

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

## MINISTER CHANDLER'S PORTFOLIOS

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Madam CHAIR:** I welcome you, minister Chandler, to the hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you from the Department of Education.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Before we begin I would like to introduce the officials who are with me here today from the Department of Education. On my right I have the Chief Executive, Mr Ken Davies. The Deputy Chief Executive, School Education, Marion Guppy is on my far left. Deputy Chief Executive, Organisational Services, Catherine Weber is to my left. Acting Chief Financial Officer, Shaun O'Brien is to our right. And we have General Manager, Early Childhood Education and Care, Susan Bowden behind us.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I will invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving onto output-specific questions and, finally, non-output specific budget-related questions. I will then invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members.

Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, I do. Madam Chair, there are 188 schools in the Northern Territory providing education for over 45 000 students in government and non-government schools. In addition there are 26 government homeland learning centres operating in 2016. Of all Territory schools, 68% are located in remote and very remote areas, and 40% of our students are Indigenous, the highest proportion of Indigenous students in any Australian state or territory.

Almost three quarters of student enrolments are in the Northern Territory government schools. The average attendance rate for non-Indigenous government school students continues to be approximately 90%. However, for Indigenous students we have further work to do to meet the COAG target of 90% attendance rate. In Term 1, 2016 attendance was 70%, up from 67.4% from the same period in 2015. Government school students are supported by a workforce of over 4000 full-time equivalent staff, 87% of which are school-based.

At 13%, the Department of Education's proportion of Indigenous staff is amongst the highest in any Northern Territory government agency. The Territory government's 2483 teaching staff are among the highest-paid in Australia, and in 2016-17 a record \$1.08bn will be invested in education to implement major system reform that focuses on delivering a long-term sustainable plan to improve outcomes for all students, including our most disadvantaged Indigenous students, as well as high achieving students. It provides a much-needed boost in infrastructure investment for special needs, preschool and childcare facilities as well as repairs and maintenance for a range of schools right across the Northern Territory.

This government understands the importance of investing in early childhood services, including early childhood education, maternal and child health, family support and early childhood intervention services. We have recently released a four-year strategic plan for the early years. It is titled Great Start Great Future. That will see \$19m invested in the 2016-17 financial year, targeted at improving services and outcomes for Territory children from birth to eight years of age and their families, with a strategic approach to integrated service deliveries across agencies.

Key initiatives include \$11.1m under the Indigenous Education Strategy for the Families as First Teachers program in 28 remote communities by the end of 2016, and an additional \$1m to expand the program into five locations in urban areas. A total of \$2.2m is allocated to operate six child and family centres, including the new Larapinta centre. These centres provide important integrated services to provide education and development of our very young people and their families. To offset the cost of childcare for parents and families, \$6m is allocated for the early childhood services subsidy for long daycare, three-year-old kindergarten and family daycare services. This government understands the importance of young people accessing quality learning in the early years, so an additional \$5.4m in 2016 will continue to provide universal access to 15 hours a week of preschool education in government and non-government schools.

We are supporting young people in the middle years with \$1.2m to implement the key actions outlined in the *Work Like the Best: Middle Years Teaching and Learning Strategy 2016–2018*, informed by the recommendations of the review into middle years schooling in the Northern Territory. It is important that young people have pathways to jobs when they finish school; therefore we are investing \$7m in vocational education and training, jobs skills and employment pathways in schools, including pre-employment programs across the Territory.

Vocational education and training programs are being expanded into maritime, fisheries and construction industries, including tailored programs for Year 9 boys and Year 10 and 11 girls to ensure young people have the skills needed to support their future in the Northern Territory's economy. Construction related training for Year 9 students is being delivered in Darwin and the VET Maritime Program has started at Casuarina Senior College, Nhulunbuy High School and Milingimbi School. It will be expanded to Shepherdson College in Semester 2 this year. In partnership with the Australian government we are investing \$189m over the next three years to implement *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024*.

In 2016-17 we have allocated \$43.7m under the strategy to strengthen our work; support families and children in the early years and focus on engaging with and attending school regularly; deliver explicit teaching learning and assessment of English oracy, literacy and numeracy programs; provide Indigenous secondary students to quality education options and support to make successful transitions between primary and secondary schooling; and ensure remote education is delivered by highly-skilled and motivated educators and support staff, including local recruits.

By 2024 we want Indigenous students in the Northern Territory to be successful and confident in their education journey and to achieve outcomes that equal to those of their non-Indigenous peers. Multiple approaches with shared responsibility between students, parents, schools and Northern Territory government agencies are required to address factors affecting school attendance. A whole-of-government attendance strategy has been developed to strengthen efforts to ensure young people attend school regularly and are engaged in learning. The Northern Territory government continues to work with the Australian government to improve the attendance of students across the Territory with the Remote School Attendance Strategy being expanded in 2016 to a further three government schools, Milikapiti, Pularumpi and Mutitjulu.

Having high-quality educators and leaders in our schools is crucial to ensuring young people have the best possible chance to succeed. In 2016-17, \$1m will be provided to the Centre for School Leadership at Charles Darwin University to fund work with school leaders and aspiring educator leaders to deliver high-quality professional development across the Northern Territory. A total of \$2m will support innovative programs aimed at leading the way in enhancing educational outcomes in our independent public schools.

I am excited to share the achievements of the Larrakeyah Primary School, an independent public school which will now join the ranks of 10 000 Cambridge schools in over 160 countries worldwide. Larrakeyah Primary School is the first government school in the Northern Territory to be approved and registered as a Cambridge International School. Larrakeyah students and teachers will benefit from the access to world-class resources from Cambridge Primary School, which will add value to the Australian curriculum.

A total of \$388m will be allocated for the operations of government schools in 2016 as global school budgets, plus \$59m to meet centralised school costs. We will continue to build capability in schools to exercise the flexibility and responsibility that greater autonomy has afforded them. Having quality school facilities tailored to meet the needs of students has led to a further investment in infrastructure, with \$58.5m for government schools and \$10m for non-government schools under Boosting our Economy, and education works to renew and grow facilities across the Territory.

Budget 2016-17 also includes \$33.1m for repairs and maintenance and \$11.6m for minor new works in schools. A total of \$1.4m is provided to establish operations of the new 40-place regional boarding facility at Nhulunbuy High School from January 2017.

Ten million dollars will construct stage one of the Taminmin College master plan, including a new science, technology, engineering and mathematics centre with eight science labs and eight additional classrooms to provide greater opportunities for rural students to succeed. The state-of-the-art STEM facilities will enable the college to further grow science in the Top End as well as further integrate aquaculture and proposed aquaponics programs linking to real jobs for Territory students.

A total of \$1m will enable a major refurbishment of the Wulagi Primary School. There is \$3.1m to further the Braiuling Primary School master plan by redeveloping existing areas to complete the new early childhood precinct with repurposed areas for a community centre connected to outdoor play, and, at the new preschool, a new cafe to replace the outdated canteen.

A total of \$5.7m will operate the new Henbury School in 2016 to support high-needs special education, and \$2.1m additional funding will enable establishment and operation at the new Palmerston Special School for 84 preschool and primary high-needs students.

A total of \$5.4m will operate the new Northern Territory Open Education Centre at the Bullocky Point education precinct in 2016 to provide a world-class contemporary distance education service.

Increasing market opportunities through the export of education services into Asia is a key platform of this government, and \$1m will go towards implementing the International Education and Training Strategy 2014-2024 to strengthen and grow the Territory's international education and training sector.

The non-government education sector also plays an essential role in the education landscape across the Territory, providing education choices for Northern Territory families and students across the Territory. The Australian government is the primary funder of non-government schools in the Territory; however, the Northern Territory government is also a significant contributor, allocating \$75.5m to support non-government schools in 2016-17, including operational and capital subsidies.

The Australian government's Students First funding provides \$166.5m, bringing the total allocation to \$242m for the non-government schools.

A total of \$21.2m will go to the Catholic Education Office as a capital payment to support the construction of a Catholic primary school in Zuccoli as part of a co-located government and non-government development.

All investments made through our 2016-17 budget aim to focus the efforts to improve the quality of education services and contribute to better outcomes for all Northern Territory students no matter where they live.

In summary, we are delivering an innovative, ambitious and sustainable reform program. It is properly funded. We are eliminating waste of resources and focusing on areas of most need, where the evidence says we will get the most return on our investment.

We are targeting spending in areas that we know that will make the most difference to the quality of education to, in turn, ultimately deliver better outcomes for all Northern Territory students. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the statement?

**Ms MANISON:** Madam Chair, I will probably need to ask my questions in the whole-of-agency. It was a pretty extensive opening statement – a lot of them can be asked in whole-of-agency.

I am finding it a bit frustrating already – I like to come to estimates prepared so we can have an informed and constructive debate. We went through the Term 1 attendance data – I looked on that site an hour ago and it was not there, but now it is there. I have researched Term 4 data – it is a bit frustrating that it gets put up the morning of estimates.

I will ask the minister first up – I have submitted a range of written questions through the Assembly and, as we know, under Standing Order 114 you are expected to answer those questions to the parliament within 30 days.

I got a receipt from you, minister, with regard to the five written questions I submitted, which were 515, 516, 517, 518 and 519 – a range of really important education questions. I wanted to get the information early so we could have a thorough debate during this process about some really important education issues, and it helps to have the data to be able to do that.

I received a response earlier this week, which said:

*Thank you for your question. I will ask the department to prepare all of the material you have asked for, to be ready to present at the Estimates Committee hearings, should you wish to ask at that time. This will avoid unnecessary duplication of work for the department.*

I am asking you now, minister, with regard to written question 515, 516, 517, 518 and 519, is it possible to table those responses now so I can try to scrutinise them thoroughly in the short time we have this morning?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have answers here to provide if you want to ask the questions during these hearings.

**Ms MANISON:** You have had over a month to get this information together – very thorough information on school staffing numbers, for example, on pre-school enrolments. You have had over 30 days to get this information together. I know your department works very hard and you have statisticians and people who work with data. You have these numbers. For the sake of debate in the estimates and to scrutinise the performance of education in the Northern Territory properly it would be a lot easier for me to be able to go through these properly in the time we have, especially considering we do not have time in parliament in this term of government.

If you could provide them to the committee I will tell you what I will do with those numbers, minister. I will be frank with you. I have a lot of questions to ask. I will still hand those answers on to other staff as well to compare them to other years so I can try to get a whole picture here, particularly around things like school staffing. That has been an area of contention where we have had a lot of debate. We have seen some big cuts. I want to be able to compare school by school, teacher by teacher, and see what those figures are. That is what I will do with it if you provide me with those responses and table those documents.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have absolutely complied with what your request was, to have these answers ready for these estimates hearings. I am quite prepared to sit here and answer those questions in this forum.

**Ms MANISON:** I do not think it is complying. Generally, when you submit a written question through to parliament you expect a thorough written answer to the questions that you ask, which is then presented to the parliament. Asking them and getting verbal responses ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** We spend all this time arguing, Nicole, or we can get to the questions. If you want to ask the questions, I will answer.

**Ms MANISON:** I find that disappointing because I think it would be better if we had them on the record. That way we could have a more thorough scrutiny.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We can have them on the record. If you ask me the questions, I will read out the answers.

**Mr CONLAN:** Can we please just get on with the questions, Madam Chair? You have expressed disappointment, member for Wanguri, fair enough.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, member for Greatorex. Aside from the written questions we also submitted some global questions, which we do for every portfolio and which are very standard questions. For example, what is your full-time equivalent rate of employees in your department? What grants have been given? Travel, interstate, overseas, intrastate – very simple questions are asked every year. Would you be prepared to table that information now as well so we can allow for a bit of scrutiny of those answers?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Again, member for Wanguri, I do not know how you ask that this is better scrutiny. This is your role today. It is your job today to ask the questions and I am quite prepared to answer them in the same manner as any other question. We have a long day. We have about seven or eight hours today.

**Ms MANISON:** We certainly do, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Use your time and we can go through the answers to those questions. We have a lot to talk about because there are a lot of good positive things to talk about education in the Territory.

**Ms MANISON:** We do have a lot to talk about, but I do not think you will have as much of an opportunity to talk about some of those things when I have to ask some very basic fundamental operational questions that could have been tabled in written responses. Let us go through it and we will start from there, I am happy to start from whole-of-agency, Madam Chair.

**Mr CONLAN:** Oh, hooray, let us get on with it.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any other questions on the opening statement? Do you have any questions, member for Greatorex?

**Mr CONLAN:** No, I am fine. I would just like to get on with it, thank you very much.

**Ms MANISON:** Good on you, member for Greatorex.

### **Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy**

**Madam CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2016-17 as they relate to the Department of Education. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. First question, minister, and you should have the answer pretty close at hand. How many staff are in the Department of Education detailed by (a) full-time equivalent, (b) permanent part-time contract, (c) temporary contract?

**Mr CHANDLER:** As of pay 20, 23 March 2016, paid Department of Education full-time equivalents was 4138 FTE; permanent part-time employees was 139 FTE; temporary contract employees was 1475 FTE; and frontline school-based staff was 3605 FTE or 87.1%

**Ms MANISON:** Can you repeat that one again, minister, 3000?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, 3605 FTE and identified Indigenous employees 569 was the head count, or 12.9%; 438 FTE or, in percentage terms, 10.6% of the agency.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. How many staff in the department are classified as ECO1 level and above?

