

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 - EDUCATION**

**Wednesday 4 September 2019**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas**

## **EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING**

<b>UNCORRECTED</b>
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**The Committee met at 9:30**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)  
The Hon. Mark Banasiak  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam  
The Hon. Wes Fang  
The Hon. Scott Farlow  
The Hon. Courtney Houssos  
The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Deputy Chair)  
Mr David Shoebridge

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Sarah Mitchell**, *Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning*  
**Mr Kevin Conolly**, *Parliamentary Secretary for Education*

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

come to the position that we support diagnostic testing but we would like to see a review. That is why we have done the work that we have.

**The CHAIR:** If I can just come to another review process, there has been a report that the Federal Government is reviewing the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians from a decade ago. What is the input of the New South Wales Government to that process?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That matter is part of the Education Council, on which I sit as education Minister. We have had consultation sessions run by the Federal Government here in New South Wales. We have also had two sessions run by our department: one in Cabramatta and one in Tamworth. We are due to discuss the progress of that review at the next meeting of Education Ministers at the end of next week.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, I am going to continue the line of questioning of the Hon. Mark Latham. You would be aware of the article that was in *The Australian* on the weekend. Is this the secret weapon that the department is going to employ to achieve the Premier's NAPLAN targets?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is always good to have a prop at estimates.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It is a joke that something like a Chupa Chups lollipop can influence the results of a testing regime as serious as NAPLAN. The article asserts that it was 20 points. NAPLAN has no credibility, does it?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** My understanding is that the article referred to a school in Victoria in relation to that particular Chupa Chups lollipop. As I said, I have made my thoughts clear on NAPLAN. It is the diagnostic tool that we have; it is what we need to use. We are required to with our arrangements with the Federal Government. But obviously in New South Wales we would like to see a review of the testing regime itself. I have been very clear on that. That is why I took the position that I did to the Education Council. The council operates by consensus. It was my hope that other States would agree that it was time for a review and that the Commonwealth would share that position. It did not.

That does not pre-empt the States that are conducting the review to do that. It is our intention to take any findings back to the Education Council. This would need to be a change at a national level; I accept that. But I do not accept that it is okay not to look into something when clearly there is feedback from the sector that it is time we had a look at it. I do not think there is any need for us to put heads in the sand over this. What is wrong with reviewing a testing regime to make sure it is still fit for purpose after a decade? I think that is a sensible approach.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, I want to ask you about the Service NSW survey on before- and after-school care. When did the New South Wales Government launch that survey?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will check.

**Ms HARRISSON:** It was at the start of July.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How was it promoted?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The Premier and I visited a school to announce that it was going online and was available for parents to provide feedback. We issued the appropriate media releases as part of that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Was that just to free media? Was there any paid advertising or communications with schools?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will take some advice on that.

**Ms HARRISSON:** My understanding is that we did not pay for any media through the Department of Education, but I will double-check.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Was there any communications with schools?

**Ms HARRISSON:** We have encouraged schools, in our communication with them more generally, to make their parent bodies aware through their P&Cs, newsletters and other communications, and to encourage the parents to let us know what their needs are around before- and after-school care.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Was there any specific directive to say, "Communicate with your parents about this"?

**Ms HARRISSON:** Not that I am aware of, but I can check.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** No, that is fine. How many people have participated in the survey so far?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The figures that I have in front of me state that since 1 July more than 2,000 parents have told us where and when they need more care via that website.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So, on average, there has been one response from each of the schools across New South Wales?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We cannot make that assertion. I am saying that 2,000 parents have told us where and when.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That is a fairly low response rate.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As I said, the survey is still up and it will be up for a period of time. It is an opportunity for us to get data from families as to where assistance is most needed.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How are you communicating with parents who take the survey to ensure that they know that it does not guarantee them a place in before- and after-school care next year?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might ask Ms Harrison to comment on the specifics of what we are doing with that data.

**Ms HARRISON:** Obviously the questions are available publicly and you can look at those. We are quite clear that they are about seeking the intent of parents around their future needs so that we can help where we have supply-and-demand issues in the State. We want to be able to make progress on that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, can you confirm that you are on track to deliver before- and after-school care for every parent at every public primary school by 2021?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What I can confirm is that we are on track with our election commitment, which was to provide before- and after-school care at every primary school in metropolitan areas and in major regional centres. As part of that commitment, we also allocated funding for smaller regional communities for more bespoke solutions, given their practicalities—which I am sure you would appreciate—for some of our regional communities. We are doing an awful lot of work in this space. We are consulting with the sector and with principal groups. We know that it is important for parents to be able to access these services and I am confident in the progress we have made so far.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** When in 2021 will it be delivered?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We are working to the timetable that we made as part of the election commitment to make it available for term one.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Just to clarify, are you going to have before- and after-school care available for every parent in every public primary school by term one in 2021?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, that is not what I said. It is not every parent in every public primary school. It was in line with our commitment in metropolitan areas and major regional centres. As I said, in other smaller regional communities we are working on more bespoke solutions, given the differences that will be the case in some of our smaller towns. I am confident that we are on track with what we committed to.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I appreciate that about smaller regional centres—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: Once again, the Hon. Courtney Houssos is asking the Minister a question and the Minister is providing a very detailed answer. The Minister should be allowed to answer the question.

