



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr BM Saunders MP (Acting Chair)
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr MP Healy MP
Mrs JA Stuckey MP
Mrs SM Wilson MP
Mr JP Kelly MP

Staff present:

Ms L Manderson (Acting Committee Secretary)
Ms M Coorey (Assistant Committee Secretary)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

Brisbane

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The committee met at 10.15 am.

ACTING CHAIR: Good morning. I now declare open this public briefing from the Department of Education. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I am Bruce Saunders MP, the member for Maryborough and acting chair of the committee. Unfortunately, the chair, Ms Leanne Linard MP, the member for Nudgee, is unable to be with us today. With me today are: Mrs Jann Stuckey MP, the member for Currumbin and deputy chair; Mr Michael Healy MP, the member for Cairns; Mrs Simone Wilson MP, the member for Pumicestone; Mr Nick Dametto MP, the member for Hinchinbrook; and Mr Joe Kelly MP, the member for Greenslopes, who is a substitute today for the committee chair, Leanne Linard MP, the member for Nudgee.

The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. Those here today should note that these proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. The media may be present so you may also be filmed or photographed. Before we commence I ask that everyone please ensure mobile phones are switched off or turned to silent mode.

The purpose of today's hearing is to provide the committee with an introductory overview of the Department of Education and its activities, priorities and initiatives in the Department of Education. I now welcome our departmental representatives.

HUNT, Mr Jeff, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services, Department of Education

NIXON, Ms Leanne, Acting Deputy Director-General, State Schools, Department of Education

ROBINSON, Ms Lesley, Acting Deputy Director-General, Policy, Performance and Planning, Department of Education

SCHIMMING, Ms Sharon, Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood and Community Engagement, Department of Education

WALTON, Ms Patrea, Acting Director-General, Department of Education

ACTING CHAIR: I invite you to commence your briefing, after which members may have some questions.

Ms Walton: I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you to the committee for the opportunity to speak with you here today. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I warmly welcome the opportunity to provide the committee with an overview of the Department of Education and our particular priority areas and achievements in early childhood education and care and state schooling.

In Queensland we have 1,240 state schools: 918 of those are primary schools; 185 are secondary; 92 are combined primary/secondary—that is P-10, P-12 schools; two are specific-purpose schools; and 43 are special schools. This compares to 508 schools in the Catholic and Independent sector. I acknowledge and thank those in the non-state sectors for their ongoing collaboration and cooperation on areas of joint interest to us all. Our 550,000 enrolled state school students are supported by around 50,800 teachers and 19,200 teacher aides. We have an annual budget of over \$12 billion for the financial year.

For the Department of Education, each year represents a window in which we can make a difference in the lives of state school students and children in early childhood settings. Under our overarching state school strategy, our vision reflects the moral imperative behind everything we do:

to have every student succeed. In this student centred approach we ask ourselves: what is the experience of one child in our educational system all the way from the early years through to completion of year 12? What can we do to ensure their growth and improvement year upon year?

Education is one area of public policy of which virtually everybody has firsthand experience and on which most of the community has personal views. As a department we embrace these diverse perspectives; however, missing from some of the more highly publicised commentary is the untold story of Queensland's success over recent years. Some of this story you will hear about today, including our success exceeding targets for access to kindergarten; narrowing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in year 12 attainment; and our work leading the nation to address bullying and cyberbullying through the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. Our success begins with our outstanding workforce of principals, teachers and non-teaching staff. High-performing schools have strong local leadership, and great results are built on high-quality teaching. I acknowledge and thank our school leaders, teachers and support staff for all they do each and every day to improve the lives and prospects of their students.

The main focus of the work of the Department of Education is direct service delivery, with over 95 per cent of our 88,000 staff working on the front line. However, behind the scenes there are critical staff providing support in areas such as human resource management, information technology, finance, infrastructure services, performance and data analysis, and research and policy development. Every day in every lesson we want every student in our 1,240 schools to be learning and achieving to their full potential in a safe, supportive, inclusive and disciplined learning environment. Many people contribute to this, and I would like to acknowledge my colleagues here today at the table for the work that they do in corporate services, early childhood and community engagement, state schooling and policy performance and planning.

The department does not directly deal with early childhood education and care services, with some notable exceptions being eKindy, the remote kindergarten pilot for families in rural and remote locations, and the pre-prep program delivered across 30 discrete Indigenous communities by state schools. What we are responsible for is funding, regulating and supporting the approximately 2,900 education and care services that deliver education programs and care services to more than 298,000 children in Queensland.

