, how successful that has been and whether there are other programs you are looking to introduce into libraries?

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. Well, we know that our library staff do such a great job every day at our 46 public libraries, the State Library of Tasmania, Tasmanian Archives, Allport Library, Museum of Fine Arts, the office at the State Archives and our Risdon Prison library. We are certainly very lucky to have such a dedicated and passionate team delivering so much more than only lending books and they are lending them to thousands of Tasmanians. That is why it is just so important for Libraries Tasmania to continue to meet the needs of the public and why the government is supporting a trial of open library access. This will extend the opening hours from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. daily and will give greater flexibility to the community to visit the library, borrow books to study, use the Wi-Fi, and we're trialling that at two locations. We'll be doing that at the beginning of 2025. We're looking at the Devonport Library, which is at the Paranaple Centre, and we're also looking at the Penguin Library. The trial will provide access to library members outside of those standard operating hours where you would expect to see staff.

There won't be any reduction to staff numbers. Those two particular libraries are managed by the same team and will provide contrasting samples for this trial. The hours of access to the Devonport library will increase from 47.25 hours to 98 hours per week and the Penguin Library from 10 hours per week to 98 hours per week. Access will be available to library members aged 16 and over who undertake a building and safety induction and sign a condition of entry agreement. Members aged 16 to 17 will require a parent or a guardian to complete that induction with them and to provide their consent and those under 16 will not be eligible. However, they can accompany a parent or a guardian or a grandparent, whoever it might be who does have access but then the onus will be on that adult to provide proper supervision at all times.

Obviously, safety and security is a top priority for both the visitor and the physical assets, including the books and the actual libraries themselves, and risk management planning has identified mitigations to minimise risk that could be associated with behaviour, safety and security.

PUBLIC

This will be in the form of a number of measures such as CCTV and lighting upgrades. There will also be the capacity for the visitor to call for security assistance if they were in a circumstance that needed that.

Mr VINCENT - Inside the building itself?

Ms PALMER - Yes, that would be my expectation.

Libraries Tasmania has been working with the Central Coast Council and Devonport City Council in the development of this pilot, and Libraries Tasmania has also consulted with Yarra Libraries in Melbourne. They had an open library implementation in 2021 which I'm advised has certainly been quite successful.

The first open library opened in Australia in 2016 and now there are 24 open libraries in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia and open libraries are certainly an innovative way for more Tasmanians to visit their local libraries outside of those standard areas. You can certainly see the great advantage for a working parent who wants to have time in a library that's, not open when they're not at work.

We're really excited about this and I'm really excited to have the opportunity to announce that for those two libraries at this Estimates.

Mr VINCENT - It will be interesting to see how it expands and how it goes.

Ms PALMER - It will be.

Mr VINCENT - It's almost a swing back to libraries at the moment from what I can gather.

CHAIR - In some communities, perhaps.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, I have a question about the elevator at the Hobart Library. I've been advised that there are three elevators - two public and one for staff.

What I'm being told is that the staff lift is broken, one of the public lifts is broken, and one of them has been very unreliable for about 18 months; so unreliable that staff have had to adjust where they work due to accessibility requirements. They've had to put limits on the number of books they can bring in and out due to OH&S and limits on the number of children and student groups who can access the library. When will they be fixed and why has it taken 18 months?

Ms McKERRACHER - The lifts at the State Library have been problematic, and we've all been very conscious of the fact. I'm pleased to say that the facilities team have got the lifts scheduled for replacement. There's work happening now. I will ask Kane, do you got any updates on that from the facilities perspective, or would you like me to continue?

Mr SALTER - Continue.

Ms McKERRACHER - I don't have the exact building schedule with me but the work's happening now. That's on two of the lifts that are in the stacks. That's where we have the archive

collection. I'm not sure about the other lift, I have to be honest, but it's being kept going at this point.

Ms LOVELL - When you say it's scheduled for replacement and the work is happening now, that's that replacement work underway now - I mean, you can see there's work being done at that library when you drive past. Is that part of those works?

Ms McKERRACHER - It's a separate piece of work, but yes. It's underway.

Ms LOVELL - It's underway. Thank you, that's good to hear.

Ms McKERRACHER - We've waited a long time, but it is underway.

Output Group 3 - Education Regulation

3.1 Education Regulation

CHAIR - Do you need to bring someone else to the table, minister?

Ms PALMER - Yes. While that's happening and Katharine O'Donnell is making her way in, there was a question that I took on notice around school lunches. Can I provide an answer on that? It was to the honourable member for Rumney, around the school lunch program.

The up to \$950 saving to family is based on a notional lunch cost of \$4.75 per day, multiplied by five days, multiplied by 40 school weeks. That comes to \$950. The more children per family means the more savings. There's a range of operating models in the schools. The lunches provided by the 30 schools currently involved in the school lunch program delivered by School Food Matters vary between one day per week and three days per week. Some schools provide it to classes, others across the whole school on alternating days contextual by school. A small number of the 30 schools, for example East Devonport Primary School, provide lunches four to five days per week using funding from other sources that they've sourced themselves, not necessarily from School Food Matters. That's the model.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you. That's what I suspected it would be. Aside from those schools that are funded on the four to five days themselves through other sources, do you accept that, unless you've got more than one child in school, if you have multiple children, \$950 a year is probably not a saving that most families will achieve from the program at the moment?