**Mr CHANDLER:** As of pay 20, 23 March 2016, the number of ECO1 level staff and above was 118 FTE. The classifications we have are ECPL2, 54; ECPL3, 17; ECPL4, 10; ECPL5, 3.5; EO1C, 11.5; EO2C, 12.5; EO3C, 6; EO4C, 2; EO6C, 1; and that is a total of 118.

**Ms MANISON:** We said with regard to school-based employees that number is currently 3605. How many classroom teachers do we have?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will find that information.

**Ms MANISON:** My other question following on from that, minister – when it comes to percentage of the department, how many staff are on temporary contracts as a percentage? And when it comes to school based employees how many as a percentage are on contracts?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do not have a calculator here; I will get that answer for you in percentage terms. In regard to classroom teachers, CT and SCT, 1983 was the head count.

**Ms MANISON:** So 1983.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That was the head count at 23 March 2016. For the January to March quarter, fixed period employees 802, ongoing employees ...

**Ms MANISON:** Sorry, minister; what is that as a percentage? I am just going by your annual reporting data which goes by percentage.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Ongoing employees 1636, school-based teaching workforce 2438. In schools the percentage of fixed period is 32.9%.

**Ms MANISON:** I will point out a few things with regard to where we are at in your government's time in the Northern Territory. There were significant job losses through the agency. I think it still sits around the vicinity of about 500-odd jobs that have ceased in the time you have been in government. We have seen school-based employees – I note that has now gone down by about 238 school-based employees, gone from the system. We had some pretty savage cuts this time last year to teacher numbers. We had seen those teacher numbers cut right down to about 164. We can see that you are starting to claw back some of those teachers by the look of things. They are desperately needed in those classrooms, so that is positive, minister. It has been a pretty savage couple of years.

One thing I will point out is that in 2012 you went to some people in the Territory with your education policy and made some very firm commitments around permanency. Quoting directly from the policy under teachers, under the education policy of the CLP at the time:

*Attracting and retaining the best teachers is more than publishing job advertisements with attractive remuneration packages. The high proportion of teachers on temporary contracts in our schools only contributes to our poor rates of retention. Upon completion of an appropriate probation process the Country Liberals will offer teachers secure contracts of employment over the long term.*

Minister, the current percentage of school-based temporary contracts is now at 32.9%. Last year that sat at 33%; the year before that was at 28.1%; the year before that it was 25%; then in 2011-12 it was at 30.7%.

Do you feel you are complying with your commitment to teachers when you have a temporary contract rate of 32.9% of the teaching workforce, when you promised that you would make more people permanent?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is interesting, because you are talking about since 2012. No doubt there have been some major reforms in education. I am glad to see our results have improved since that time. Our system and our teachers are doing a remarkable job.

You made a couple of assumptions that would consider the numbers you had when you were in government were the right numbers. I argue that if you went back a little further, by a couple of years, you would note the numbers the previous Labor government had around teachers were very similar to what they are today. In fact, there are a few more today. There was a spike around the year 2010-11 and it was on the back of the then Labor government inheriting quite a large substantial slice of federal money. In the Northern Territory they used some of that money, obviously, to employ teachers.

When we came to government one of the things I knew from outside of government, from the opposition benches, was that a remarkable number of teachers were contract based. In a very short period of time we had converted nearly 300 of those teachers from contract based to permanently based.

I suggest to you that one of the recent spikes in contract teachers has to do with the implementation of global budgeting. That has taken away, if you like, control of employees from a central position from the education department and put the control back in the schools so the schools get to use a merit-based selection process to select the teachers they find suitable for their own schools. I would even go as far as saying that perhaps some of the schools in the first instance of global budgeting have been a bit conservative with their numbers. Perhaps they have not put on as many permanent teachers until they get this new system that was brought in by this government.

I know now, seeing the figures from last year, that collectively there was in addition or in surplus of about \$60m across the school sector – surplus of \$60m.

That is across government schools in the Northern Territory, which, I must also say, since global budgeting has been rolled over into this year's budget for those schools, we did not take it off them. Unlike previous budgeting systems where what was there at the end of the year was gone, they start with a new budget. The money that was not spent last year is still within the schools today. I put it to you that I expect to see some schools out there being a bit more flexible this year by putting on more staff simply because they got through the first couple of years of global budgeting. They know how the system works and I think you will find, with the conservative nature of their approach, they might loosen the purse strings just a little, but they will do it wisely ...

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, we warned you at the time. We had schools saying it; we had people on school councils saying it. We heard from education advocates, such as the union and COGSO, that you had cut schools back to the bone and that you were cutting into the bone at the time. Those cuts were absolutely savage. Do you acknowledge now that what you over saw with the introduction of global school budgets went too far?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, absolutely not. I have seen better results today in our schools. If anybody in this room has a different focus to that, you are in the wrong game. Education results are important in the Northern Territory and I would much prefer to see quality teachers in our schools than just a higher number of teachers.

Talk to any principal and they will tell you that they would much prefer quality teachers. Whatever we do to invest in teachers is important so that we have quality teachers working in our schools, delivering better

results than we ever got under previous Labor governments. I do not know when people will get off their ideology rocking horses and look at the system in the Northern Territory today being better than what it was before.

In the last few years we have cut 19 executive positions out of the Department of Education. I put it to you, with all due respect to those people working in the system at that time, that I wonder what the heck they were doing. It certainly was not providing for better results in our education system.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, we want to ensure the maximum – when it comes to having people at the front of classes and in schools supporting kids, that is where the focus needs to be. But we have a 238 FTE job loss of school-based employees in your time in government. That still sits there, loud and clear.

I come back to the point that 33% of school-based employees are on temporary contracts. Are you comfortable with that figure? Do you think it is the right figure? Would you want to see it lower, given the context of the education election commitments made in 2012?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Since the introduction of the teacher permanency policy, 130 school-based positions have been advertised and filled on an ongoing basis. That includes 84 teaching positions, of which 19 classroom teacher vacancies have been filled, all of which were existing DoE employees. There were 28 Charles Darwin University graduates recruited as part of the department's high-achieving graduate initiative.

I suggest to you at this moment in time that, yes, there are far too many contracted employees within the system, but, as I said before, I fully expect that with schools now understanding their global budgets being able to be stretched a bit further than what they thought in the first instance, the conservative look over the last 12 to 18 months will change that. I think, going forward, you will see many of these teachers made permanent.

Again, when we came to government there were about 300 employees contracted who we made permanent, but I think with the recent changes in improving the system, we have seen that number stretch out. I need to put on the record that there will always be a high percentage of contracted employees within education. In our primary schools especially, we have a very high percentage of young ladies who are fantastic teachers, and at some stage in their career they many choose, with their partner, to have a family. They will then leave the system and you will have people backfilling those positions, usually on contracts.

We have very good packages in the Northern Territory where, for instance, remote teachers take study leave after being remote for four years. That requires someone to be on a contract basis. There will always be, within an education system of over 4000 employees, many on contracts.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, are you aware of many schools employing teachers and having had to use their savings? After the global budgeting system came in they have had to use what was their savings in the bank in order to employ teachers, but also to employ support staff such as teacher assistants. I have heard of stories of schools having to look at how to maintain the staffing they want, as well as what they want to deliver in the school. Is that something you often hear?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, in fact I hear quite the opposite. The vast majority of our schools have surplus money in the bank. Admittedly, over the last 12 months a few have required some assistance from the department and we have a great team which was able to assist schools in managing their global budgets. What we fail to ...

**Ms MANISON:** So, minister, you are not aware of any schools that have used their savings in order to employ teachers or assistant teachers?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Not if it is savings regarding fundraising initiatives. You have to remember that, essentially, if you work to the absolute minimum, whatever budget you are allocated in a financial year, being schools and non-profit organisations, they should work to their entire budget for that year. Savings which are essentially put aside should not be there. You should start with a budget and end up with a zero budget. I am not talking about fundraising initiatives from schools; that is a separate issue. I have never heard a story where a school has had to use their fundraising initiatives just to cover basic costs. If I did, I would certainly be working with the Department of Education to work through whatever those issues are.

Many schools were challenged initially and there was additional money put in the budgets to help through that period. I think it is remarkable, given a system of that size, how our principals and schools responded to the global budgeting. I guarantee you this – where we are today, compared to where we were three-and-

a-half years ago, I would be hesitant to suggest any principal out there would prefer to go back to a centralised system rather than having control of their money to spend as they wish.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, with the 238 school-based employees that have been cut from the system, have you looked at who those employees are, where they are from, what sections they are from and where schools have lost employees? Is it disability support or behaviour management? We know teachers are in that number. Have you looked at where those jobs have been lost?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The one thing you are forgetting, again, is that we have taken away a central control of the system. Your team and your model sounds like you want to completely overturn what we have done and take back a complete centralised control.

**Ms MANISON:** No, minister. I am asking about the performance of your government and what sort of work you do as a minister and as a department to analyse ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am answering the question.

**Mr CONLAN:** A point of order, Madam Chair! The minister should be allowed to answer the question.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am trying to answer the question. With 153-odd schools out there, you are quoting a number of over 200 teachers or 200 staff members. You are forgetting that schools now make those decisions, not the department. The schools make those decisions. When it comes to employing the staff they require within their global budget, they are making decisions at the school level, unlike what was made back when there was a centralised position.

These are school-based decisions, not department decisions. They are making the decisions around what they need in order to achieve the results in their schools. I will keep returning to the results because, guess what? They are better than we have ever seen in the Territory before.

**Ms MANISON:** Okay, minister. Going back to looking at some of the classroom teachers and the levels at present, would you be able to provide me with the numbers of your classroom teachers at the moment by level – CT1 and CT2 through to CT9? How many do we have, at present, in our schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely. As of 23 March 2016, of the 1938 – that is a head count classroom teachers. Of these, 1114, 56.2%, were at the top of incremental level of nine. I will go through the levels. The current annual salary for classroom teachers ranges \$67 768 – \$97 188.

**Ms MANISON:** Sorry, minister. I do not need the salaries. I was just keen to get ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** You are not interested in what teachers make in the Territory?

**Ms MANISON:** We are, and you know that. What I am after is how many teachers, FTEs, there are as CT1, CT2, CT3 through to CT9. I have the 2013-14 data from the annual report. I have 2014-15 – just to see if we have had any changes or movement in that area.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Increment level 1, there are 183 teachers. Level 2, 135 – and these are headcount as of 23 March 2016.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. Thank you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Level 3, 118; level 4, 126; level 5, 103; level 6, 64; level 7, 60; level 8, 80; and level 9, 1114.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I turn to some of schools and staffing figures. This will be a bit of a tiresome and long process. I am keen to check up on some of the schools that I spoke with you about last year at the start of estimates, and maybe a few others that I have had a look at.

A question I put to you last year, which was taken on notice, was about the FTE staff for May 2012 to May 2015 so I could have a year-by-year breakdown. Last year, at the start of estimates, we had a bit of a chat about some of those schools and some of the numbers that stood out for some of the wrong reasons with regard to cuts.



I am keen to get an update on some of those figures while we are here. I would not mind getting the latest staffing figures, for example, for – can I start off with Anula Primary School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Anula, yes, I have over 30 pages of ...

**Ms MANISON:** I know. I have a lot of pages here too. We will be going through a few here, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is okay. Anula – what was the question again?

**Ms MANISON:** I am keen to find out what the classroom teacher number is, but also what their overall school FTE is.

**Mr CHANDLER:** From 24 February, pay 201518, 42.5 for Anula, and I have a breakdown here if you want the different teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** The classroom teacher would be good – just the CT number.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Twenty-two.

**Ms MANISON:** Let us look at Casuarina Senior College.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is an increase over last year. What was the next school?

**Ms MANISON:** The next school is Casuarina Senior College, so the CT number and the overall FTEs of the school.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Casuarina Senior College, 50.3 teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** And the FTEs for the school?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are 79.1.

**Ms MANISON:** Can we have a look at Centralian Middle School, please?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Centralian Middle – I will not keep repeating the page, you know that.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I have a different document to what you have. I would love to have that document. Feel free to provide it. I would be happy if you table it.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Centralian Middle School 48.5.

**Ms MANISON:** Okay, and what is the classroom teacher number, please?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is 22.1, which is an increase of two over last year.

**Ms MANISON:** Centralian Senior College?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Centralian Senior College is 57.5.

**Ms MANISON:** It seems that I have figures for classroom teachers and SCTs.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Senior Teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** SCTs. Could I get the classroom teachers and the SCTs, for Centralian Senior College?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It would be 28.7.

**Ms MANISON:** And the classroom teachers?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sorry, 28.7 is the number of classroom teachers. The total teacher number is 57.5.

**Ms MANISON:** That is the total FTEs of the school, but – sorry, the data I am looking at from last year has CTs, SCTs and ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, so I have to add these up together.