In partnership with the Australian government, we have worked to deliver universal access to kindergarten. In 2017 we exceeded the 95 per cent target, with 99 per cent of eligible aged children enrolled in a kindergarten program. For the fifth year in a row Queensland has continued to close the gap on kindergarten participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with 4,843 out of an estimated 5,279 Indigenous children enrolled in 2017—a difference of 436.

While it is important we recognise our successes, it is essential that we continue to build on our achievements in the years ahead to improve developmental outcomes for children in Queensland. The state schools division leads the development and implementation of strategies, policies and tools that equip principals, teachers and other school based staff to create learning environments in which wellbeing is supported and all students are able to realise their full potential. The division also leads concerted efforts to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability and students living in rural and remote locations throughout the state. Additionally, it is the registered provider for international students in Queensland state schools.

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, completion of a year 12 certification is a significant achievement and one that sets young people on the pathway to improved life outcomes. In 2017, 98.1 per cent of our year 12 state school students and 97.2 per cent of our Indigenous year 12 students received a Queensland Certificate of Education or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Attainment. This represents a narrowing of the gap to less than one percentage point, compared to the 29.2 per cent gap that existed in 2008. Our goal is to close it entirely, and we are working with schools around the state to achieve just that.

In 2018 our strategy for success includes a focus on four priority areas including: lifting the performance of our top students; closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the area of year 3 reading; improving year 9 writing; and lifting outcomes for students with a disability. Through our youth engagement strategy we are committed to identifying and working in an individualised manner with those young people who have disengaged or who are at risk of disengaging to help them transition back into learning or employment.

Over recent months an intense spotlight has been shone on the devastating effect that bullying has on people from all walks of life. While we know that this is a whole-of-community issue, we are proud to take a leading role to address bullying, and we are working with our partners in the

community and around the nation to do that. I am delighted to say that the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence last Friday, which Queensland leads, had a record 4,475 participating schools this year across the nation, including 100 per cent of Queensland state schools. The 2018 calendar has 199 school days and after today there will be 159. Each one of those days is an opportunity to make a difference. We are attuned in state schooling to the concept of growth and to ensuring that every student receives at least one year's worth of growth in every school year.

The corporate services division provides finance, human resources, information technology, infrastructure and procurement services across the department's 1,240 schools and 88,000 employees, enabling one of the largest and most dispersed agencies in Queensland to deliver vital education services. The work of corporate services helps to ensure that the department achieves sustainable investment, better utilisation of assets and resources, and increased organisational productivity and accountability of its investment for both business and education outcomes. The department's \$18 billion asset base includes schools, teacher accommodation and early childhood education and care services run on departmental land.

I am conscious of the time and I am conscious of how much I have left here, so I seek your advice on whether you would like me to truncate or whether you would like to go to questions now.

ACTING CHAIR: If we could just truncate, because we have a few questions we would like to ask and I think it is very important that we get answers for the committee, because education is a very big part of everyone's electorate moving forward with future generations.

Ms Walton: The policy and planning division coordinates major research, reviews and evaluations and leads the development of the portfolio's legislative requirements, performance monitoring, reporting, functions and governance, and risk and planning activity. It also oversees the management of grants for the non-state sector and the delivery of services for home education and supports the portfolio's statutory bodies. Queensland has made great progress in lifting educational outcomes and this particular area, the policy area, is also engaged with the federal government around the new school funding arrangements which are to be determined. Every school and school community is different and their own context, successes and challenges exist. By delivering on the government's commitments and securing the best deal for Queensland in federal negotiations, the department is supporting every young Queenslanders to succeed.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide this quick overview and I welcome any questions the committee may have for either me or members of the executive.

ACTING CHAIR: We have wonderful teachers and principals out there in the regional areas—this is particularly for you, Jeff, because I am really not happy with what is happening with the education department. Areas like mine, the Maryborough electorate, are getting jobs moved out of the regional office and moved into places like North Lakes, for instance. That is taking away not only jobs from the community but also skills and education. I think it has to stop. I want to know what the department is doing about making sure these jobs stay in regional Queensland. A lot of our children are behind the eight ball before they start with education because they are from dysfunctional or low-income families or there is a lack of resources in some of our schools in regional Queensland. What is the department going to do to keep these jobs in regional Queensland?