Ms PALMER - I think that's why the wording is 'up to'. You're right, it depends if you've got multiple children at a school. I'll be interested to meet the parent that's getting their lunch for \$4.75 a day, to be honest, but that's the calculation that was used. If you have two or three children at a school that might differ. That's why, I think, the wording was 'up to'.

CHAIR - Would you like to introduce, or you've already done it, have you?

Ms PALMER - Yes, I'm sorry. Katharine O'Donnell is the Director Education Regulation.

CHAIR - Did you have specific ones on that?

Ms LOVELL - I'm not sure if this fits within this line. I might have missed it. I wanted to ask some questions about curriculum development. Does that fall here or is that more in school? I can leave that. That's fine.

I did have a question, probably for the minister, about reporting on year 12 attainment. I know this is something that has been contentious, and that there's been some discussion in previous years around how we better capture meaningful work or education past year 12 in what is being reported in Tasmania. I know that it's not necessarily comparable with what gets captured in other states. Not that I'm saying our data will look amazing if we did capture everything, but it probably makes it look worse than it would look if we were reporting in those other states.

Where is that at? Is there any work being done around how we better capture those students who are not being captured in what we're reporting currently, but are going on to meaningful work or education, and who would be included in that data if they were reported on in another state?

Ms PALMER - I can certainly start off with this. It's a little bit of a passion project of mine. Every year we see it, and I experienced it for the first time as Education minister this year. We see headlines splashed across the media and in political circles as well - 'Fail for Tasmanian students'. That's a really unfair criticism and it's an unfair reflection on our amazing workforce and what our amazing young people are doing.

We're not comparing apples with apples, and certainly when the ROGS data comes out, it specifically says, 'Be careful how you interpret this. You cannot read this and think you're comparing the same thing with other states.'

I guess there are two ways of looking at it. We feel that the information and the way we're reporting is authentic and accurate. There are other states that have added in VET courses and other areas where those young people are going. We could do that and it would absolutely change our data.

For me, I look at it and I think, 'Well, the way we're reporting it, I know it's accurate and authentic but it doesn't tell the whole story.' I've had young people who have been absolutely gutted by the narrative around this especially in the media and in political circles - people who have come to me and said, 'Do you realise that I am being classified as a failure through this?'

We've had a number of meetings and I have certainly been advocating on behalf of these young people. We need to get a better education across what this narrative is, or maybe we need to look at - do we start looking at a state like South Australia where we are often compared to and saying, 'All right, well, let's look at what's actually going into their basket of fruit and let's put our own basket of fruit together to match theirs.'

At least then we would actually have comparable and fair -

Ms LOVELL - Can I ask you a question on that, because you said that you feel that what Tasmania is reporting is accurate and authentic, but then you have a young person coming to you saying that they think they're being classified as a failure. If what you're reporting is accurate and authentic, then they wouldn't be included in that data anyway.

I guess I am trying to get to the bottom of it. I understand the comparison issue, that if we're comparing with states then we're not comparing apples with apples. Fair enough. Putting comparisons aside though, our attainment level would still be low. What can be being reported? Should we be including those other things so that we are better capturing what young people are doing? If not, then I would argue that number is - if you're saying that's accurate and authentic, then clearly that needs some work.

Ms PALMER - I think I might pass to Katharine, but I will add that defining educational success is actually one of the terms of reference in our independent review of our education system. We feel really strongly in this space and, as I said, I've heard from students who say it's been a blow to them in the way that it's been reported.

I might get in trouble for saying this, but in some regards, mischievously, for people who have a certain agenda, it works well for them to report it in a certain way that actually impacts our young people. It impacts teachers who are slogging it out and doing an amazing job and who are actually really proud of young people, who may not necessarily be an apple being compared to an apple.

Ms LOVELL - Understanding that, I guess the question is - those people that are scrutinising that data, sometimes maybe there are other motivations, but often they are doing it because they want to interrogate the system and make sure that we're providing good educational outcomes.

I think it's also difficult for people who want to unpack and scrutinise it if they're not able to make those fair comparisons with other states as well. I guess the question is for everyone: How do we better capture and report on that data so that the government can be comfortable with what you're reporting, but so that others who are scrutinising that can also be comfortable that that is the full picture that we're looking at and we're making fair assessments.

Ms PALMER - I think it'll be really interesting to see what comes out of the independent review around this. Did you want to make some points?

Ms O'DONNELL - Perhaps if I can, minister. It is certainly something that at officer level we are considering and working with the other jurisdictions on. Your point was really interesting around what is attainment. At the moment we say attainment is a TCE or attainment is an ATAR. That may not necessarily be the indicator that we should be looking at, and some states don't.

There is actually a meeting next week at officer level, and one of the things on the agenda is what are the other states looking at, and being quite open and transparent with each other around trying to get some consistency around that so that we are not saying, 'Well, why is South Australia over 100 per cent and we are not?' We need to understand that so that we can work out what is the best and fairest way of assessing what attainment is.

Ms LOVELL - There are also targets set around attainment in the Budget, so what is the measure for that? Is that the measure - that it is a TCE or an ATAR? Because if we compare our results with that target, we are still a way off that target. Maybe it is being clearer about what are the parameters that we are measuring all of this within, so that everyone can be being fair about this.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - Absolutely. I am really wanting to move in this space. That is why I made it a priority in my terms of reference for the education review, and that is why we have been having the conversations that we have been having. I am certainly look forward to hearing back from the meeting with officials in the coming weeks.