**Ms MANISON:** Usually I just look at the CTs, but Centralian Senior College seems to be a bit different.

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Wanguri, Centralian Senior College operates on a different award rate, which is why the categories are different.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Do you want me to break it down so you have each of them?

**Ms MANISON:** If you would like to that would be fine, minister, and hopefully we are comparing apples with apples.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have five SCA2 senior teachers; two SCA5 senior teachers; 1.5 ST1 senior teachers; 4 CT teachers; and 24.7 SCT teachers. That does not include the principal and other ...

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. Then we get down to 57.5 FTEs. Thank you, minister. Darwin High School, please.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Darwin High School total is 122.4, and that is nearly five up on last year ...

**Ms MANISON:** And the FTEs? Sorry, your classroom teachers. My apologies, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Classroom teachers, 79.8, which is 2.2 up on last year.

**Ms MANISON:** I will ask while we are there, could we have a look at Clyde Fenton Primary School and the classroom teachers there?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Classroom teachers are 12.2 and a total of 22.7 staff.

**Ms MANISON:** Darwin Middle School, please, and the classroom teacher numbers there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have 59.6 total, which is an increase of 7.8 teachers. Classroom teachers are 37.2, which is 6.6 up on last year.

**Ms MANISON:** Very good, minister. Could we have a look at Dripstone Middle School, please?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have a total of 43.5 and classroom teachers, 25.8.

**Ms MANISON:** Could we please look at Larapinta Primary School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have 25.3 in total, classroom teachers, 13.6.

**Ms MANISON:** Can we please look at Katherine High School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, we have 59.4 in total, with 37.4 – again an increase over last year. It is probably worth noting, and it will get on the record sometime today, that we have one of the best student to teacher ratios in the country.

**Ms MANISON:** And we also have the highest rate of disadvantage and the highest percentage of students not meeting national minimum standards.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Well-resourced and getting better.

**Ms MANISON:** And the worst attendance.

**Mr CHANDLER:** And getting better.

**Ms MANISON:** But we should never be content with the results where they are.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Never content.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely. Millner Primary School.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Millner, 18.7 total with 10.1 classroom teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Can we have a look at Moulden Primary School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Moulden Primary School, 34.5 total with 19.3 classroom teachers, another increase.

**Ms MANISON:** Can we please have a look at Rosebery Middle School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am glad you are keeping these in alphabetical order. It is much appreciated.

**Ms MANISON:** I have a list like you, but my list is a different list to yours. I reckon they probably line up though. It would be nice to have your list; we could talk about page numbers and everything.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Rosebery Middle, 48 in total and 26 classroom teachers, which is one more than last year.

**Ms MANISON:** Not according to my numbers.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I would base them pretty actual, these figures.

**Ms MANISON:** I have May, May, May and May, and you have March this year.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Right.

**Ms MANISON:** Okay, can we look at Sadadeen Primary School, please?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sadadeen Primary School, a total of 33.5 with 12.5 classroom teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. Sanderson Middle School, please.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sanderson Middle School, 47.2 in total with 24.6 classroom teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Okay, minister. Shepherdson College, please.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Shepherdson, 49.5 total with 24 classroom teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. For my colleague, the member for Barkly, can I please have the figures from Tennant Creek High School?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It would be my pleasure. Tennant Creek High School, 29.6 in total and 16.3 classroom teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Tennant Creek Primary School, while we are here. I may as well give him some up-to-date data.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Tennant Creek Primary School, we have 37.5 in total and 20.5 classroom teachers, which is the same as last year.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister, for that data. There were some figures there that raised concern for me, and just so we know, at the moment you are looking at a list which is March 2016 versus March 2015. That is my understanding; is that correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sorry, can you repeat that?

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, the list that you are looking at is that pay in March 2016, which we have been basing all the FTEs and debate around so far this morning, and March 2015. I am looking at a list from the question put on notice last year, which compares May 2012, May 2013, May 2014 and May 2015; so, that would be correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will give you an accurate reflection on the figures that I have here compared to what I am basing them on.

**Ms MANISON:** No, I completely understand that your figures of the FTEs would be accurate to the day, but I want to speak to you a bit about some of the figures I have seen that have stood out. When I look at May 2012 and the journey through to here; we are in March 2016. For example, looking at Anula Primary

School, where in May 2012 they had an FTE count – they are sitting at 55.8 and a classroom teacher number at 27.1. That classroom teacher number is now at 22 and the FTE number overall for the school has gone from 55.8 to 42.5.

Another one that stood out were Casuarina Senior College; they used to have a CT teaching population of 66.7. That went to 57.7, 52.9, 48.5 and now it has gone up to 50.3, and when you look at the FTE count it started at 106 and went to 92.9, 82.6, 78.1 and now is at 79.1.

Centralian Middle School tells a bit of a steady story ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** You are not covering the whole story. Schools are based on student numbers ...

**Ms MANISON:** Yes.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am not being cute when I say there is an increase in those areas. Those increases would probably be based around student numbers increasing and local decisions. Where there are schools that have lost students; there will be a loss of teachers.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I think there are also stories that can be told about the capacity of a school to be able to market itself and offer more subject selection and more range by having the teachers there. I just think it is important that we look at the numbers.

I am not trying to sensationalise this. I am talking about a school's capacity to go out there and offer their community the subjects they want and to engage their children in learning – the options to give those kids the extra support they need if they have learning difficulties and so on.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. I put it to you that they have far more opportunity to do that today than what they did before because of school autonomy.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I am trying to – we need to debate these numbers and scrutinise them. That is what estimates are about.

Centralian Middle School for example – this is a steady picture, so let us talk about that. You are looking at a number where you had classroom teachers at 22.2, 22.7, 22.7, 18.7 – and you are back at 22.1. You had some SCTs, SPT1s and SPT2s that used to be there, but they are all gone now. Overall your FTE staffing there is at 56.4, 60.6 and it went up to 62.1, down to 51 and now it is back at 48.5.

Centralian Senior College – we will go through all the numbers you provided me. Senior teachers; the SCA1s were at 5.8, 5.5, 5.4 and now they are back at 5. The SCA5s are steady at two; at one point they went to 2.5 but now they are at two. ST1s are now from one to 1.7, 1, 1.5, and they are still at 1.5. The CTs, classroom teachers, went from three to two last year and to four now so there is an up. The SCTs went from 31.5, 31.2, 26.6 to 28.8, and now they are at 24.7. The overall school FTE count went from 63.1 in 2012 to 69.3 in 2013, 58.6, 59.5 to 57.5.

Darwin High School seems to have stayed pretty steady from classroom teachers at 84.1 to 81.5, 76.1 to 77.2, 79.8, and they are now at 131. It used to be FTE in 2012 – 126, 120, 117 to 122.4. I think we are probably seeing a pattern here of the introduction of global school budgets and some big cuts around that time.

Darwin Middle School – you can see some improvements there. You know that is a very popular school and a big school of choice for many people in Darwin. Classroom teachers went from 36 to 38.5, 32, 32, now at 37.2, and the overall FTEs from 57.7 to 60.2 to 51.7, 52.9 and now at 59.6. I definitely want to raise some figures from one of the schools in my electorate, Dripstone Middle School. We have seen the classroom teacher number there go from 36.6 to 35.5 to 33.5 to 35, down to 25.8, and the FTE count from 61.6 to 56.8 to 52.8 to 54 to now 43.5.

Sorry, minister, just a couple more. Millner Primary School, which is one of the schools that we mentioned – we have seen the classroom teachers go from 14 down to 10.1, and FTEs from 25.8 down to 18.7.

Moulden Primary School has gone down but it has gone back up now so we have gone from classroom teachers at 23.2 to 20.2, 17.3, to 16.2 to 19.3 now. The FTEs from 42.2 to 38.2, 34.7, 30.6, now back to 34.5.

Let us have a look at Rosebery Middle School. We have seen CTs at 39.5 to 36.3 to 27.9 to 26.5, down to 26. We have seen the FTE count there from 64.9 to 63.3, 52.8, to 48, now at 48. We have seen, at Sanderson Middle School, classroom teachers down from 36.5 to 30.5 to 35.9 – they had a jump that year; not many schools did it seems – then 28.5, but now back down to 24.6. The FTE count was 81.3 to 69, 70.9 to 52.2 and now down to 47.2.

Shepherdson College always seems to be a school that gets a lot of debate around it. The teacher count at 2012 was 39.1 down to 37.5, 33, 26.5, and now it is down to 34. The FTE count went from 75.6, 74.9, 63, 52.5 to 49.5.

Tennant Creek High School, in the member for Barkly's electorate – classroom teachers went from 20.6, 19.1, 15.5 to 16.9, and it is now 16.3. The number of FTEs overall went from 41.6, 36.1, 29.4, 30.4 to 29.6.

There seems to be a lot of change in some of those schools. I suppose this is where I need to raise my question with you, minister. It has been raised with me that you are looking at the situations at some of those schools, particularly around mergers with Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College, and with Rosebery Middle School and Palmerston Senior College. I have not been formally briefed on this. I heard that this has been discussed in those communities. I even have a document here, which you have handed out in those communities.

What is happening there, minister? Are you talking to those communities? What is the rationale for you looking to go down this path? I think, looking at the school data and statistics, it probably gives you a bit of an in to that conversation.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Well, that was a shadow ministerial statement.

**Ms MANISON:** It is interesting when you drill down to the data and look at those changes.

**Mr CHANDLER:** There is one fundamental difference that you seem to overlook in all this. We have gone from a system where the Department of Education was very proscriptive with what each school had within it, including what level people were at. That does not exist today. A lot of the changes within the system are choices made by schools. Instead of a school being told, 'You will have X amount at this level, you are entitled', or whatever you want to call it – but that was a centrally controlled system.

We have gone from that centrally controlled system to a system of global school budgets and system autonomy, that is, the schools get to make their choices around the makeup. A school may, in fact, end up with more classroom teachers and fewer admin roles, for instance. It may end up with more admin and fewer classroom teachers. They make choices at the school level.

You will see, from the time global budgeting and school autonomy was introduced, some changes within the makeup of what we have come from. There is nothing to hide here except the fact schools are making decisions locally and which suit their needs, not being told by the Department of Education what they are entitled to.

We went from your system, which is very clear; every year the numbers would barely change under the system you came from. With what we have introduced in the last few years you will see this makeup perhaps change over the next couple of years until schools – the wrong word is come to terms, but it is more about understanding what they can do with the flexibility they have. They get to choose how many of a certain level they have within their global budget, so there will be a difference in there, but I must couch that.

It will all depend on going back to that global budget; the global budget will always be determined around the number of enrolments in a school and, therefore, they can work within that system. That was never the case before.

**Ms MANISON:** Let us look at a couple of different examples of provincial to very remote schools and remote schools. Sanderson Middle School saw a drop of 81 staff down to 47.2 in a couple of years, and the number of teachers dropped from 36 to 24.6.

Shepherdson College went from 39 classroom teachers down to 24, and staff from 75 down to 49. Tennant Creek school went from 41 to 29.6 staff; four fewer teachers will have an impact on a school like that. At Rosebery Middle School we have seen some huge changes. What analysis is done on the impact of those

schools with such staffing changes, or do you just have faith that they get it right by cutting it purely on numbers, enrolment and attendance?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No. The last couple of questions have been long-winded. I am yet to even touch on why we are looking at partnering up schools, because we have moved on to another subject. Let us go back ...

**Ms MANISON:** I will get back there, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We could sit here all day over 153-odd schools and cherry pick which schools are up and which schools are down. The makeup within those schools is up and down. A lot will be determined on two things and two things only: the size of their global budget based on the numbers in the schools ...

**Ms MANISON:** Yes, attendance and enrolments.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... and the choices made within the schools. We have gone from a very proscriptive system to one of flexibility. You cannot compare apples with apples in this case because schools will make those decisions. So, yes, you could nominate some schools where the numbers might be down. I could take you equally to a number of schools where those numbers are up, and rightly so ...

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I go back to the fact that I have a document here of frequently asked questions from the Department of Education which states:

*Why is the dual campus college model being implemented in Palmerston and Alice Springs?*

*The purpose of the dual campus college model is to provide students and their families with continuity in the teaching and learning programs from Year 7 through to Year 12. At present, there is a decline in student numbers in middle schools in Alice Springs and Palmerston. This model will assist in improving retention and engagement of students, whilst maintaining the benefits of dedicated learning spaces for middle and senior years.*

Then it goes on:

*Whose decision was it to introduce a dual campus model?*

*The dual campus college model is a Department of Education initiative. The primary objective is to improve student outcomes in Alice Springs and Palmerston through the development of a consistent and connected learning journey over a six year period.*

Minister, surely Mr Davies has not gone this alone? Surely, as a minister, you are driving this through your department? Can you explain what is going on with Rosebery Middle School and Palmerston Senior College, as well as Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College? Why are you going down this path?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely happy ...

**Ms MANISON:** Can I table this, please?

**Mr CONLAN:** Can we just get a break? Can we allow the minister an opportunity ...

**Ms MANISON:** Sorry, I am just asking to table this.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to answer the question.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The reality is there was a word that you used maybe 10 minutes ago, but it is an important word in the question, 'Did you do any analysis on this?' Yes, we have. It is why we have done some deep analysis, whether it is for the early years, Indigenous education or middle years. We have done the reports. This is not Peter Chandler, Minister for Education, coming up with ideas. These are based on recommendations. It is quite interesting. When you try to align schools like Rosebery Middle School and Palmerston Senior College, it is done for a very good reason. I need to unpack this a little slowly.