Mr Hunt: Employment everywhere is important to us, and there is certainly a whole range of things that we do in the department to make sure we stimulate regional employment. I would point to the Investing for Success initiative as one significant funding initiative that has been provided to schools over the last four years and is continuing in both 2018 and 2019. It is stimulating employment growth throughout schools and providing \$240 million to schools to stimulate teacher and teacher aide growth in the main. Schools have that flexibility to choose the employment makeup of that spending, but that is providing far greater employment than would otherwise be in play.

Further, I guess over the last three years, as the chair may be aware, with the Extra Teachers initiative, 875 additional teachers above growth have been allocated across schools right across the state, so these combined factors are adding to increased employment in regional areas rather than decreased. I guess it is important that the department is in a position to respond as populations shift.

I think it is also fair to say that, from a corporate perspective, we recognise the importance of a regional presence in our corporate structure as well, and that structure has over the life of this department—and I have been with the department for some 30 years now—seen that change to meet the changing demands of both the organisation and the services that we provide and where and how those services are consumed.

I think it is important to acknowledge also that the way in which our current workforce is consuming the services we offer is changing and we need to be agile to respond to that. I certainly take your point about the regional footprint. As an old Wide Bay person myself, I understand the importance of the regional employment footprint for the department.

The other part that we stimulate through our work in the department, on the corporate services side in particular, is the response to the Queensland purchasing and procurement strategy, and that has a very strong flavour in it in terms of regional employment. With a department of our size, in terms of our capacity to stimulate and support regional employment in a whole range of manners—whether that is with the local newsagent or the bookstore or the local building and contracting companies—there is a whole range of ways in which the department contributes to regional employment.

If there are specific questions I am happy to take those offline or to have a further chat about them at another time.

ACTING CHAIR: I am certain we will have further discussions. You still have not answered my question. I will pass over to the deputy chair.

Mrs STUCKEY: I am really thrilled that we are able to have a briefing from you today as we embark on a new committee. I have some questions that you might want to take on notice to help me get up to speed, and perhaps the rest of the committee would agree. With regard to reviews and reports, I wonder if you would be able to provide us with a list of some of the reviews and reports that you are undertaking. I am interested to know if there were some underway during the last parliament in the year 2017 that perhaps lapsed. It seems a shame to waste any body of work that you may have done. What happens to those if they are not completed? Do they just fall off the radar?

Ms Walton: One of the major reviews that was undertaken—and the recommendations were published last year in a major piece of work—that the department is working on this year, implements the recommendations of the disability review. Those recommendations are on the website. There is a significant amount of work happening not only within the department but across government departments as well to ensure that every student with a disability is succeeding. We can certainly provide you with that list of reviews and reports that we have. That was a major piece of work that was completed and it is a seminal piece of work, I have to say. Are you referring to even smaller reviews such as the review of a policy?

Mrs STUCKEY: Yes, it would be great to see anything that the committee is able to have that is not government-in-confidence. I understand there are some topical issues out there at the moment as well, and that probably leads me to where I want to go next. I did take part in the national day of action, and you will see on my Facebook page that we did support that. I would like to be involved in my schools, and I wonder if there is some way that I can be involved in schools in Currumbin. Are you running workshops or is there anything that local MPs are able to do? I already sponsor a program—I have done it for a term—called Men of Business, which is for young guys who perhaps need some support. Is there a way that local MPs can get involved?

Ms Walton: All schools welcome the support of locally elected representatives. Sometimes that is simply done through things such as the P&C committee. I am sure that all of you on the committee have locked those meetings into your diaries once a month. There are certainly avenues such as that, but there is no hindrance. If we can assist that in any way, shape or form, particularly as the member for Currumbin, with the regional director in the south-east, we are happy to do that.

Mrs STUCKEY: I was just asking if there was anything specific. I understand that task forces are being created too, but it would be great for MPs to be involved in that process. We know our schools fairly well, rather than have people coming in from other areas who might know education but do not know the local geography.

Ms Walton: Certainly. We will take that on board.

Mr HEALY: Thank you very much, ladies and gentleman, for your attendance here. More importantly, they are great statistics in relation to 2008. They are significant and very impressive. I know there is a huge amount of hard work that goes into that. We have passionate teachers, principals and teacher aides, and I want to acknowledge that at the outset. Like a lot of people, I did love what you said in relation to the fact that everybody has an involvement. Last week I attended my 10-year-old son's parent-teacher discussion and it was interesting. He has a wonderful teacher.