CHAIR - With regard to your performance information there, how are the targets -

Ms PALMER - Sorry?

CHAIR - The performance information on page 59, with regard to the Teachers Registration Board. This is the number of teachers moving from provisional to full registration and engagement directly with stakeholders regarding TRB functions. How were those targets actually set? They seem to be arbitrary in some respects.

Ms O'DONNELL - These are some of the new performance measures that have come out.

CHAIR - That is what I am asking, how were they set?

Ms O'DONNELL - Through the new boards. They have been set at this stage based on areas that are of the most interest and focus for the board at the moment. The provisional to full process is of huge focus for the board, and there has been a new process developed which makes it somewhat more straightforward than previous ones for teachers to progress through from provisional to full registration. This is to monitor over the next 12 months essentially how those changes are performing, and are we actually getting the teachers moving from provisional to full registration that we expect to see. That is where that target has come from.

Engagement directly with stakeholders has come from feedback that the Teachers Registration Board got last year in a survey that it did with stakeholders where, to be fair, the results were not great with regard to how they were perceived and how their engagement with stakeholders was perceived. That has been another huge focus of their work, to improve the way that they engage with their stakeholders, to improve the way they get information out, to make it easier for people to register, and to hear what teachers are saying and to try to act on it. It is measuring whether things are working and improving, and the same process will be gone through again to determine whether those values have improved or not.

These will continue to be evolved over the next 12 months as the boards work through both the Minister's Statement of Expectations and those areas of performance that the boards believe need to be captured or improved.

CHAIR - I am conscious of the time. I think we are supposed to finish at 6.30 p.m., so we are already over and there are probably still some more questions for this minister. We haven't got to capital investment and there are some questions with that. We may need to leave those line items open, acknowledging that you will be in the Chamber to respond to these questions, unless you want to stay later? We have been here all day to be fair.

Ms PALMER - I think we will have to leave it open and we will have to come back and do it in the Chamber in -

CHAIR - in the Budget wrap-up.

Ms PALMER - I think so, because I have another team waiting.

CHAIR - Yes, I understand, and that is why I am making the point. This time we've got two ministers with very significant portfolios in the same day - Treasurer, then Education and then Disability -

Ms PALMER - I'm in your hands.

CHAIR - In the lower House you might be able to do that because you have different members coming and going, but not on this committee. We sit here the whole day.

Ms PALMER - I'm on your team.

CHAIR - Okay. We will take a 10-minute break to enable people to change the team, but I do think if you had time today we'll leave this line item and the capital investment open.

Ms PALMER - And this line item as well?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms PALMER - Do you have more questions on this?

CHAIR - Well, we're on home education and it relates to that. Sorry, I'm losing my voice.

Ms PALMER - Is that just another few minutes of questioning on that? I'm happy to leave capital works open but I'm wondering if we could finish out this line item.

CHAIR - Or maybe if I could take the questions on notice, perhaps, in relation to the number of families who are being home educated - we've got that now - and the process that is undertaken to monitor their progress, particularly the numbers as they relate to - because there was a lot that applied for home education after a round and after the initial COVID period, particularly with the reopening of schools in 2022. What are the numbers trending in that regard?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes, I can talk to that, absolutely.

CHAIR - [inaudible] disability as a result.

Ms O'DONNELL - The number of registered students at 31 March this year was 1479 from 889 families. That is an increase from the same time last year of 100 students, well, just under 100 students, with 1397 this time last year from 844 families. There was an increase after COVID between 2021 and 2022 from 1143 to 1467, but that went back down again the following year. In 2023 a number of those students returned to school, so that dropped from 1467 to 1397, and now it's just edged back up again to 1479, so we've not seen the dramatic increases that other states have seen over the last few years, but that is partly because Tasmania has always had a slightly higher percentage per capita of home educators than other states.

CHAIR - So it doesn't appear to be a trend of continuing to increase above what is normally the trend.

Ms O'DONNELL - There's always been an increase of between 50 to 100 students a year, and it seems to have settled back into that again.

CHAIR - But there was a drop from the COVID numbers.

Ms O'DONNELL - That's correct.

CHAIR - It's back to a more normalised level.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes. Did you want to know about the process?

CHAIR - Yes, the process for reviewing and the outcomes for those students.

Ms O'DONNELL - When the *Education Act* was changed, you might recall there were a number of standards put into the legislation, 10 or 12. Home educators need to prepare a written document setting out how they're going to address each of those standards with each of their children. If it's a new application, that document is assessed and if it meets the standards on the face of it, they're given provisional registration. Then about six weeks later, a registration officer who's trained goes out, meets the family, meets the children, looks at the work, talks about what they're doing, and determines whether the program is meeting the standards or not.

That process is repeated every year, so the registration is only for one year, and it actually works out to be about nine months because that's about when they need to put the next application in. At that point, the registration officer goes out again and visits. Compared to other jurisdictions, Tasmania is probably the most child safety-focused of all the home education processes, where our home-educated students are visited at least once a year by registration officers.

CHAIR - Are there any children or families that have not met the requirements?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

CHAIR - How many?

Ms O'DONNELL - This is a little confusing, but because 452 students have withdrawn, what we often see is that when they're not meeting the standards, they self-select out; they withdraw and go back to school rather than be told they can't continue to home educate. I might need to take on notice whether any or how many of those have actually had their registration revoked, as opposed to deciding they will withdraw.

CHAIR - There's 400?