When the former Labor government introduced middle years, I listened very intently to the minister at the time, Syd Stirling, and I got it. I thought he was onto the right area because a focus was needed on those years of students. I understood why he wanted to try this model. I must admit when I further investigated I found that there were many schools, particularly in the US, that had tried the middle years program for decades and gone back to comprehensive high schools. The more I investigated I became a little suspicious.

In addition to that, whilst it may have been the right approach, I wondered if it may not have been managed as successfully as it could because I do not think – with all due respect to the department – the system here in the Territory had the capacity to implement such a change without skilling up a workforce.

I have had people from within the system, and from the Labor Party at the time, tell me it was akin to taking a few primary school teachers and a few high school teachers, throwing them together and telling them to get on with it. There should have been some more work done around capacity building to ensure that the right services and curriculum were provided in that system.

One of the issues I have been faced with since I took over as Education minister after the Country Liberals took government is, what I see as, a lack of stability leading to a lack of discipline within middle schools. I can take you to primary schools where I am amazed at the discipline in those schools. I can take you to senior colleges and high schools, and see the same level of discipline. I can take you to a number of middle years - and I am using a pretty broad brush, because there are some better than others – that have disappointed me sincerely.

I have had many conversations with Ken and others within the department over the last few years. What can we do to fix middle years, to improve and support teachers and the system to provide a better educational outcome for students going through that system?

Interestingly enough, I have had – and I will not embarrass them – a member of your own party hope that, whilst we are in government, we would take the opportunity to get rid of middle years and go back to just comprehensive schools, because in their mind it has been a failure. I do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater here. I want to see if we can improve the system, but I think working to align some of these middle schools with senior colleges is a strategic move, based on trying to ensure that we can provide capacity within and a very clear line of sight between two schools.

Yes, a lot of work has been done and I have been absolutely involved in this from the word go. There is a sense out there – I have even had feedback from the union, ‘You are doing this all in a cloak and dagger way. What do you have to hide? Is this some election ploy? Is this something you will announce just before the election?’ No, it is not. I have just been trying to get the ducks lined up.

We wanted to work with key stakeholders beforehand to ensure that we bring the community along. In fact, we have not even reached the stage of writing any terms of reference around how it might look. We actually want to work with the schools; we want to work with the senior colleges’ school board. We want to work with the middle schools’ council in writing the way forward as a partnership on how we can align the two schools to better support students and provide better pathways for their educational journeys.

I would love to see the day where we have some students from the senior college doing some lessons at the middle schools and, conversely, having some middle year students coming across to the senior college and having some of their lessons there to form a stronger partnership between the schools.

The rationale is around improving the system that we have now. It may be that it is like a one school model over two campuses, for instance. It is around leadership; it is around building capacity with our teachers. A clear consequence, hopefully, will lead to better student outcomes.

There is no secrecy in this; we are just trying to get the ducks lined up. I know there has been a little – the risk here is the wider you talk, of course, then it filters out even further. Then those people who are not in the know – and you will be given a thorough briefing on it.

**Ms MANISON:** I was about to say, can I please request a thorough briefing? It says in this frequently asked questions document, ‘There is bipartisan support for the dual campus model in Alice Springs and Palmerston’, which there may very well be, minister, but I would like to be briefed on it first. Thank you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think what you are reading from is a draft copy; that is not the final version. So, whoever the leaker is, they are getting in early, because they are leaking draft information to you. They are waiting

for a final document, which is a bit disappointing, I must say. Having said that, there is nothing to hide here. This is about not trying to, if you like, destroy the pathway that the former minister and the former Labor government was taking with middle years, but how we can actually strengthen it.

Some of these are recommendations out of the report we have done. As I said, I have had a call, even from people from your side, 'We were hoping that you would take it apart and go back to a comprehensive model'. Although it is an approach, I do not think the right approach. I would much rather take what we have and see if we can improve on it.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, with regards to the time lines around where you are hoping to do this merge under one banner, the dual campus model – at the moment, in your planning and in your vision, what is the time line going forward? If you do go forward with this, when would you like to see it fully in place? Most importantly, with consultation with school staff, and the most important group, the school parents and the school community; what are those aims that you have going forward?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think, ideally, you would be aiming at the commencement of Term 1 of a new school year.

**Ms MANISON:** So 2017?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We are in June now. We have some time and some capacity to ensure that all the stakeholders are involved, that the teachers' union is fully briefed on how this will lead to improvements within the system. You are right, there have been discussions held with councils and boards. I have talked to students and I have spoken to parents off the record, saying, 'What do you think of this idea?'

**Ms MANISON:** As local member, it is your community out there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is right, you certainly test the waters. In all honesty, 100% of the feedback I have received, and to whomever I have spoken to – they are saying it is a good idea. Yes, we should be working towards this. I am certain someone will come up and provide a devil's advocate view on the matter, and I will have to listen to that because they may have some very valid points that I have overlooked in any of this.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, obviously in the planning, or modelling, that you have done on this dual campus model, you have reflected on the absolute pain Alice Springs went through when they created the middle school system. I am not overstating this; it caused enormous pain throughout the school community, throughout the community at large – closing a school, creating a new school. It took years for the Centralian Middle School to become a stable education system. It is now flourishing; it is a fantastic school. I think probably over the last two years, it has well and truly found its feet and it is doing some fantastic things with great outcomes.

Are you reflecting on the pain Alice Springs went through when you consider another major restructure of high school education in Alice Springs?

**Mr CHANDLER:** This will not be a one-size-fits-all model. At this stage, I do not propose to do this across the board. There are very good senior colleges out there. There are very good middle schools that are operating and, I think, punching above their weight.

There are some that I had an eye on. I am trying to find ways to build support within those schools. It will not be a one-size-fits-all model. I am certainly aware of the difficulties that occurred in Alice Springs, as they did in Palmerston. I can recall parents who will talk to you about the difficulty – they will have to get another child to another school or another location in the morning. I distinctly remember talking to one parent who said, 'I now have three different schools to get to at similar times in the morning; how will I do that?'

I was not even a member of this parliament at the time. I was chair of a local primary school. They were really angry about the fact they had 15 minutes in total to get to three different schools. I understood what this was doing in the community back then. Whatever we do, you need to take into consideration as many, if not all the facts.

As I said before to the member for Wanguri, there will no doubt be some people coming forward with some real concerns over this particular approach. It will be our job to demonstrate the reasons why we want to take this approach for that particular cluster of schools and why we are not doing it over here. I think if we



are to be true about making this work, I would not want to suggest a major change to those schools that are working well. It was not great to see the hail storm that you endured in Alice Springs last week, but fantastic to see, when a couple of schools had to come together and share resources, just how well – with all reports, Year 12 students going across to the middle school - they fit in, got on and just got back to their learning. It was great to see them interacting with each other.

**Madam CHAIR:** I suppose Alice Springs is quite different from some other centres in the Northern Territory, certainly different from Darwin. We only have one public middle school and one public senior school. What I have learnt in recent times is that any change to any school has a reverberating effect throughout the community. It changes the way families and communities operate. I guess my warning to you is this: please make sure this is done with deep consideration of all the possible implications of changing the structure of the delivery of high school services in Alice Springs.

**Mr CHANDLER:** As a former Minister for Education, who was in place ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Very briefly, twice.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... during a period of major reform, I am sure you too would have appreciated the difficulties when you are introducing change.

**Madam CHAIR:** Very brave move, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely, but at the end of the day we are just trying to improve a system. I do not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. I think there is a sensible way forward, but it has to be done working with the community.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely, minister, and it will be good once the community is properly informed so they can make informed decisions about the best pathway going forward.

After today's session I would love to book in Mr Davies and his team for a briefing. That would be fantastic, so thank you for that offer today, minister.

Minister, still on the whole-of-agency questions, I would not mind turning to the budget appropriations and look into BP3 to go over Northern Territory's contribution to the education budget over recent years versus the Commonwealth's contribution to education in the Northern Territory. When I look at the budget books – I am looking at the appropriation down the bottom of the NT's output contribution going into the Commonwealth's contribution there.

If you look at the 2013 budget through to the 2016 budget, you see the numbers show that the Northern Territory sat at about \$562m, \$560m, \$531m, \$539m to \$560m where it is today. The Commonwealth contribution in 2012-13 went from around \$215m, \$212m, \$300m to \$314m, and today it sits at about \$340m. Post-Gonski reforms, or what the Northern Territory signed up to – the Students First funding agreement with the Commonwealth. We have seen a steep increase in Commonwealth funding while the Northern Territory contribution seems to have remained relatively the same. Can you talk me through that, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sure. To put a couple of things on the record, we did not sign up to ...

**Ms MANISON:** Gonski.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... the same platform that was put forward. What worries me in the community is this ongoing rhetoric around cuts to education and Gonski funding. What the average person probably does not realise is that when that model was first mooted, no one disagreed with the actual model, which was a funds-based approach. That is what we are doing today, a funds-based approach.

Initially I did not sign up to that agreement with the Labor government at the time, and I put it on the record that we instantly lost money. It was a federal Labor government that took money away from the Northern Territory government. It was not until the relationship I formed with Christopher Pyne and the Coalition government coming in that we were able to sign up to a new agreement. It provided every cent that we would have received under Gonski anyway, but no strings attached. We could use that money, and we have used that money to implement many of our reforms in the Northern Territory.

The argument that drives me crazy is the unions and other people saying that the Coalition government is cutting money and cutting Gonski. The Gonski money was never there; it was outside the forward estimates. If anyone is listening to this they will know that budgets are projected out four years. The model put up by the previous Labor government showed a modest increase over four years and a major increase in the fifth year, outside the budget cycle, and another major increase in the sixth year, also outside the budget cycle. It was never factored into any budget.

How the hell does somebody cut something that never existed?

The Gonski model around needs-based funding is spot on; I agree with it. But Gonski never applied a monetary figure to that model. That was a government decision which, quite wrongly, set up some expectations across Australia that could never be delivered. Even today, whilst there are a lot of commitments and promises made, it was never in any budget.

The federal government has increased the overall budget to education by around \$1.2bn or \$1.3bn based on a needs-based model. I also put on the record that people will think whatever was in place two or three years ago was at the right level. That might be so, but I argue that there was a lot of waste within the system that could have been better focused on improving educational outcomes. It is what we have worked hard over the last few years to do and we are seeing better outcomes. I put it one step further. Much of what the federal government is focused on now is a very similar approach to what we developed over the last few years in the Northern Territory – and we are starting to see results.

There is no doubt that if somebody told me, 'You can have an extra \$1bn in your system', I will grab it with both hands, but I would be very careful with how that money was spent. It will not be spent on parties and streamers.

**Ms MANISON:** That is good to hear, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It will be spent on improving results. Whatever we do in an education system to improve the quality and capacity of our teachers, ultimately will lead to better results in the classroom.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I will put this to you. You did not sign up to Gonski, which tied states and territories to ensuring they did not cut back their contribution. Basically, the federal government put in a whole lot more money which allowed, for example, the Northern Territory to cut back on its contribution to education. Students First funding seemed to give you that flexibility to cut back your contribution to education. Was that one of the more attractive reasons for you signing up to the Students First? If you look at the history of the Northern Territory appropriation over the last few financial years, you will see that there were significant cuts to the Northern Territory's contribution to education. If it was not for the Commonwealth stepping in, it would have gone even further backwards.

**Mr CHANDLER:** First of all, every cent the Northern Territory government received from the federal government through that agreement was spent on education. Some of it was spent on improving some of our infrastructure; there is no doubt about that. That was necessary and I will advocate to always be including spending on educational infrastructure. The recent \$68.5m from the stimulus package – I was over the moon ...

**Ms MANISON:** And we welcome that Boosting our Economy stimulus package. It is needed out there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... that was going into education – fantastic. But 100% of that money has gone into education. The reality is, moving forward I will stand by the fact that we have reset the base. We have perhaps even turned education on its head in the Northern Territory over the last few years by the change and the reforms we have introduced.

But this estimates process is talking about a budget moving forward. The anomaly – and I reckon you will get to it at one stage, so I may as well answer it now ...

**Ms MANISON:** Go for it.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... is that in about 2018 you see a reduction in what is printed in the budget as a Commonwealth commitment. That is simply because we could not put the final result in. That is what we know is there. However, I have written to Senator Simon Birmingham and I will read out a quote from his letter. We have been suggesting, on the back of possibilities of funding reductions, what the impacts would be. I know you will get to this; there was an estimates ...

**Ms MANISON:** Senate select committee?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, that is it. Within that, we had to come up with ideas of how a loss of that kind of income could impact in the Northern Territory. We have come up with a scenario; it is based on something we do not think will happen, but could happen.