I have a quick question because I get this from a lot of teachers. There are some challenges that a number of children face, and I will touch on dyslexia at this point. What I do know about dyslexia is that as the child progresses—regardless of gender but it is predominantly in males—through their schooling life they become more isolated, and this creates enormous challenges for the individual,

teachers and families. Sometimes it can create further and derogatory issues so that when that person leaves there is a total disengagement from what goes on in the classroom. I know in this state we do not recognise dyslexia in any official capacity—I could be wrong—and I have asked teachers and I have had a number of parents talk to me about this. Can I ask: is it an issue? Do teachers raise it with you? Is it recognised and should it be going anywhere?

Ms Walton: Thank you for the question particularly about this topic. Leanne, you may be able to give the date, but a number of years ago we established the Autism Hub and Reading Centre under the previous government. It was established for two reasons: to provide a greater service to schools in the community around autism and to provide a greater service to schools and communities about reading, particularly dyslexia. The Autism Hub and Reading Centre—I will focus on the reading centre—provided a lot of professional development for teachers across systems around dyslexia and how to best support young people and how to best teach young people with dyslexia. It has only been recently established. They provide professional development for teachers right across the state. That has been a significant step forward in supporting students with dyslexia.

You then get to the question: is it recognised as a disability? That is a question that has come up for as long as I think I have been in the department, and that is a couple of years. In specific funding for students with a disability we have six categories. Dyslexia is not one of those categories. Nor is Tourette's; nor are a lot of other disabilities because they are the most common disabilities. What we have also done is provide a bucket of funding to schools—we call it the WSS-SLR funding—where 25 per cent of that funding goes directly to schools, not through regional offices, to support students who do not sit in those six categories, to support students who may have other disabilities. Whereas there is not a seventh category that says dyslexia, additional funding does go to schools to support students with other disabilities. Probably the breakthrough for the department in supporting students and parents of children who have dyslexia is the service that is provided from the reading centre. Any parent can ring, any teacher can access that, and any principal can access that, irrespective of what schooling sector they are in.

Mr HEALY: Thank you; that is an excellent response. What I do see particularly in my area—I can speak with confidence—is that there are a number of teachers or principals who are allocating funds to breakfast, lunch and dinner programs and, whilst they are not acknowledged or recognised through the funding, they are pulling capital from other areas. Do you think it is an area that should be recognised, or do you think that if there are six areas like dyslexia and some of the other afflictions like Tourette's and others it should be recognised? I know it is not. You know better than I, but is this something where we could identify six or seven or whatever afflictions—if we can refer to them as that—and if we do identify them, could there be an improvement? What are your views on that?

Ms Walton: We had the disability review which was finalised last year, and part of that review was looking at the funding methodology. The funding methodology includes where you directly fund. Also we have the national data collection instrument, which is providing information federally and also to states on the adjustments that are required for students with disabilities. It does not discriminate. It does not say 'with dyslexia' or 'with an intellectual impairment'.

Can I say that we are in the process of working through with the NDIS the categories within the federal funding envelope to the department. That process is in train to look at the categories that we have in place to see whether they are the categories that we need to go forward. Certainly this is a very topical discussion and I am happy for the assistant director-general, disabilities inclusion, to provide you with further detail around that.

Mr HEALY: That is terrific. I will apologise to my colleagues because I have one more question. This is one topic that I am very keen about because I have a large number of concerned parents. With regard to the ability for parents to bring other independent organisations into schools to assist—for example, a retired teacher or a person who is a professional and working in the Susan Barton program, which is specifically about reading and dyslexia—I understand they are not allowed to come into schools. As far as I know, they have not been allowed to come on-site to one particular school, so some students have been taken from school during school hours to a private house. Is that an issue? Does the principal make that call or is there a directive from the department? How does that work? I am just interested to know.

Ms Walton: It is a school based decision. There are a lot of organisations that want to work in schools. There are a lot of people who want access to students in schools. There are a lot of researchers who want access to students in schools. Ultimately, it is a school based decision. The principal is the accountable officer for the school, so we say that is a school based decision. If the

principal is not aware of the particular organisation he or she will often take advice, either at a regional level or from the centre. Typically, it is the principal's decision who comes into the school and certainly if students are being withdrawn from the school.

Mrs WILSON: My question also concerns dyslexia because I am the parent of a child who is 22 and has suffered from dyslexia from a young age. In relation to ascertainment, are you saying that with the new funding model you are looking at children will not have to be ascertained to be able to access that funding? My understanding is that has always been the way it has taken place.