Ms O'DONNELL - Four hundred and fifty-two students.

CHAIR - They voluntarily returned to school?

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

CHAIR - Maybe they were going to anyway.

Ms O'DONNELL - They have been anyway, or it may have been because they weren't meeting the standards.

CHAIR - But we don't have the number of how many were revoked?

Ms O'DONNELL - No.

CHAIR - When you look at the number of revocations, it would be small, but is it for a family or for a child or children?

Ms O'DONNELL - For each child.

CHAIR - So one child may stay in home education and the other child might not?

Ms O'DONNELL - That's right.

CHAIR - So it would be revocations per child.

Ms O'DONNELL - Yes.

CHAIR - We'll put that to you on notice.

Ms PALMER - I believe the questions have to come via me.

CHAIR - Yes, they will all come to you, minister.

Ms PALMER - Thank you. I've just got a couple of questions that I'd like to provide answers to, they're quite quick. The first one I'll pass to Kane, which is in regard to the lifts.

Mr SALTER - In regard to the lifts, one is being returned to service in November, the second is waiting on some parts and expected to be returned to service in two to three weeks.

Ms PALMER - I've also got some information for Brighton High School for professional support staffing - 0.4 FTE for a social worker and 0.4 FTE for a school psychologist, and those positions will be commencing in term 4 of this year, which is a great lead-up for them. From term 1 2025 they will have 0.4 FTE for the school nurse.

Finally, there was a question on the 2016 communities program impact evaluation of the first 18 months of the program, an operation that was completed in September 2023. The report found that the program demonstrated value for local adult learners in the four funded communities. The report makes a number of recommendations to be considered that will focus on improvements in program governance, in design, performance and capability to support community-led projects that leave behind sustainable changes.

It recognises the complexity of the collective impact approach to community-led behavioural change projects with vulnerable target groups in low socioeconomic communities. 26TEN communities operate in areas of social disadvantage where learners experience often complex and competing priorities while intending to change behaviour in an area of strong

stigma, improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. These skills are often difficult for adults to acquire so all possible ways of engaging and motivating disengaged learners are necessary.

The aim is for the recommendations to be considered with key stakeholders, the 26TEN communities coalition and 26TEN team to agree which recommendations are to be adopted and implemented over the next six to 12 months to improve the program model for future communities and create resources that can be shared more broadly.

CHAIR - The question was could you provide the report? Was there an actual report that basically that's outlined in?

Ms PALMER - That's the information I've been given.

CHAIR - We'll move that one on notice and you can tell us what you can provide.

Ms PALMER - So you want the actual report?

CHAIR - Yes, if that's possible. Thank you, minister.

The committee suspended from 6.29 p.m. to 6.35 p.m.

Output Group 7 - Community Partnerships and Priorities

7.1 Disability Services

CHAIR - Welcome back, minister for your portfolio of Disability Services. If you would like to introduce the people at the table with you now and I invite you to make an opening statement, should you wish to do so.

Ms PALMER - Yes, absolutely. I would like to introduce Mel Gray the Deputy Secretary, Policy and Reform, and also Ingrid Ganley, Acting Executive Director, Disability and Reform and behind us, if we need her, is our Executive Director, Policy and Delivery, Jodi Willcox. That is my team.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make some opening remarks. I would like to begin by acknowledging Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and original owners of the land that we are on. I pay my respects to elders past and present. The number of Aboriginal people in Tasmania that report a profound or severe core disability is 11.8 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 7.7 per cent and the general Tasmanian population of 8 per cent. As Minister for Disability Services, I am determined to achieve outcomes for all Tasmanians living with disability

It is a busy and important time for people living with disability and for the Disability portfolio with the national disability royal commission and the review and reform of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and, at a state level, the development of the new disability rights inclusion and safeguarding bill. This is as well as the usual policy, regulation and funding of peak and advocacy services for Tasmanians with disability.

As this committee is aware, the disability rights inclusion and safeguarding bill has been introduced into parliament. I take this opportunity to thank my Legislative Council colleagues for their collaboration as it passed the upper House, another important step towards delivering

a safer and more inclusive Tasmania for people living with disability. This bill also provides a response to some of the recommendations of both the disability royal commission and the NDIS review, and places Tasmania in a strong position to continue to respond to these important reforms.

In the 2024-25 state Budget you will see an allocation for Output Group 7.1, Disability Services, of \$287.783 million in 2024-25 to ensure we can continue to support the needs of our Tasmanian disability community. This budget allocation includes support for the implementation of the bill, funding for advocacy and peak disability supports in the community sector, funding for smoke alarms for deaf and hard-of-hearing Tasmanians and funding for continuity of supports for Tasmanians requiring specialist disability supports who are not eligible for the NDIS.

Predominantly, though, the budget allocation is made up of the department's contribution to the NDIS. For 2024-25, this contribution will be \$297 million. I note that the Disability Services budget output and the NDIS contribution differ as the NDIS contribution also accounts for Tasmania's in-kind contribution to the scheme, currently made up of the state's funding of personal care and support in schools for children with disability, and specialist school transport for students with disability. This is managed as an offset of the total financial contribution, which explains the difference in budget allocation in the output group and the financial contribution to the scheme overall.

I am pleased to take questions from the committee.