**The CHAIR:** That is our policy. But we do not want detail to morph into time occupation. That is not what is happening with this Minister. But I ask that she wraps up her comments.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have answered the question.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Just to be clear, in metropolitan areas and major regional centres every parent in every public school will have access to before- and after-school care by term one in 2021?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Where there is demand for those services. Also, keeping in mind—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That is a walk back from the original commitment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, it is not. As I said, we are sticking by our election commitment. That is notwithstanding the fact that we already have several before- and after-school care services operating in our public schools across the State. But we are on track with our election commitment to deliver what we said we would do.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Will the demand be based solely on this survey?

**Ms HARRISSON:** We look at demand across the system. We engage with schools around where the needs are for them and their communities. We are using a number of different strategies to meet that demand, including funding for additional facilities, rental subsidies for operators on public school sites and \$20 million in an innovation fund to allow people to come forward.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I have read the specifics of the election commitment. I am interested to know whether the results of the survey being conducted through Service NSW will reduce the amount of before- and after-school care locations where it will be delivered.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That will be part of the data that we will consider. But, as I said, we are also consulting with stakeholders and the peak bodies in relation to before- and after-school care, as well as our principals. That is one element of the data that we will consider; but not the entirety.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can you confirm how many additional schools will have before- and after-school care services operational by the end of this year?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can you also take on notice the number by the end of next year and the start of 2021?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will take that on notice and provide you with the information that we have. Obviously there are many schools that already offer a before- and after-school care service. But I will see what data is available and provide it to you.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** What is the Government's plan once the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education is removed?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Given that this is my third year as the Minister responsible for early childhood education, I have spoken about this many times before. We have had year-on-year agreements. It is important to stress that I have raised with both the current and former Ministers at a Federal level that we want longer-term certainty on the funding. Recently we signed a deal going forward for the next 12 months. The Federal Government is also undertaking a review. As I said, I have made it clear to Minister Tehan on a number of occasions—as have colleagues from around the country—that we would like to see longer-term deals on the national partnership arrangements so that there can be greater certainty for the sector.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I am pleased to hear that you have been advocating on their behalf.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** The review is not due until 2022. The current announcement from the Federal Government is that the funding will end in 2021. What are you going to do once that funding runs out?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again commenting a little bit on a hypothetical, but we have year on year—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** It is not a hypothetical. It is a budget announcement.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, we have had in place year-on-year arrangements in the early childhood space for a number of years. Obviously for us in New South Wales we are proud of the investments that we have made into early childhood education, particularly the work that we are doing in our preschool sector. My advice is that the review from the Federal Government is due in early 2020. Part of that will be obviously coming back to us as States as to what the future is in terms of long-term agreements. But I will always advocate for longer term agreements. I do not think year on year provides enough certainty to the sector. As I said, that is a position I have taken from my very early days as early childhood Minister.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But this is a very different situation. This is not just year-on-year funding. This is a fundamental change from the Federal Government that said it will vacate the space. It will end

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** If you want to answer them, become a Minister.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are before- and after-school providers required to pay for electricity that they use at New South Wales Government facilities, including for air conditioning?

**Mr SCOTT:** Let us take that on notice. I want to double-check that. We will take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. And if they are, can you tell me how the appropriate amount is being determined?

**Mr SCOTT:** Yes, sure. Happy to.

**Ms HARRISSON:** Our providers do pay rent to use our school sites for before- and after-school care. One part of the election commitment around this is to provide a rental subsidy for those providers operating on our school sites to enable more providers in to provide more service for our communities.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thank you. Ms Mackey, we referred earlier to the support that has been provided to early childhood centres that have been assessed at "working towards". Can you explain when that program was formulated and what support is being provided to centres?

**Ms MACKEY:** Sure. Our program is in response to trying to achieve the objectives of the national quality framework, which is part of continuously improving for all services. So that is particularly targeting working towards services.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sorry, so does that mean that only services that are classed at "working towards" are eligible to work in the program?

**Ms MACKEY:** Yes. Can I just get to that? That working towards program, the initial target is working towards services but the information that is being developed through the program—particularly the information around self-assessment for services—is something that is being created for the whole sector. And we are just about to work with the sector on the rollout of that. It has been very successful. It is being delivered on our behalf by ACECQA, so it is giving services really bespoke support around how to improve what is happening in their service. We know that if a service goes through the program, they are three times more likely to be rated as meeting or above when they next go through assessment and rating.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You said the service is being provided by ACECQA. What does that mean?

**Ms MACKEY:** We have done a procurement process and ACECQA was appointed to deliver the working towards program.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So this is the New South Wales Department of Education that has then subcontracted to ACECQA to provide this program to services in New South Wales. Is that correct?

**Ms MACKEY:** That is right.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And how many services is it for?

**Ms MACKEY:** It is for up to 300 services.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Up to 300. Every year?

**Ms MACKEY:** We are currently in our second round and each round was for 150 services.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. And what is the total funding envelope?

**Ms MACKEY:** It is \$5 million.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. And when was the program developed?

**Ms MACKEY:** I will have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Roughly two years ago?

**Ms MACKEY:** Maybe 18 months ago.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. That is fine. So can you tell me if there are any future plans for future rounds, or you only have a \$5 million funding envelope at the moment?