Ms Walton: We are looking at what adjustments are required to support the learner. The term is 'what adjustments are needed to support the learner to successfully complete school'. The federal government has been focused on what adjustments are needed to support learners, and certainly that is what we will be looking at: what adjustments will be needed to support learners. The future could look very different from what it is now around the support provided, but if I can just go a little bit further. That is why we made the conscious decision—I think it was a couple of years ago—to quarantine funding to schools at 25 per cent of WSS-SLR funding, so that if you did have some students with a particular disability that 25 per cent could go to support their needs. The expert on that is the assistant director-general, disability inclusion. We are happy to provide a further briefing on the specifics of the adjustments required and the future methodology.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you once again for coming today and giving us this briefing. I am going to keep my questions quite short because we are running out of time. In my electorate of Hinchinbrook we have quite a few 'rougher' schools. After getting some feedback from teachers at the grassroots, I acknowledge the work that you are doing with people with learning disabilities and behavioural disabilities. I have a family member with a similar sort of issue. What I am trying to get to is that we have teachers who are spending a lot of time helping these children. I understand the importance of accepting and helping them get through schooling, but I am getting the feeling from some teachers that they are not concentrating on helping the children who want to excel. They are spending most of their day looking after students who have behavioural issues. Can the department let us know how we are making sure the brighter children are not being left behind or held back?

Ms Nixon: Being a school principal myself and having spent 30 years in schools, I can say that they can be challenging environments. We have a broad range of students who come to our schools. Principals and teachers do a fantastic job managing the range of students they have in every class. If I talk about our bright students, which is the question specifically, one of the four priorities this year for state schools is in fact lifting our top students. We are running an inquiry cycle across the whole state. Over 120 schools have put up their hand to work with us to look at what we can do specifically to help our brighter students—we are talking the top 20 per cent or so—to lift their outcomes.

How can we make sure that we pay attention to them? That piece of work will go on for the next 12 months. Out of that we are working alongside those schools to support them to be clear about the work they are going to do; support them in the structure of the research they are going to do; and provide them with some evidence based research and collect information about things that work. What we will do with the things that work is make sure that we are able to share those with every school, because it is absolutely important. Just as we invest in students who struggle in school for a whole range of reasons, whether that is behaviour, disability or academic achievement, we need to ensure that all of our kids are succeeding. The state school strategy is about every child succeeding, so that means our top kids as well. I look forward to reporting back to you with some of the outcomes of that.

Mr KELLY: I know that before and after school and vacation care are not the responsibility of the department, but does the department do anything to work with principals or P&Cs to plan for future needs in this area? There are a number of schools in my area where that has not occurred and it is having a significant impact on families.

Ms Schimming: You are right: the responsibility for outside school hours care goes to an approved provider, and the approved provider can be a P&C or another organisation like Camp Australia or PCYC. There are different organisations, so the responsibility for the enrolment management sits with the approved provider. Obviously parents want outside school hours care on school sites, but the infrastructure that we have in our schools—many of them are inner-city schools—means that it cannot be delivered in that way.

Outside school hours care is also regulated, so Early Childhood Education and Care regulates that service. There are quite strict rules around the number of students who can be there based on the ratio to the teacher. Because we understand that it is a problem we have sent communications to

all principals, and regional directors have been very involved with the assistant regional directors to talk to principals about what kinds of processes they have in their schools to work with an approved provider to try to increase capacity so we can have more students access outside school hours care.

We have a forum coming up at which all of the stakeholders, including my fellow deputy directors-general, will be coming together to say what are the problems and what are some of the solutions that we can put forward so that we can address the waiting lists. It really is an issue, and some of our P&Cs would like to expand. We have a workforce issue around attracting people who want to work in that industry. As you would know, it is a split shift so they have to work early hours in the morning and then in the afternoon. We certainly acknowledge there is an issue there, and we will be working with schools and principals to try and address some of those issues.

Mr KELLY: Thank you. That is great to hear. My second question relates to schools growth and the size of schools. When a school has taken all of its in-catchment kids and is taking a significant number of out-of-catchment kids, how is the decision made about whether that school should continue to grow, and how does the department manage the impacts of that school's growth when they are taking kids out of other schools' catchments to grow that school?

Ms Walton: That is a terrific question.

Mr KELLY: I know, and I want a terrific answer.

Ms Walton: I will hand over to Jeff for that terrific answer.