CHAIR - If I just start with the funding, I did note when you were reading out the funding for 2024-25 and 2025-26, the numbers were different to table 9.13 on page 289 - not extraordinarily different, just a little bit different. Page 289, which is what we scrutinise the revenue from appropriation by output. If you could just take me through again, perhaps with a little bit more clarity, around the amount of money for this year's budget, \$297.482 million that makes up our contribution to the NDIS. I am interested in how much is not that.

Ms PALMER - How much is in-kind?

CHAIR - A full explanation of what that is, perhaps, because it seems there's also, potentially, money that is there for other purposes that aren't the NDIS.

Ms PALMER - The Disability Services state budget allocation has increased by \$12.7 million, from 275.1 million in 2023-24 to \$287.8 million in 2024-25. This includes new initiative funding of \$300,000 for Changing Places, \$8.7 million for the disability inclusion bill implementation, so that's setting up the disability commissioner and those types of things, and \$2.8 million for disability reform. The disability reform money is looking a - we've had these two enormous bodies of work with the NDIS review and the disability royal commission, so looking at those recommendations and saying, 'Okay, what work do we need to do in this space?'. That's the breakdown of what that is. The funding for the disability reform is support for reform through capacity and capacity building, promote change management processes, facilitate market and advocacy.

CHAIR - If I can just go back to the question, minister. In table 9.13 on page 289, the appropriation for this year is \$287.482 million. How much of that is our funding for the NDIS?

What I thought I heard you say in your opening comments is that a significant portion of that is our contribution to the NDIS.

Ms PALMER - I am advised that the in-kind proportion is around \$19 million. If you look at the \$297 million contribution in 2024-25, which will be the actual cash contribution plus the in-kind, with an estimation of around \$19 million for the in-kind, you'll be looking at a contribution of \$278 million, which is the cash component.

CHAIR - So, in 2025-26 it's \$278 million. I want to understand how much we are giving to the NDIS as our portion.

Ms PALMER - The cash component is \$278 million. On top of that is around \$19 million for the in-kind proportion, which I laid out in my opening comments.

CHAIR - What year are you talking about?

Ms PALMER - I am talking about 2024-25.

If you look, as a co-funder in 2023-24 it was \$285 million. That would have been the cash component plus the in-kind.

CHAIR - Where are you reading from?

Ms PALMER - Scheme overview.

CHAIR - Right. The numbers aren't adding up for me here. Take me to the figure of \$287,482,000, which is the appropriation for this output group for this year. How much of that is our NDIS cash component?

Ms PALMER - The cash component is \$278 million.

CHAIR - \$278 million?

Ms PALMER - Yes. The \$19 million in-kind is not reflected in the budget papers. On top of that, you have the further investment of the money for reforms, implementation of the bill, \$300,000 for the change of [inaudible].

CHAIR - The thing is, it does not seem like enough. That is what I can't quite figure out.

Ms PALMER - It's about \$10 million.

CHAIR - There is about \$10 million in the appropriation that is not for NDIS cash funding. That \$10 million is to fund all these other things, including advocacy funding; children's therapy mainstream component; mainstream services such as health, education and justice; continuity of support -

Ms PALMER - Sorry, can I get Ingrid to talk to that?

Ms GANLEY - The cash contribution in our output group for our operational covers the budget commitments around the inclusion bill and the reform. It includes the elements the

PUBLIC

minister read out around advocacy, peak body and smoke alarm funding, as well as our continuity of support and to start the staffing and policy areas of disability. The other areas you mentioned are what the Tasmanian government does for people with disability outside of the disability services funding line item.

CHAIR - Where is that funded from?

Mrs GANLEY - St Giles, for example, sits within the Health budget. The reference in the budget papers is that as a state government we have responsibility for mainstream services which sit across Justice, Education, Health and other portfolios.

CHAIR - Minister, can you provide a breakdown of the cash component of the NDIS to the committee? The money, the allocation for the delivery of the new bill and all the other things so we can actually see. It's one line with no detail.

Ms PALMER - Yes, we'll have that for you before the end of the session.

CHAIR - Thank you. It makes it difficult to ask questions without that to go on.

Ms PALMER - I can give you some of those numbers verbally if you want that, which is what I laid out before: \$300,000 for changing places over two years.

Ms THOMAS - But that's infrastructure.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it is a co-contribution to a national program that the Commonwealth is rolling out. That's the state's contribution. It will provide a number of changing places and I believe one of them, at least, is going to be a mobile changing place, which means it can be taken to any part of the state, Taste of Tasmania, Festivale in Launceston, east coast, whatever it might be. It is a co-contribution. There is \$8.5 million for the disability inclusion bill over four years. That includes the establishment of the commissioner and senior practitioner.

CHAIR - Is that staggered across the four years?

Unknown - That's an average of -

CHAIR - It will be lumpy, I imagine. The allocation will be lumpy, it would not be evenly spread across.

Ms PALMER - While we are setting up.

CHAIR - So it would be really good to have it for the four years.

Ms PALMER - With regard to the \$8.5 million for the Disability Inclusion and Safeguarding Bill over the four years, it is \$1.5 million for 2024-25, for 2025-26 it is \$2.350 million, for 2026-27, same again \$2.350 million and 2027-28, \$2.350 million.

Ms THOMAS - That is essentially the funding for the Office of the Commissioner.

Ms PALMER - And the Senior Practitioner as well. In the reform space, you have got a 2024-25, \$732,000, 2025-26, one million, 2026-27, \$550,000, 2027-28, \$550,000.

CHAIR - What does that cover, reform?