There was a lot of hoo-hah in the media at the time that we had lost all this money. No, it is just that the final negotiations have not been made. I recently wrote to Simon Birmingham. I will not read his entire reply, but just an excerpt. This letter from Senator Hon Simon Birmingham was received by me on 6 May this year:

*I have been clear in my commitment to negotiate with states, territories and the non-government sector on school funding arrangements before the next funding period, starting in 2018. This will include not just funding, but also the reforms that all education systems, authorities and schools will be expected to implement to improve the outcomes of students in Australian schools.*

When I have had ongoing discussions with the Senator – I can assure you that he intends to improve education through two ways: one, looking at our system itself; and, two, ensuring that adequate resources are provided. He talks about increasing those resources. I have seen, publicly and in letters that he has written to me, figures that show growth.

There is another part of the letter where he talks about – it represents a growth of \$4.1bn, and I am talking in Australia – a 26.5% increase since 2015-16. This is what we will be moving forward in 2018-20. He has promised additional resources and I have absolutely no doubt that those resources will flow through to the Territory.

**Ms MANISON:** Especially because now is the time to lobby federal government and for both sides to secure every cent you can for the Northern Territory, minister. In the context of the federal election and education being of key importance to this nation going forward, and the Territory, I will just bring you back to what you said in that select Senate committee submission from the Northern Territory to the federal government. Just to highlight what, potentially, you were looking at and how much investment means to education here in the Territory.

Page 3 of the submission reads:

*Based on the announcement in the 2014-15 federal budget, over the period 2017-18 to 2024-25, it is estimated that across both government and non-government schools the Northern Territory would be approximately \$309m worse off under these revised arrangements. Northern Territory government schools may receive \$166m less in Students First funding over the eight-year period.*

The submission goes on to say, and I think these are very important points about the importance of education investment and the context in which you put it, which is:

*Any reduction in funding is likely to have a more significant effect on education service delivery in the Northern Territory than in other jurisdictions, due to limited economies of scale, dispersion and the extent of disadvantage.*

It goes on to say:

*Reduced funding will have the most significant impact in these locations, where every additional dollar is critical to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage in remote areas.*

I think that was a very appropriate statement and appeal that you made to the federal select Senate committee into school funding here in the Northern Territory, because we know every cent counts. I am heartened to hear that you feel like you are having constructive conversations with your federal counterpart in Canberra, because it is essential to secure every additional cent possible in the Northern Territory. But I bring you back, minister. In the time of the CLP government here - we know that every dollar counts - we have seen the appropriation, the output of the Northern Territory government's contribution to education, go backwards significantly in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

If you were to add indexation here in 2016-17, you are still not at 2012-13 levels. Why is that, minister? Why have we gone back in that investment?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I could ask you a question; are dollars more important to you or results?

**Ms MANISON:** I am asking you the questions, minister, but I will say yes. Results are absolutely critical. I want to have a thorough discussion on that as well, but on one hand you are saying to the Commonwealth that every single dollar counts in closing the gap, and on the other hand your words are not matching your actions in the Northern Territory, and the contribution that has been made to education here. Why was that? Why were those cuts made over those years?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, let us unpack this. First of all, you are coming from a position that things were perfect under the former government.

**Ms MANISON:** I am certainly not coming under that position whatsoever. Nobody, as I said to you before, can be content with the results for many of those students where they are at, at the moment. We absolutely need to catch up at a rate faster than anywhere else in the nation and we know that. I absolutely, truly believe you are very committed to that. I know you are.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We had a responsibility to come in and look at a system. If we are spending this amount of money on an education system and our results are not there – I have said this many times in parliament; I have never met anyone in education who does not have their heart in the right place. They are trying to improve the system. I inherited what I would consider a very scattergun approach. It was as if people had gotten to a level of panic that, whenever there was an issue, just throw some more dollars at it and it will be dealt with. 'Let us move on to the next problem.'

If you throw dollars at something without any strategic plan, you will not get the results. More and more money was being spent, yet we were not seeing the improvements that we perhaps should have in education.

I had a responsibility, and I took it seriously, to look at the very system that we have, trying to find ways to focus on improving results, knowing we had inherited a government that was severely in debt and deficit, and having to do all that in a period of time where we were trying to find savings measures right across government, which is the responsible thing to do. At the end of the day, you cannot keep living beyond your means. In that period of time we started to – every person I spoke to was giving me different advice. 'Don't lift up that rock. Don't look there. You're doing the best you possibly can.' I would never take that position. Even with remote education we know there are struggles out there and we need to do more in that space.

Let us couch this in a different way. Imagine if we had inherited a government that was severely cashed up and I took over the role as Education minister. I guarantee you I would have gone to my Cabinet colleagues at the time, saying, 'Well, we just need more money. That will fix it. We're cashed up. We've got more money. We need to throw more money at it.'

Yet there is a part of me that whilst, yes, I lost a fair bit of bark in that entire process, having to front unions out the front of this place was not the nicest thing to have to do. I lost some bark, but you know what? Having found savings measures within education provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, as in, we had to look at ourselves with a reduced budget and find ways to do it even better.

If you like to use the old saying – if you have less and you need to do more with it you become smarter. Necessity, the mother of all invention – we had to become smarter. The approach we took by bringing in experts, both from within our department and outside of our department, bringing in external experts to look at remote education, middle years and early years – today, we know where we should be focusing and we know it has to be in early childhood. I know you agree with this. I am not verbalising it but ...

**Ms MANISON:** We have a very extensive early childhood development policy and we see the importance there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is where we certainly need to focus our resources to ensure that the platform – to ensure that foundation of education for a student is provided in the first instance. It does not just involve education; it involves this whole-of-government approach. I hate that term, but whole-of-government. We partner up with Health, Housing and communities to ensure that we provide that foundation. Only then, when we can focus on that area, will we see the results slowly flow through.

They are not things I can do tomorrow, but the reel has been cast. It is reset, and I think the platform we have laid now provides us with the right approach moving forward. I say this with all sincerity. Whilst I did not enjoy the time period that this government had to find savings measures right across government, it

provided us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to find new and better ways to do what we do. The system has responded; the chief executive through to teachers in our classrooms – I am just amazed at how they have been able to respond. Today we are seeing better results. Attendance rates are slowly but surely increasing. I think our system has responded very well and with the autonomy, global budgeting and what we are doing in remote schools, we are seeing a system that is improving.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, as we are sitting here almost at the four-year mark of your government, coming to the end of the four-year term when people will cast their judgements on us all on 27 August 2016, it is fair to say that since coming to government you made some big cuts to the education budget in 2014-15 and 2015-16. In the NT government's contribution we saw staff cuts – up to 300 teachers at one point, gone from the system. You are slowly clawing your way back now in that resourcing into education.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is marvellous coming from someone who was part of a former government that left us in a budgetary position – to say that it was just ...

**Ms MANISON:** You have made cuts. You make decisions as a government as to where your priorities are and where you make cuts.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have made savings measures right across government, and why? It was because we had to; we had no choice but to do it.

**Ms MANISON:** But you made big cuts.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I remember going through this the other day. I want to read out for you where we are today compared to where we were.

The total agency budget in years 2011-12, and this includes education and capital works, was \$898m. Today it is \$1.08bn, so over the last few years, whilst we can argue about where we have had to go ...

**Ms MANISON:** I am looking at the Northern Territory government contribution.

**Mr CHANDLER:** But we have a larger budget today than we have ever seen before in education.

**Ms MANISON:** If you look at the Northern Territory government contribution, if you add indexation you are still not up at 2012-13 levels.

**Mr CHANDLER:** If you cast your mind back to before that, when the previous government had the BER funding, I can show you signs that indicate significantly that a lot of the money in that budget was made up of BER money. We could argue this up and down all day.

I am focused on improving the system. I think what we have done over the last few years, through the reasons I have already suggested, has gotten us into a better position now than where we were three-and-a-half years ago. Has there been pain? Absolutely. Have many people been on this journey? Absolutely. Every teacher, classroom, student, principal and person who works within the Department of Education has been part of this journey.

The journey started because of the financial position we inherited, yet we have been able to manage, through the expertise of the Department of Education, and every principal and teacher out there, to have a far better system today than what we had three-and-a-half years ago.

Yes, this year we have the largest budget I have ever had in Education. I am proud of that because of the lobbying and, with the Chief Minister's support, we have that.

**Ms MANISON:** And a significant Commonwealth increase.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely. And how has that happened? It is through good lobbying and good relationships.

**Ms MANISON:** I would say the Gonski reforms and the follow-up after that.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Let us not escape the fact the former federal Labor government cut funds from the Northern Territory's education budget, and it was not until the Coalition was elected – and through my agreement with then minister Pyne – that we received additional ...

**Ms MANISON:** It was through signing up to Students First that you could cut your funding. You would not have been able to do that if you signed up to Gonski. It would not have been allowed.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Gonski is this model that you, the Labor Party, the unions and others keep referring to as a quantum of money. There was never a quantum of money in the Gonski model. It is a needs-based funding model, but there is no quantum. That was a government decision.

I put it to you again; if people take the time to look at how the former federal Labor government unpacked it, they will see there were very modest increases over the first four years. There were major increases in years five and six, which was never funded for, never budgeted for. Again, the rhetoric is that there was this magical cutting of something that never existed in the first place. It is wrong to tell people in Australia that it has been cut when it never existed in the first place.

**Ms MANISON:** We have seen cuts in the Territory, but, minister, let us move forward to something that you like to talk about a lot.

I think estimates is a really good process; it also gives you, the government, an opportunity to talk to people about what you feel you have achieved in your time in the department over the previous year. A lot of this has been discussed in the context of the last four years.

We all know that we have an incredible workforce of teachers, support staff and principals working very hard at all the schools, and we applaud them. Mr Davies works very hard with the senior executive team as well. You see their commitment to and experience in education across the Territory.

I want to talk a bit now about where you see the successes in completions have been, minister. That gives you an opportunity to talk about those numbers and analyse where they are coming from. Please tell me a bit about the numbers on which you base where you say we have achieved success with completion rates? What are the completion rates at present for NTCET for 2015 graduations? What were the Northern Territory Indigenous NTCET rates of graduation last year? I understand that under Mr Davies' leadership there has been some very strong work done with schools because he and you wanted to see a strong focus on completions. Let us talk about completions because we want to see more kids getting through Year 12.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It has been amazing to look at the results over the last few years. In 2015, 1338 students gained their Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training.

**Ms MANISON:** That includes non-government schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Correct, yes. This is an increase of 1.6% from 2014, which is an additional 21 students. Of the total completers, 187 Indigenous students received an NTCET, with 170 from urban schools and 17 from remote schools ...

**Ms MANISON:** Can you break that down by government and non-government, minister, so I can align those with your annual report figures?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will have a look.

**Ms MANISON:** It is broken down in annual reports by non-government and government sectors so it makes it a lot easier to compare apples with apples.

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are 170 from urban schools and 17 from remote schools, representing an increase of 14 Indigenous students from 2014. There were 837 students from government schools and 501 students from non-government schools who completed an NTCET in 2015. This is a decrease of 5% for government schools and an increase of 16% for non-government schools.

These figures are consistent with changes in enrolment numbers where government schools' Year 12 enrolments decreased from 1384 in 2014 to 1269 in 2015. For the same period there was an increase in non-government school Year 12 enrolments from 535 to 629.

The NT increased the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank mean score for all students by 4.2 points from 61 in 2014 to 65 in 2015 ...

**Ms MANISON:** Indigenous NTCET from government and non-government, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I might have to take that on notice. I am happy to.

**Ms MANISON:** Can I put that on notice, Madam Chair?

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**Question on Notice No 8.1**

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question please, member for Wanguri.

**Ms MANISON:** What was the number of Indigenous students to obtain their NTCET in 2015 from government and non-government schools?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you accept the question, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Wanguri of the minister has been allocated the number 8.1.

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**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. I asked about that because in the budget papers the budget targets versus the budget estimates were quite different for 2015 with the NTCET completions for government schools. Last year in 2014-15 there were 885. You targeted for 884, but you saw a decrease in your Year 12 cohort for the government sector, so that came in at 837. Do you think you are on target to reach the 872 completions that you targeted? Does that align with the fact that in 2014 there were 885? Was that the actual number that was achieved that year?

**Mr CHANDLER:** You have picked up on a ...

**Ms MANISON:** Does it relate to enrolment numbers, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, it does. We will go back to why we are working on the middle years issue we talked about earlier.

There has been a real lack of flow-through from middle years within the Northern Territory into our secondary colleges. That is one of the reasons we want to better align some of these schools, like Rosebery Middle School with the Palmerston Secondary College, to see if we can ensure we capture more of those students. Conversely, in our primary years sectors, we had a massive flow this year back into the primary sector, which validates much of the work in that sector. For us to see, in a very short period of time, the number of students that were in public middle years not choosing - or their parents choosing - to go on to our senior colleges was one of the very reasons that we are trying to solve some of these issues.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. I think it is important.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.1**

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have that answer if you want it.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes, thank you, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** For government schools, Indigenous 2015 figure for NTCET was 132 and for non-government Indigenous NTCET completers, 55.

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**Ms MANISON:** Just going back to those Indigenous students, to give us an understanding, I remember seeing the Gunbalanya celebration that you had with your graduates. Can you breakdown how many of those students were from provincial, remote and very remote schools? That was a great achievement, by the way, minister. Fantastic work by the school.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will get the other figures for you. Do we need to do that on notice or we will just organise it? I can do it officially.