Mr Hunt: As you may be familiar, the department is required under the Education (General Provisions) Act to provide local students with access to their local school. Where there is capacity within a school then that school—and when I say 'capacity', I mean spare space in their infrastructure—is allowed to take enrolments from out of catchment. We work very closely with individual schools, and we do an annual mapping process of capacity and enrolment and growth across the catchments of those schools. Where schools have achieved 70 per cent of their capacity, we start having a conversation with them about whether they need to be enrolment managed. When they tip over 80 per cent of the enrolment capacity of the facility then we invoke an enrolment management plan. Those enrolment management plans are typically negotiated with local P&Cs and school councils to ensure they meet the mix and the model of the school locally as well as give the school confidence about the trajectory they are on so they can cater for in-catchment growth of local students into the future. That can often mean some fairly challenging circumstances in their enrolment management plans to help manage the growth. We do fundamentally believe that local children should go to their local school, so that is what the enrolment management plan is there to do.

We recognise that sometimes that can take some years to filter through, and we try to recognise the fact that schooling is also about how families operate. Mums and dads like to drop both the year 2 and the year 4 child off at the same school, so most enrolment management plans have sibling arrangements in play. If the child was enrolled from out of catchment into a school that has then had an enrolment management plan, the sibling can still go to that local school. Having said that, though, we need to manage the catchment more broadly where the growth is. We will put extra infrastructure into schools as they grow to make sure the school does have that enrolment capacity. This is a constantly changing effort. I think we would all recognise that kids do not stay young forever and they grow up through the schools and they go on to high school. We have to look at catchments over the longer term. What is the growth rate of babies and young children in the community through to their high schooling and exiting years and what does that profile look like? The short answer at the end of my very long answer is that we manage that on an active basis, is. We have an enrolment management plan process that helps us manage that growth across the state in each school catchment.

Mr KELLY: My final question is in relation to the Advancing Education plan. Can you provide an update in relation to specifically the coding and robotics activities? Are they in fact now in all schools, and how is that rolling out?

Ms Nixon: We have had a very large uptake of digital technologies in terms of the curriculum. All schools do not have to implement the Australian Curriculum Digital Technologies until 2020, but we have many schools that are involved in that. We have a number of robots that we lend out across the state and we have huge engagement in that. You may be aware that the Premier recently launched the Premier's coding competition, and this year the new superhero is Bullying Girl. She is promoting coding amongst students to address cyberbullying issues. It is very popular. We see throughout the state, in the far reaches of the state, that students are engaged with coding and digital technologies.

Mrs STUCKEY: My question is around policy development for the future as well as currently. We have just come through a pretty hot summer, and I know those of us who live in South-East Queensland do not have it anywhere near as bad as those further north, but I have been receiving a lot of complaints from people throughout the state about their schools not being air-conditioned and children not being able to perform as well in the heat. Can you give a really quick snapshot on the air-conditioning policy and any plans for some of those schools?

Mr Hunt: The department's policy around Cooler Schools zones has been well established over many years. The challenge for us in terms of the fiscal position that the department is in and government's consideration of air-conditioning all schools is that it is somewhere between \$2 billion and \$4 billion worth of expenditure to put commercial grade air conditioning into all of the schools across the state that are not currently air-conditioned. We maintain a commitment to the Cooler Schools zones schools and make sure that those air-conditioning units are serviced, maintained and fit for purpose in their communities. We have been upgrading what might have been typically referred to as the evaporative air-conditioning systems of 20 or 30 years ago to refrigerated air conditioning in the current program of maintenance and refurbishment. Outside that zone it is a matter for local school communities to consider whether they seek to air-condition their local facilities.

There is a range of things that schools can do, such as accessing the gaming machine benefit fund. We have a Smart School Subsidy Scheme whereby schools can approach the department to be considered on a priority basis for shared funding for some of those types of initiatives. Local schools have been using their own resources—P&C and other funding—to take action to air-condition where they can. The issue of air conditioning is not only the capital cost up-front but obviously the ongoing maintenance and repair and replacement as well as the energy side of it. The department does obviously fund schools essentially for their energy consumption. The committee may be aware that the Premier announced last week the upcoming ACES solar schools program, which we are looking forward to delivering to drive both energy efficiency in our schools and also greater cost management in our department. These things all come together around models that we can use to support schools outside of the defined zone.

Wherever you draw a line on a map there will be somebody on the other side of the line who would ordinarily think that they too should be in the zone. The zone has been well established for a long period of time, and we continue to consider that in the context of our ongoing fiscal environment.

ACTING CHAIR: That concludes the briefing this morning. Thank you very much to all of those departmental officers who have participated today. Thank you also to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's parliamentary web page in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.00 am.