Ms PALMER - Yes, that is the reform. We have got the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review and there is a lot of work that actually has to go into our pathway forward with the recommendations that have come out of there and the work that needs to be done. That money is to do that body of work.

CHAIR - Is that all of it or is that is there other?

Ms PALMER - Which is I think is what I just read out before.

CHAIR - We have got changing [inaudible], we have got the bill, we have got reform.

Ms PALMER - And you have got the reform and then on top of that, you have got the NDIS contribution and then the in-kind support and then some of those other line items that you mentioned sit outside of this sort of portfolio. On top of that, as part of what we fund in the advocacy space for the Association of Children with a Disability, 2024-25 you have \$405,813. For Advocacy Tasmania, you have \$379,791.

CHAIR - Is this out of your budget?

Ms PALMER - Yes, Speak Out Advocacy, \$363,408, National Disability Services \$118,610 and Expression Australia is \$25,000. That total is \$1.292622 million, that is for 2024-25.

CHAIR - Ok, so that figure is included in the appropriation figure? It is. It would be really good to have this listed in the budget papers, actually, because it is impossible to know what is in that. I mean, that is not your fault, that is the Treasurer, perhaps. Can we tell him?

Ms PALMER - Maybe I can talk to him.

CHAIR - But you see the point, I think, there is one big bulk amount and for us to actually scrutinise whether from our perspective, there is enough money there to do all the things that are needed and was a large chunk of it is the NDIS, which is inescapable and necessary, if we do understand the pressures on some of our advocacy organisations and that sort of thing, it is a little bit hard to know that they have been provided what they need.

Ms PALMER - Chair, can I just check, please, are you happy with the figures that I have read out or would you like us to -

CHAIR - I think you have provided them all.

Ms PALMER - I think I have provided all the information.

CHAIR - I am suggesting in future budget papers, it would be good to have some sort of breakdown of that big number, or leave it as a separate chart you can put in that actually breaks that that bulk amount down. We do not want the budget papers to be any much fatter than they are right now. Hopefully we will not have another election to jam in next year.

PUBLIC

In terms of the funding that is available for state responsibilities as such, like not the NDIS funding as such, are you satisfied that that's able to meet the needs of the people that your department is tasked with serving?

Ms PALMER - I think that's a very difficult question to put to the Disability minister. I

-

CHAIR - Feel free to say what you think.

Ms PALMER - Yes, sure. I don't know that that's how this works, with all respect, Chair.

I think that it is a huge contribution that the state puts towards our NDIS contribution. Of course, a percentage of that also sits in the ILC funding space, which is a competitive process for disability organisations to ensure that they have funding. I think I've spoken about this when we were debating the bill, that we've been very vocal as a state in saying that we don't believe that process is the best process for funding a lot of our organisations and we are really hoping that the feedback that we've given - and that other states and territories have given - will certainly be considered as we move into this new phase of the NDIS.

But, at the moment, that is the process, that's the way it's been set up and that is the expectation of state and territories that that is how the Commonwealth set up the NDIS. But I think we will see movement in that space. Even now, the federal government is going out to consultation on work around general foundational supports, which we believe is going to replace - for want of a better word - the ILC funding model.

CHAIR - Okay. So, just in terms of your performance information, there's only a couple there related to the disability services page 283. With the new disability bill that we've just passed through our House - called disability bill for shortness - and the review of the NDIS and the royal commission, is there any intention to revisit these performance indicators? Because they don't actually tell us a lot about outcomes for people with disability.

Surely, we would want to know the percentage of people with disability getting their needs met. Part of that's the NDIS, I accept that, but, from the responsibilities of the state, wouldn't we want to have more outcomes-focused KPIs?

Ms PALMER - Yes. I think, with so much change in this space, that a lot of things like that will need to be looked at. A lot of that information will come through when we establish our disability commissioner. A lot of that data will be presented to both Houses of parliament through the annual report. But I think a lot is changing in this space. So -

CHAIR - Yes, so, then I go back to the question, are you going to review the performance information in here, in the budget papers? These things sit unchecked for years. Some are worse than others in terms of not measuring anything but numbers - about people who turned up at the door and didn't get turned away; don't even know how many were turned away. I'm not talking about this situation, but some of them their performance information is totally meaningless.

Ms PALMER - Yes, I have no trouble with it being looked at. I think that's something I would need to talk to the Treasurer and consult with Treasury about, but I'm certainly open to

it. And it was really important to me and to us as a team that a lot of this information would be publicly available, not just in budget papers.

I don't know how many people outside of all of us read the budget papers really, but an actual annual report from the disability commissioner to ensure that we do have a lot of that information readily available for anyone to see is certainly something that we could look at. I'd need to do that in consultation with the Treasurer.

CHAIR - And probably with the commissioner, too, once you get them in place. So, the funding for the implementation of the disability rights and inclusion bill, it doesn't seem like a lot really when you think about you've got to establish the commission, you've got to appoint the senior practitioner. There are a number of other mechanisms within that legislation that will take funding, I would assume. How have you landed on this amount?

Ms PALMER - That's the work our interim Disability Commissioner, Mary Mallett, did. That was part of what we asked of her to do - to look at what we actually want the disability commissioner to do, and what support the disability commissioner would need to be able to do that work. It was a collaboration between the department. We were very much looking at the advice that we got from our interim Disability Commissioner. It's from there that we landed on that.

CHAIR - How do you envisage the commission being set up? It'll be an independent process, but staff-wise, that sort of thing? I'm trying to understand the resourcing of that office more fully.