**Ms MANISON:** Do you want to provide it before the end of your output groups today?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, that is fine.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** So provincial and ...

**Ms MANISON:** Remote and very remote.

Talking about the results a bit further again – I look at the NAPLAN results every year and I totally appreciate and understand that NAPLAN is not the be all and end all of a student's achievement in their life. There is a lot more that goes into a student's education than NAPLAN testing, and I think you would agree with me there, but when you look at the comparisons from 2008 through to 2015 my read on it is that the results can be very lumpy.

It can be frustrating to see you have wins in one year and then the next year it goes backwards again. Overall, I think, when you look at the results – I am looking at this from my perspective. I am looking at categories of meeting national minimum standards, which I think is very important, so we can send kids off into the world with good job prospects and opportunities as adults. I look at things such as Indigeneity, provincial, remote and very remote schools, and all the domains of testing. My read on it is that since 2008 we have seen some positive, small, consistent movements forward. If you were to look at, for example, the domains around Year 3 students in spelling, reading and grammar and punctuation – but then you look across the board and, again, it just seems lumpy and inconsistent.

I have talked consistently about why it is so important that we invest in education. We cannot be content with where we are at the moment and too many students are still not reaching those national minimum standards. They are not getting the education at the end that we all want to see, and I think we all believe that. For example, in 2005, looking at the outcomes - and I am looking particularly at the Indigenous student cohorts - 42.5% of Indigenous students hit national minimum standards in reading. For Year 5 that was 38.2%; for Year 7 that was 44.7%; and for Year 9 that was 32.9%.

In numeracy that was at 48.6% for Year 3; 45.9% for Year 5; 54.2% for Year 7; and 56.9% for Year 9 hitting national minimum standards. In spelling, that was 34.5% for Year 3; 34.9% for Year 5; 31.8% for Year 7; and 30.9% for Year 9 reaching national minimum standards. We want to see those percentages on the rise; it is critical to the future of the Northern Territory.

Minister, can you point to where you see consistent and real improvements in the NAPLAN testing. I appreciate you have a whole department of people who can sit there and analyse the data to the nth degree. I am keen to hear where you see that there have been improvements. Are there any areas this year that you see the department prioritising a need to do more work in relation to the NAPLAN data?

I know, year from year as the results come in, you probably look at it and break down where schools can do a bit more work. For example, going to my school council meetings, they have a look at it and really analyse it and say, 'Right, we need to put a bit more effort in this part over the other'. As the minister, and with Mr Davies there by your side, running the department, can you tell me about where you have seen good signs but where you might have also seen where you would like to make a bit of priority for more work?

**Mr CHANDLER:** You have started the question well by suggesting that NAPLAN is not the only way to measure a school.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** There is absolutely no doubt we have come off an extremely low base right across the Territory. I am pleased, from one extent, to see trends heading in the right direction, but there are still some areas that I am concerned about. I will give you one example. Right across the country, every minister is worried about writing skills. These have dropped off dramatically and we racking our brains to see what we can do in the system right across the country to fix that.

Interestingly enough, I spoke to a professor not so long ago who said we are all worrying about something that we do not have to worry about. More and more people are moving away from using the old pen and move to – if it is a keyboard, using iPads, iPods, whatever. I should not just use the American companies –



are there other ones? Galaxy and whatever - but using modern technology where they are not using the pen as much anymore. I felt really strange about that argument.

On one hand you kind of agree that yes, as we evolve as a species we are using and grappling with new technology, but I worry and I have sat and I have seen schoolgirls sitting down outside a coffee shop, seven or eight children sitting there, and every one of them has their iPhone or Galaxy out. Not one of them is talking to each other. They are all texting or looking at social media and I am thinking, will we get to the stage, one day, where we will have to re-introduce verbal communication as part of the curriculum, simply because people are not talking anymore?

It worries me that we are losing the ability in one area, and that is writing skills. Yet you have some professionals saying, 'Well, why is that important? We should be evolving with technology.'

**Ms MANISON:** To the NAPLAN data and what you are seeing ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** This is one area that is particularly worrying. Another reason too – Year 9 is a real challenge. Again, seeing some of the results in Year 9 – it is the middle years cohort that we are concerned about, which is why we are doing some work. I think, overall, like you said earlier, none of us can ever be complacent, even when you are seeing results improving. The results were some of the fundamental reasons we took on a reform agenda, particularly with remote education around middle years, early years and all of that.

We know, using the science based on the recommendations of these reports now introducing those recommendations, we will see results. Visible learning in schools – and I know it is controversial but even with some of the curriculum around Direct Instruction, even the early indications are showing improvements in those areas where when you measure like-for-like schools – schools that are using Direct Instruction and comparable schools not using it – you are seeing an increase in learning.

That, to me, is exciting, as is listening to remote teachers who were dead against things like Direct Instruction in the first instance; they are now coming out and telling me, 'Minister, this is the best thing you've ever done. I can clearly see changes in my classroom every week. We are measuring our students every week, which is done on Fridays and analysed over the weekends. I come into school Monday and I have the results of exactly what we have done the previous week. I can measure the ongoing improvement.' It is pretty special.

We could sit here and go through – I could read the results to you if that will help, for the record. Do you want a general statement like I am giving now – yes, we have come off a low base. We have made a lot of changes within the system, introduced new methods around policies and education, and we are seeing a trend of improvement. Is it quick enough? Is it good enough, in my mind? No. I will never be happy until we get comparable results in remote and urban schools. I will not be happy until we have results that show we are leading the country. The ultimate goal is to set our education system up in the Northern Territory to be leaders in the country so other jurisdictions look at our results.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, I am comfortable with you reading that, but I think it is time ...

**Madam CHAIR:** We might have a break of 10 minutes. Thank you very much.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Welcome back everyone. We are still on agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, you were going to take me through the data from your department, giving guidance about the results from 2015.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Happy to. The 2015 results for students at or above national minimum standards for reading exceeded targets for Year 5 and Year 7 for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and for Year 9 for non-Indigenous students. Results were below target for Year 3 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and for Year 9 Indigenous students.

The 2015 results for students at or above national minimum standards for numeracy exceeded targets for each year level, Year 3, 5, 7 and 9, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, with the lone exception for Year 3 Indigenous students, whose results were marginally below target.

Year 3 reading: non-Indigenous Year 3 students at or near minimal standards for reading improved to 89% in 2015, marginally below the 91% target but above 87% in 2011. Indigenous Year 3 students near or at national minimum standards for reading improved to 44% in 2015, but remain below the 56% target at 47% in 2011.

Year 3 numeracy: non-Indigenous Year 3 students at national standards for numeracy improved to 93% in 2015, exceeding the 92% and the 91% in 2011. Indigenous Year 3 students at or near minimum standards for numeracy improved to 53% in 2015, marginally below the 54% target, and below 60% in 2011.

Year 5 reading: non-Indigenous Year 5 students at or near minimum standards for reading were stable at 89% at 2015, above the 87% and the 86% in 2011. Indigenous Year 5 students at national minimal standards for reading improved to 48% in 2015, exceeding the 34% target and 29% in 2011.

Year 5 numeracy: non-Indigenous Year 5 students at national minimal standards for numeracy improved to 93% in 2015, exceeding the 91% target and the 2011 level. Indigenous Year 5 students at national minimum standards for numeracy improved to 53% in 2015, exceeding the 41% target and the 47% in 2011.

Year 7 reading: non-Indigenous Year 7 students at national minimal standards for reading increased to 93% in 2015, exceeding the 89% target and 90% in 2011. Indigenous Year 7 students at national minimal standards for reading improved to 54% in 2015, exceeding the 50% target and the 52% in 2011.

Year 7 numeracy: non-Indigenous Year 7 students at national minimal standards for numeracy improved to 94% in 2015, exceeding the 91% target and the 90% in 2011. Indigenous Year 7 students at national minimal standards for numeracy improved to 61% in 2015, exceeding the 53% target and the 47% in 2011.

Year 9 reading: non-Indigenous Year 9 students at national minimal standards for reading increased to 89% in 2015, exceeding the 87% target and the 83% it achieved in 2011. Indigenous Year 9 students at national minimal standards for reading declined to 33% in 2015, remaining below the 43% target and the 41% in 2011.

Year 9 numeracy: non-Indigenous Year 9 students at national minimal standards for numeracy improved to 93% in 2015, exceeding the 92% target and the 87% in 2011. Indigenous Year 9 students at national minimal standards for numeracy improved to 61% in 2015, exceeding the 60% and the 45% in 2011.

In regard to the earlier question on Indigenous NTCET and non-Indigenous, I have a breakdown, if you want me to read those out. The number of Indigenous NTCET completers by school – I will give you the breakdown, and I will give you the totals to start with.

In 2012 we had 126; in 2013 we had 165; in 2014 we had 164; and in 2015 we had 215.

**Ms MANISON:** That is NT-wide non-government and government schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes 170. I will give you the breakdown in schools if it is helpful.

**Ms MANISON:** Please, go for it.

**Mr CHANDLER:** At Casuarina Senior College the numbers for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 are 19, 22, 29 and 31.

Centralian Senior College had 24, 21, 13 and 22. Darwin High School had 11, 14, 15 and 15. Good Shepherd Lutheran College had 0, 0, 3 and 0. Katherine High School had 7, 9, 18 and 8. Kormilda College had 7, 15, 15 and 16. MacKillop did not exist in 2012, 2013, or 2014, and had 3 in 2015.

Marrara Christian College had 6, 8, 11 and 9. Nhulunbuy High School had 0, 1, 2 and 1. NTOEC had 17, 24, 13 and 11. Alice Springs OLSH College had 4, 1, 3 and 0. O'Loughlin College had 0, 4, 7 and 8. Palmerston Senior College had 10, 12, 10 and 15. St John's College had 4, 6, 9 and 9. St Joseph's College in Katherine did not exist in 2012, 2013, but in 2014 they had 1 and in 2015 they had 2.

St Phillip's College had 2, 3, 2 and 5. Taminmin College had 11, 12, 8 and 5. Tennant Creek High School had 4, 10, 5 and 6. The Essington School had 0, 3, 0 and 4. That gives you the totals of 126, 165, 164, and 170.

The remote figures – we will go through these schools just the same as we did before for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. The totals were 8, 9, 9 and 17.

**Ms MANISON:** For which remote schools, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will give you the breakdown. Gunbalanya had 2, 5, 6 and 8 – well done to Gunbalanya.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Kalkarindji had 0 for all years. Maningrida had 0 for all years, yet I think we got some good news out of Maningrida.

**Ms MANISON:** Maybe just read the ones with graduates.

**Mr CHANDLER:** OLSH at Wadeye had 0, 0, 1 and 0. Ramingining School had 4, 2, 2 and 0. Shepherdson School had 1, 1, 0 and 7 – well done to Shepherdson.

**Ms MANISON:** Excellent.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yirrkala had 1, 1, 0 and 2 to give us a total of 8, 9, 9 and 17.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. It is interesting information. I am sure your department looks at it to see what is going well with schools and where it can be replicated.

Congratulations to Casuarina Senior College, which is my old school. What a wonderful school it is and it is great to see 31 Indigenous graduates there last year, so well done. I know they have a great Clontarf program there as well.

Minister, can we turn to enrolments now? Looking at enrolments, I am keen to ask you some questions, especially around Indigenous preschool enrolments. We are all well aware that the population has grown in the last year, and that population growth has been driven by births here. Yet our preschool figures, particularly for our Indigenous students, do not seem to match that growth and, again, they have been up and down.

The Indigenous preschool enrolments for 2012-13 were 1415; the following year in 2013-14 it goes to 1364; for 2014-15 it was 1448; last year, the 2015-16 year, it dipped to 1284; and now we are at 1349. I would have expected a steady upwards trend there. Minister, can you give us any more insight into those enrolment figures and why they appear to be a bit lumpy?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have a list of nine questions here. In that question you went across a few of these questions. I am happy to ...

**Ms MANISON:** For the sake of time, knowing that you have Transport and Infrastructure, I am trying to break down question 515 into one succinct question, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay. What is that question?

**Ms MANISON:** The enrolment figures appear to be lumpy. They go up one year and down the next. I was under the impression we have had consistent population growth. When it comes to our Indigenous population why are those figures lumpy with Indigenous preschool enrolments? Are you confident that you are getting the enrolment numbers where they need to be, especially since you and I both agree that early childhood development is vital and we want children starting school Year 1, Term 1, day one, ready for school? Preschool is a very important part of that.

**Mr CHANDLER:** In 2015 there were 1305 Indigenous children enrolled in the Northern Territory government preschool program. In Term 1 2016 there were 1165 Indigenous children enrolled in a Northern Territory government preschool program. We anticipated additional enrolments throughout 2016 as children enrolled progressively through the year.

The estimate in Budget Paper No 3 for 2016-17 is 1349 Indigenous enrolments in preschool. We can only go on history to judge how accurate those figures will be. We know numbers increase over a one-year period as parents choose to enrol and as we encourage more parents, particularly in remote communities, to enrol their children into an educational program.

We could talk about FaFT, for instance. You would agree it is a great program where we are slowly seeing ...

**Ms MANISON:** Very definite bipartisan support there, and something we were very proud to introduce.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Good to hear. It is a good program and, where I have seen it, very successful. Gunbalanya is one of those we have visited where you see young mums and dads sitting down with their kids and little babies. They are in a school environment to start with and you have the impression that, if they can keep that up as parents, not only are they learning, but that child is exposed to an educational environment. By the time they get to preschool it is no big change; they are used to it. From preschool into the early primary years, it is no big hit to them because they are familiar with the surroundings and they know the drill.

We will continue to work with the systems we have in place at the moment. Yes, there is a drop, but history will tell you there is a drop and those enrolments increase over the year.

**Ms MANISON:** From the department's perspective, it will be keeping a very close eye on that until we get the maximum capture of Indigenous preschool enrolments.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, there is no doubt the department keeps an eye on this and has also worked very closely with the Department of Health especially, keeping an eye on the number of young children in our communities. Not just in communities but in urban areas.

We opened the new centre in Palmerston, one of six we have constructed, with the support of the federal government funding that infrastructure. Those types of programs and facilities are really starting to drive the early years stuff and bringing more people into the system, but it takes a whole-of-government approach, with the department working with Health and other departments, to keep an eye on these things. You are right. You hit the nail on the head when you spoke about capturing those children as early as possible.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely. Minister, I might forward to attendance. My apologies if I was a bit frustrated to start the session with this morning. I was a bit grumpy after finishing up here at 11.30 pm last night after a long session with Business. My frustrations were probably a bit more fired up when I had gone to look for attendance statistics and – lo and behold – Term 1 appeared as you were reading your opening statement.

Attendance is absolutely critical; we all agree. We need to see kids consistently attending school, and then they will do much better. It is when attendance is not, at the very least, at 80% – we all want to see it at 90% – that we see them fall behind, and it gets worse and worse by year by year. I had a quick look at that data during the opening statement, referring to Term 1, and from what I saw, particularly looking at the Indigenous data attendance statistics – I want to ask some questions around expenditure, attendance and where we are at.

I had a quick look at Term 1. It looked like in 2014 for provincial we were at 83%, in 2015 at 84.4% and then 2016 down to 82.9%. So, we have not made any movement from 2014. In remote it was at 79.1%, down to 77%, and now down to 74.6%. So, again we have gone backwards. In very remote it was at 62.8% to 59.6%, and it is still at 59.6%. Having a look at Term 4, again it seems to go up and then down again.

We want to see this improve at a rapid rate. Like results, we need to get attendance right up. You did seem to see a bit of significant improvement in 2015, but then it has gone back again. My first question for you, minister, is how much is the department spending on school attendance in that area to try to improve attendance? What is the dollar figure you have on it for this financial year?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I certainly share the frustration when it comes to attendance, having just returned from a day trip to Dili on Friday.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely, and you see 100% attendance. I saw your story about doing it in shifts for the school. It is amazing.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. One school there were 650 students and eight teachers, but we will not go there, I can assure you. The reality, the very clear difference, is the value that the Timorese place on education.

It is frustrating when you visit particular communities in the NT. We still struggle to get students into well-resourced schools with fabulous teachers. It is something the former Labor minister struggled with, Chris Burns. He and I used to talk about this all the time – and what we can do. We have partnerships with the federal government in trying attendance strategies. People out there are basically going outside people's homes, ringing bells, getting kids on buses and getting them to school. It is frustrating.

Mind you, I think we have some real successes out there. Some schools and communities do an amazing job at getting their children to school and they should be congratulated. I just wish it was mirrored, particularly across more of our remote schools. Even some of our urban schools, if it was not for a small cohort within those schools, would have attendance rates approaching 98%, 99% or 100%. It is the same cohort again that is causing some concern.

**Ms MANISON:** So, minister, the total expenditure on attendance?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will take that on notice because it is across a number of different areas. You have a number of different federal programs and the programs we are working on at the moment. The figure I have here for the trans-border initiative is presently under review. The total budget expenditure for the NT Attendance Strategy, both SEAM and RSAS – and I did not swear then, that is the ...

**Ms MANISON:** What does that mean, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Remote School Attendance Strategy, RSAS, as well as SEAM. Do you want to know what that one is?

**Ms MANISON:** No, we know what that one is.

**Mr CHANDLER:** You know what the SEAM program is. I will give you both so it is a fairer picture. In the 2015-16 budget estimate, this is Northern Territory government – \$2.475m.

**Ms MANISON:** That is \$2.4m/\$2.5m.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. Expenses as at 31 March 2016 are \$1.422m. The 2016-17 budget is \$2.496m – total budget when you include federal assistance. You can work that out, the NT component. The total budget is \$8.747m.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, do you feel like you are getting, for the investment, the results you want to see?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Do you want the honest truth?

**Ms MANISON:** The value for money.

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, I do not. I think there are areas where we are working very well in that space. I suggest that even some of the federal funding – I am not saying it is misdirected. I just see from the evidence that I am getting back that I do not – although there are signs of improvement and any new student who comes to school is valuable, I would expect, with the amount of money that is being spent on that program, we would see better results than what we are getting. The clear answer is no.

It is something I expect will improve. If it does not improve, I am sure I will be sitting down with Senator Scullion and deciding what to do next. You can continue down the road of throwing money at a program and if it is not giving you the results you really think it deserves, we really should be looking at – the fact is we have been working on a new strategy for a while now. I am not one to throw the baby out with the bathwater. If you can fix a system that you are working on, fantastic. We will be launching the new strategy shortly and it is based – I am being honest. I do not think we are getting good enough results.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. Moving forward, under the Stronger Futures agreement how many teachers are employed and whereabouts are they currently employed?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to take that question on notice, Madam Chair.

**Ms MANISON:** I wanted to ask few more questions around that.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sure.

**Ms MANISON:** How much longer do we have in this funding agreement and how much funding is forecast in each financial year in this agreement? How does that compare to what was originally forecast?

What I am trying to ascertain is, have you had to bring some of the money forward that was initially outlaid for future years. If so, what are the reasons for having to bring that money forward?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The revised National Partnership Agreement on NT Remote Aboriginal Investment, or NTRAI, Children and Schooling Implementation Plan covers a three-year period from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2017, and supports the first phase of the NT government's implementation of *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-17* in remote and very remote schools.

Key initiatives supported by the Children and Schooling Implementation Plan include the expansion of the Families as First Teachers Program; mandated literacy and numeracy approaches; the Transition Support Unit, which by all accounts does an amazing job; the Employment Pathway Program; strengthening the remote workforce; and construction and refurbishment of teacher housing in remote and very remote communities.

The Australian government provides \$108.03m in milestone funding under the implementation plan, which includes \$16.06m for teacher housing – that is in the Department of Housing's budget – and this constitutes 57% of the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-17 budget totalling \$189m.

Additional funding of \$11.79m under the implementation plan is tied to the achievement of annual performance benchmarks for school attendance and NAPLAN. Total funding in the Department of Education budget is \$119.82m. The Department of Education submitted the 2015 Children and Schooling Implementation Plan annual report on 31 March this year, outlining achievements of all the 2015 milestones.

**Ms MANISON:** Did you hit the milestones, minister? Were you successful in getting the funding?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The NTRAI replaced the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory in May 2015. The NTRAI applies the investment already committed by the Australian government to a more outcomes-based approach, providing additional support to the NT in the areas of children and schooling, health, community safety and remote area strategies.

The revised NTRAI Children and Schooling Implementation Plan was signed on 21 April 2016. Total funding for the remaining seven years, that is, 2015-16 through to 2021-22, of the children and schooling component of the NTRAI is \$244.46m, plus \$42.62m in funding provided to the non-government schools sector. This figure includes \$119.82m under the three-year implementation plan, and DoI has achieved all revenue from previous years.

I point out again that those milestones were achieved in 2015.

**Ms MANISON:** Under the new agreement that you signed up to, which started on 1 January 2015, does the expenditure differ from what was originally signed up to in Stronger Futures? What I am trying to ascertain is whether money has been pulled forward, or is it still where it was meant to be in the outer years?

**Mr DAVIES:** Post the Indigenous Education Review work done by Bruce Wilson, we got in early as a department and negotiated with the Australian government on an early agreement under the Stronger Futures funding envelope to get the education implementation plan on foot as part of the broader strategy.

The agreement covers policing, health and many other initiatives that sit under this new implementation plan. In effect, the new implementation plan was negotiated, with targets that were put in place across other agencies and funding envelopes negotiated from agency to agency through the Department of the Chief Minister with the Australian government. Effectively, our negotiated agreement segued across to the new arrangement. So what we had agreed under the Stronger Futures framework, effectively, was transferred across into the new agreement's framework.

**Ms MANISON:** So that has not changed.

**Mr DAVIES:** No, it has not.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, Mr Davies.

**Mr CHANDLER:** After listening to that answer, I now understand the question.

**Ms MANISON:** Roger that. You spoke about the transition support unit. Can you provide details of funding allocated to the Transition Support Unit and how many staff are employed in it?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will. Whilst that is being found, I have to tell you about the feedback. Only last week, I spoke to a principal from South Australia who was quite amazed at the work they are doing there. Rob is doing an exceptional job, as is the whole team. The assistance they are providing students, parents and schools is quite dramatic. The comments from the principal from the South Australian college were that it was helping students wanting to return to the Northern Territory. Rather than always helping children go interstate to other colleges, this was attracting students back to the Northern Territory.

The Transition Support Unit is a key project within *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-17*. There are 25 officers based in Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. It commenced in October 2015 to support Indigenous students from remote communities to access quality secondary education in regional, urban and remote schools.

The Transition Support Unit has established relationships with 45 interstate boarding schools, 10 Northern Territory boarding schools and 46 Northern Territory remote community schools to help facilitate boarding options for Northern Territory students in 2017. The Transition Support Unit is currently case managing 320 remote Indigenous students. Of these, 71 are new enrolments in NT boarding facilities and boarding schools, 44 are new enrolments in interstate boarding schools and 205 are students on a transition plan to boarding school or being re-engaged with boarding.

The Transition Support Unit's Indigenous Education Excellence Scholarships have been awarded to four students from Alpara and Yirrkala to attend interstate boarding schools. The total value of scholarships budgeted in 2015-16 is \$150 000. A little background to this is that in response to the recommendations of the review of Indigenous education in the NT, the strategy's implementation plan covers 2015-17 and was endorsed by Cabinet in February this year.

The unit also works with families, schools and students in Years 6 and 7 to ensure students are prepared for boarding school; case management support for all Indigenous students who have transitioned to regional high schools and boarding schools; a rapid response service for students identified as being at risk; and an excellence scholarships process for high-achieving students to transition to some of Australia's leading boarding schools. The budget estimate for 2015-16 was \$4.146m, and the 2016-17 budget was \$4.920m.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. Turning to behaviour management and incidents within schools, can you outline how incidents within schools are classified and categorised within the department?

**Mr CHANDLER:** While that information is coming to hand, that is another area where I know we share similar views. We have to do all we can to ensure we are handling these situations correctly in the first place, providing the right support in our schools for our teachers and the principals and to ensure those processes are spot on.

I am not removed, as I am sure most people would understand. I get what are called news flashes and I am sure former minister McCarthy would have received news flashes, although he probably had departments he had no problems with ...

**Mr McCARTHY:** Transport! Come on!

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, I share that.

With education I get news flashes just about every single day with incidents that occur in our schools. I read every one of them, and I am quite horrified with some of the things that occur. I am, in some cases, even more horrified when parents get involved and some of the outcomes of those interactions. Violence in our schools is not something that I think either government would ever condone ...

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... and behaviour management is something that we are constantly looking at, particularly around those middle years.

**Ms MANISON:** How are the incidents categorised?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The categories that we have – these are the primary behaviour types – come down as assault; bullying; a dangerous act; inappropriate use of technology; indecent behaviour; substance use or possession; verbal abuse; violation of agreement or non-compliance; and weapons or property offences.

**Ms MANISON:** Okay, minister, and do you have a number of the incidents that have been experienced within schools in the last 12 months?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sure, yes. In 2015 - I would like to clarify, some of these numbers will be different because there would be one student that commits more than one offence, so the numbers will be a little bit different.

In Term 3, Weeks 1 to 10 in 2015, we had 776 incidents undertaken by 586 students. In Term 4, 2015, Weeks 1 to 10, we had 770 incidents by 564 students. In Term 1, 2016, 885 incidents undertaken by 654 students.

**Ms MANISON:** So there has been an increase this year. Is there any thinking behind that or why that has occurred?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think it is fair to say that the introduction of the new *Education Act* has had something to do with the way things are reported and handled today. The *Education Act 2015* provides school principals with power to suspend a student from school - either in full, partially, or with conditions - where the student's presence is likely to constitute a physical or psychological risk to others. Where there was a longer process before, principals can now get on and do this a lot more quickly than what they once could. So they may be taking further action quicker.

In the NT government schools there has been an increase in the number of individual students suspended compared to Term 4 2015 and Term 1 2016. Assault is the most frequent reason for suspension.