Ms PALMER - It includes funding for the disability commissioner and a staff of seven FTEs to support the operations of the office. That's the commissioner and the seven. Inclusive in that is also the support for the inclusion advisory council.

CHAIR - Are they paid?

Ms PALMER - They are.

CHAIR - Adding up. Ka-ching ka-ching.

Ms PALMER - Expansion of the Office of the Senior Practitioner with the creation of a new senior practitioner position, which will be an Allied Health Professional Level 6 and two additional FTEs to support the operations of the team plus the operating costs of both offices.

CHAIR - Officers, not offices?

Ms PALMER - Offices, as in laptops and offices. Not 'er', 'es'.

CHAIR - Offices, right. That's all going to be done within \$2.35 million?

Ms PALMER - Per year, for 2025-26.

CHAIR - With no increase over the forward Estimates? Seems extraordinary to me. I assume the commissioner would want a reasonable salary, one would expect. The seven FTEs, disability inclusion - I've forgotten what they're called

Ms PALMER - The advisory council.

CHAIR - The advisory council, sorry. And the senior practitioner, and all the gear that goes with them. Right, okay.

Ms PALMER - That was the body of work that we asked our interim commissioner to do - to look at what would actually be needed for those two positions in particular, to fulfil what we have in our new legislation. We've worked from there.

CHAIR - What level would the commissioner positioner be?

Ms PALMER - It's been costed at an SES 2.

CHAIR - Right. Getting people recruited to the position, you'll need to reward them suitably. Good luck if you can get it done, I'd say.

Ms THOMAS - That was the question I had: how much is allocated and how is this determined? That was my concern, that it's not going to be enough to do it properly.

Ms PALMER - Sorry to interrupt, I think it's probably also important to remember that there are a number of other budget processes during the lifespan of that. We're not wanting to skimp on this.

CHAIR - After all, forward Estimates are only guesses, aren't they?

Ms PALMER - We're doing our very best to budget this out. Mary Mallett, our interim Commissioner, worked for a long time on this. Our department has scrutinised this. There are a number of budget processes in between now and 2028.

CHAIR - I hear what you're saying; it's just that without any increase in funding anticipated, it basically means there's no CPI in wages, salaries, which I don't think is what people would generally expect to see. We'll watch with interest.

In terms of some of the other areas of funding that sit in other departments, you said there were some across some of the mainstream services in Health, Education, and Justice. This is in your description of 7.1, on page 281, and the children's therapy mainstream component - that was [inaudible] by St Giles. So, why are they included in this output group if they're not funded in this output group, but they're funded through other - I assume the minister for communities?

Ms PALMER - I'll just seek some advice. I'm advised that it's describing all of disability of what the state government does. It's looking across government and saying this is what is provided in disability services.

Ms THOMAS - It's not contained in that line item.

Ms PALMER - Okay. There was a concern when the NDIS came in that people thought we would stop everything, so the decision was made that we would actually put under disability services that holistic look at disability services across all the different agencies.

CHAIR - But they're funded by different agencies. So, if I wanted to understand more about the advocacy funding, that comes out of your bucket, I think from what you said.

Ms PALMER - The advocacy does for individual advocacy, yes.

CHAIR - Like Advocacy Tasmania and Speak Out?

Ms PALMER - Speak Out, the Children's Services Advocacy. Advocacy Tasmania, Speak Out Association, and the Association for Children with Disability Tasmania - they're the three.

CHAIR - What are the mainstream services, such as Health, Education and Justice, that fit into the disability frame? We don't have Health and we don't have Justice. We missed Education for asking questions about the funding for people with a disability. You did mention, in fairness to you, some of the issues of children with disabilities in schools, but where's the information that supports the disability service model in those other portfolios? I just finding it hard to understand how you would properly scrutinise this when the funding doesn't sit in this line item.

Ms PALMER - You would have to do scrutiny in those other areas. It doesn't sit in my portfolio.

Ms THOMAS - In which case, you don't have control over those areas as disability minister, which seems -

Ms PALMER - Outside of my role, certainly as an advocate across all of government and all the portfolios, which is how I see this role. I'm not the Housing minister, but I often talk with the Housing minister about making sure that this is well and truly front of mind for him organising for Homes Tasmania to come and address the Premier's Disability Advisory Council. I certainly see my role as disability minister as an advocate, but I don't have line of sight over there. They sit in other portfolios.

Ms GRAY - In terms of the reform, we have a departmental-level steering committee that I chair, as the relevant deputy secretary for Disability Services, and that has every government agency represented on it so that we're working collaboratively towards the reforms and having conversations about those mainstream services in those agencies at the departmental level, and appropriately briefing ministers as required on issues that arise in those other agencies.

CHAIR - It seems to me, this is one of the challenges I have as an elected member. You get a person come to the office with a disability-related matter and say it's regarding disability parking, let's say, and it's over in Infrastructure or Transport or wherever that sits. But to get anyone to actually take any responsibility for it, who can I talk to, to address this constituent's concern? It just gets pushed around and round and round - no-one.

Ms PALMER - You can absolutely come to me and I will find where you need to go.

CHAIR - In the past that hasn't been the case, I might add.

PUBLIC

Ms PALMER - That is absolutely the case and certainly has been since I've been disability minister. I do not have a 'wrong door' policy; if someone comes to me and it's not directly my responsibility under this portfolio, I will always find out who they are meant to speak to. The other thing is, a disability commissioner is also going to be pivotal in this space as well and there will also be a 'no wrong door' policy there.

It may not necessarily fit with the disability commissioner - disability parking, I'm not sure, sometimes maybe it sits even with local government - but it's making sure that people are not going through exactly what you've just described, talking to this one and being pushed off here and here and here. They can come to me, to our disability commissioner and we will find where they need to go if the responsibility doesn't sit there.

CHAIR - Will there be a power then - I'm using an actual example here of a woman with a disability who requires taxi transport into town. She lives in a relatively narrow street with a bit of a steep drive, but people go up and down there all the time. She's been unable to get a taxi to come and get her because they say they can't get out of the street easily. There are cars going out all the time. She waits at the taxi rank; she's visually challenged as well as her mobility.

Ms PALMER - Can I just check, is she using a wheelchair accessible taxi?

CHAIR - No, she's got a walking frame, but she is visually impaired as well.

Ms PALMER - And other vehicles go in and out of this street?

CHAIR - Yes. When we've tried to make representation on her behalf, it seems we just keep going around in circles. She waited at a taxi rank and because she can't see the taxi coming, she doesn't know it's there, but they just go past.

This is a person with more than one disability who's finding it extremely difficult to interact and socially integrate; because she's visually impaired, she can't drive herself. Is this something that the commissioner will start dealing with?

Ms PALMER - You can go to the commissioner, as I say, there's no 'wrong door' policy with the commissioner and there's no 'wrong door' policy with my office. I often have people come in, especially with transport; I am working with the current Transport minister with a round table looking at better accessibility, better transport options for people with disability and I certainly advocate whenever I need to. If you want to bring that person's name to my attention, I would be more than happy to advocate on her behalf, which is what I see as the job of the disability minister. We have our interim commissioner at the moment, but once our disability commissioner is in place, again that's another place where someone could go to and we will do what we can.

CHAIR - People with disability interact across all our departments, whether it's Health, Education, Infrastructure, Justice - the whole lot.

Ms PALMER - Which is why our inclusion bill is so important, because we will be asking all of our departments, all of our GBEs, all of our entities to factor into their policy conversations, into all of their plans, how do you integrate people with disability into your plan? That is one of the exciting things about our new piece of legislation, that we will see that across every entity of government.

CHAIR - Your role beyond that is still to be the 'no wrong door, open door'.

Ms PALMER - It is for me, yes. That's what I do, that's what my office does and we have people contacting us for all sorts of reasons. If we can navigate a pathway that's easier for them, if we can give them a name and a number or get someone to call them, then that's what we do, on a daily basis.

CHAIR - Yes. Obviously I supported the legislation, as we all did in our House, but hopefully it will start to change some of these things because it has been a problem.

Ms PALMER - It will have to because entities will be held to account.

CHAIR - Any other questions? Wheelchair accessible taxis are hank's teeth and I don't think there are any in Burnie at the moment or Wynyard, and we have a lot of people up there with mobility disability.

Ms PALMER - I do have an exciting project that we're working on at the moment where we are working with the Transport minister, where we're actually looking at, because it is a real problem, access to our wheelchair accessible vehicles. We have so many organisations that actually have these vehicles that might in the morning, pick someone up, take them to New Horizons, they're there for six to seven hours, whatever it might be and so we're actually looking at, where are those vehicles? What are they doing?

Let's have a bit of an audit of what vehicles do we have around the state and that's work that's in progress.

CHAIR - So, they wouldn't necessarily need to be a certified or whatever the term is?

Ms PALMER - Well, they already are because -

CHAIR - They're not a taxi though.

Ms PALMER - Yes, it may not be a taxi, but we're just looking at we've got these vehicles. What are they doing? Have we -

CHAIR - Sitting in someone's garage for the rest of the day.

Ms PALMER - They could be sitting in the car park of multi-cap, we don't know. This is a really exciting piece of work that we are progressing in collaboration with the Transport minister just to do an audit. So well, where are they? How many have we got on average? How are they being used? Could they be used to be taking someone to a medical appointment at 1 in the afternoon instead of sitting in a car park? What does that actually look like?

We know there is an issue with this. We know that there's an issue with taxis. We did a body of work last year to incentivise trips to pay extra to the owners and the drivers. We saw a bit of an uplift in the number of trip that were being taken, but it didn't sustain. So we keep going, we keep looking at what else can we do, what other options are there and that's what we're doing at the moment.

PUBLIC

We've heard some horror stories of people getting to a restaurant and then at 9:30 at night, can't get home and they're outside and the restaurant is closing. That is not a society that is prioritising people with disabilities being able to participate in any way that they want to and we understand that transport is a barrier to that and so that's why we're going hard.

CHAIR - Good to be aware of that. So, minister, is there anything you wanted to add before we close off on disability?

Ms PALMER - No, I don't think so, other than to say we are really aware at the moment that there's a lot of angst in our disability community with people with disability, with their families, with their carers. Just that as a team we are advocating at every level to work through the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission to see the implementation of our bill, to work through and advocate on behalf of Tasmanians with the NDIS review. I guess this is perhaps just an opportunity for our disability community to know that at every point we are just so engaged in this and trying to achieve the best outcomes that we possibly can for all Tasmanians.

CHAIR - Thanks, in a tight budget. Thank you, minister, for your time and we'll close off the hearing, stop the broadcast.

The committee adjourned at 7.27 p.m.