To ensure teachers have the strategies to create a safe environment for students the online training course Understanding and Managing Behaviour provides in-depth understanding of behaviour. A social and emotional learning curriculum and positive behaviour framework are being developed to assist schools to create safe and supportive communities and build healthy, resilient young people.

Twenty-eight school counsellor positions across the Northern Territory provide individual support to students and professional development for staff, and they assist in the delivery of school-wide wellbeing programs. Two of the 28 school counsellors are employed independently by schools.

A substantial amount of resources and initiatives are available to support young people displaying antisocial behaviour. The student behaviour management taskforce released the 'Getting to the heart of the matter' student behaviour taskforce report in Semester 2, 2015. Its recommendations address unacceptable student behaviour and are under consideration. These align with the Indigenous Education Strategy and the middle years teaching and learning strategy.

The social and emotional learning curriculum and positive behaviour framework will meet the needs of all NT students, particularly Indigenous students, and trials will begin in Semester 2 2016. There are 129 schools engaging in the KidsMatter and MindMatters material that supports the implementation of mental health initiatives and the development of a positive school environment. Eight positive learning centres in Darwin, Palmerston, rural Katherine and Alice Springs support schools and students and the ...

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, do you think we have enough behaviour management support in our schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have thrown some additional money there this year. We have increased the budget from \$176 000 to \$266 000 to ensure there are adequate resources. It is an area that has concerned me. I am probably saying this anecdotally, but given all the newsflashes I receive from schools, you usually find minor offences in our primary sector. Occasionally they will be more severe, but the most of the more serious ones, in my mind, are in the middle years section with probably the least amount coming from our senior colleges.



**Ms MANISON:** Minister, a concern has been raised by COGSO with regard to the issue of safety in schools. One adult was in attendance at schools prior to the first round of cuts in 2014 – there were two adults in schools, and they are talking about teaching principals. Their concern was that the department had agreed to fund all small schools an additional amount to ensure at all times there would be two adult staff present at schools. We are hearing the commitment is not being maintained. Can we confirm the attendance of at least two adult staff in public schools for all student contact time? Is that happening at the moment?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Nothing has changed in the policy area in that regard. In fact, what you are saying is ...

**Ms MANISON:** Is it happening?

**Mr CHANDLER:** If there is evidence of that – and it does not worry me where that evidence comes from, whether it is directly from the schools or from representative bodies – let us know, because it should not be happening.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Wanguri, the member for Nelson has a question on that issue.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, on behaviour management. Minister, I gather under the new *Education Act* the department can step in and make a decision over and above what the school has decided in relation to discipline. Is that correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Correct.

**Mr WOOD:** My concern – and I will not mention the school, but you probably know the school anyway. I attended a council meeting there. Perhaps when the department makes a decision it may not have all the full facts behind it. I am not arguing the case against discipline for misbehaving students, especially students who attack teachers, but do you look at the background of that child, especially the family environment they come from?

One concern that was raised was that whilst there certainly needs to be some discipline, or some responsibility taken, for their actions, suspending a child from school who has no home to go to, or who has parents who may be drug addicts, can possibly more damage. I think, what I understand from the school, they were lacking in staff that could help. There was a shortage of staff at the school at the time. There needs to be some way we can balance the students having to take responsibility for their actions. At the same time the department needs to be careful, when it makes a decision over and above what the school, that it knows the full background of the student before it steps in and makes the decision.

Do you think you have to be very careful, before the department steps in, with what the school has done?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Do you think that the department needs to work more closely with the school to get an understanding of the background of that student? In many cases, in government schools, that person has nowhere else to go. In the case I am talking about I think the suspension was for a few days, but the department suspended the person for nearly a month. In some cases the only love that person receives is from a couple of teachers who try to help that child. If you suspend that child, what hope do they have if they have no family to go back to?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Member for Nelson, I think I am pretty aware of the circumstances you are talking about, so I will be very careful with what I say. However, whilst you are absolutely right, we need to be very careful from a system response to any individual incident that the greater view is taken on, expressed and considered.

Sometimes, I think, society today – or, if you like, the judiciary right through to our schools – often puts a wraparound on the offender before even considering the victim. I often worry that more concern seems to be about somebody's background and circumstances without any acknowledgement whatsoever of the actual crime or action.

I am using a hypothetical now; where there is potentially an attack on a teacher, I think we have to be very strong in our approach. We have a duty of care to all our employees, and just because a teacher is in a classroom within a community it does not take away the fact we, as a department, and I, as a minister, have

to do what we can to protect that teacher. We have to send a very clear message to offenders that it is not tolerated.

There are people who have extremely sad stories in their life, but, at the end of the day, unless you teach a very clear lesson that it is not tolerated, how are they supposed to learn from that experience? And yes, while I agree from a department point of view that we need to consider as much as we possibly can, we still have to take action when – whether it is a crime or a particular action that has taken place – there has been an assault on a teacher or another staff member.

**Mr WOOD:** I absolutely agree, especially with the bit about an assault on a teacher.

What are the alternatives to sending a child to no home at all? That child will probably come out bitter and twice as bad. My understanding was that there were not enough staff to run – I do not know the technical name, but you have places where these students can be managed. I think there may have been a shortfall in staffing at that time.

I believe people must take responsibility for their actions, but do we have other means of trying to achieve these same outcomes without making it worse, you might say? If we send someone home for a month on suspension and there is no one home, or it is a dysfunctional family, and you do not have backup support for that person while they are suspended, have you achieved what you are trying to? That is, show that the person must take responsibility for their actions, but at the same time you do not want that student coming back to school worse than they were before you suspended them.

I will give you an example. Can the Education department use places like the Loves Creek boot camp? I hate the name boot camp because I have been there. I think boot camp is a name that we have picked up from TV and applied it to something that I think is a little smarter than that. Is there a possibility to divert kids away from school for a while, but give them a chance with people who will help them and bring them back onto the right track?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It reminds me of listening intently over the years to the member for Barkly about his experiences as a teacher. I think he used the example at one stage that a teacher today is a leader, parent, carer, counsellor and authoritative figure in many children's lives. In some cases it is the only time they ever get a chance to have someone close to them.

Again, I have always taken my hat off to teachers. It is a remarkable job they do. They are often left with a reflection of our society that ends up in our schools. They are dealing with a classroom full of children that go from one extreme of children, ready, willing and wanting to learn, through to others who do not want to be there, and somewhere in between. Some of those kids who do not want to be there are often those children – again, using a pretty broad brush – who are in the hands of, or have had interactions with, other government agencies, whether it is Police or family and community services.

Yes, I agree there has to be some way we can look at dealing with some of these more in-depth issues. It should not be the teacher's responsibility to take on the world and solve the world's problems. Some of these kids have come from pretty mixed backgrounds and are mixed-up kids. Often they are, if you like, forced to go to school – and I do not mean forced as in pulled along – as the system says, and we think children should be in school to get an education. But if they come from backgrounds where they are not getting that support, what do you do with them?

This is where we are starting to step outside the boundaries of Education's responsibility. Again, I will use that saying – is it that whole-of-government approach to being able to deal with some of these more serious issues that some of these children have? We have kids today who are going to school with the new anklets that Correctional Services – the judiciary has suggested these kids have curfews and other restrictions on their movements. Those children are in our schools.

If those children muck up, the school needs to ensure it has the resources to call on to deal with some of those harsher children and the issues they are dealing with. At the end of the day, we need to ensure we have the right processes in place to protect our teachers, other students and other staff within the system. But at the same time you will always have that one-off. What do we do with this difficult child who has caused something to occur in a school that is of significant nature and requires a response? If that response, as you said, will put them into further harm, where is the responsibility, and what should we do?

**Ms MANISON:** On that point, minister, it is my colleague, the member for Barkly, from whom I have heard a few stories about bringing a child back into the school system who has been disengaged for some time.

When the yellow shirts first started coming out, you heard a few stories about getting all these kids back into school at the start of the school term, but many of them with high behaviour needs who have been disengaged from the schooling system for some time. How does the agency put the right supports around schools to ensure they have the right supports to deal with those very high, complex-needs students to ensure those students who are already at school and on track are not disrupted in their learning, but hopefully we can continue to keep those kids with complex needs engaged in schools who have been out of the school system for some time?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is always intriguing. The former government set up the Malak Re-engagement Centre, which is still funded today. It is still operating. I have been of the view that we need to have an area within schools where we can suspend children. It is something I have been working on and will continue to work on. To my mind – and this is just my opinion – sometimes if you suspend a child from a school, as the member for Nelson said, you are putting them in harm's way, particularly when they do not have parents there to support them.

I will tell you one story where I had support from a parent who, when a child was suspended at home, went to the trouble of removing cables between the TV, the video and the wall. She took the controllers of the PlayStation and left a pile of books on the table for her daughter. I will not get more specific than that. That is a parent who is actually getting involved with the system to support the schools because that parent's daughter had mucked up and she, as a parent, wanted to teach a lesson.

I think the whole system let us down. The daughter complains to another government department, gets support and is taken away from the family because she complained that it was too harsh. I think sometimes our system does not work well together across agencies, and that is just one example. I think there will always be places like the school system we run in the Don Dale Centre. Do we still call it that, even though it has moved ...

**Ms MANISON:** I appreciate that we are probably getting a bit short on time now minister, but I think it is more about the remote and very remote schools where the students have been pulled back into the schools with the attendance strategies on the ground. It is great to get them there in the first place, but how do you keep them there? How do you ensure they do not create chaos for kids who are doing the right thing in the school?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do not think any of us have all the answers in that space. I know that the counsellors do an amazing job. There is about a \$3.6m budget allocation for counsellors in schools across the Northern Territory. As I said before, two schools decided to employ their own counsellors within their global budget because they saw the value in having additional support in their schools - great decision by that school.

There are a number of programs. You could talk all day about the Stars Program or Clontarf and how they have a piece of that puzzle, through to Malak re-engagement, school counsellors and what we can work with – our teachers – to build capacity, but you will still have an element of children who are problematic, and a lot of it is based on their background and their place in the community. Of course, it is the public education system, in most circumstances, that is left to deal with probably the most difficult of cases.

**Ms MANISON:** Sorry to move you on, but we have a lot more to cover. There is still a challenge in the system ...

**Mr WOOD:** I think the concern from the teachers that I spoke to at a meeting was that they had made a decision based on the knowledge of the people, and the department stepped in and made a decision over the top. I am not saying that was necessarily wrong, but I think they felt that they needed to be involved. So some background could be given to the department before the department made a decision so it had all the facts, and it should have talked to the teachers. I was at that meeting and those teachers, although they wanted these kids disciplined, love those kids and wanted to give them some help.

You have that balance between wanting to – and realising that these kids, if they do not get help at school, will not get help anywhere else. They were concerned about the department stepping in. Perhaps the department should step in, but it should be careful that it knows all the facts before it does. That was the criticism. It was not saying that you should not come in, but do it in a way that is sensitive to the people who are on the ground.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do we have any more whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

**Ms MANISON:** Yes, I have a fair few. Time is very short, Madam Chair, so I will try to crunch through as many as I can before lunch. Then what I do not get through we will put on notice again and see how we go next time round.

**Mr CHANDLER:** What you are asking for is short answers, is that I right?

**Ms MANISON:** What I am saying is that this is a very big, critical portfolio, so I have lots of varied questions for you.

Turning to infrastructure investment in schools; yes, we support the Boosting our Economy package. It is needed for small business, but any investment in school is a wise investment so it is welcome to see school infrastructure getting an upgrade.

I wanted to turn to the repairs and maintenance spending that we have in Budget Paper No 4. My read of it is that it has not changed from the previous financial year and it has gone down for schools in this term of government. Schools are not getting any younger. Does this mean that more schools are have to pick up repairs and maintenance within their global school budget and their savings?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The figure for 2015-16 is higher than 2016-17 because there was an additional \$5m put in with the Boosting our Economy strategy.

**Ms MANISON:** So, that is the estimate at the moment for last financial year? Originally you had targeted it at \$33m and it is \$33m again.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is certainly the same; that is a good point. There was a real risk, without going too far, of that \$100m we threw into that stimulus package, having \$68.5m in addition to any other budget we had been working on for education, there was a real risk. I think we could have seen a reduction in repairs and maintenance this year. I was adamant there would not be a reduction in repairs and maintenance based on the fact we received additional money. Every minister is fighting for their share of the pie. There was probably argument out there – ‘Pete, the department did all right with that \$68.5m; let us tighten it in other areas.’

**Ms MANISON:** In real terms it has gone down over previous years.

**Mr CHANDLER:** What you will see is, if you want to throw in that \$68.5m, it is a fabulous stimulus into the system. I am happy that additional money has gone in. Overall, as I said, why it looks like it is down on last year is simply because \$5m out of that stimulus package has gone in. That is just the repairs and maintenance budget.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. In real terms, looking back for example ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have a 0.6% CPI at the moment, so be careful with the real terms.

**Ms MANISON:** In 2012-13 it was \$33m; in 2013-14 it was \$43m; in 2014-15 it was \$34m; and now we are back down to \$33m. If you add it up over the years you are going backwards. We will move forward, minister, to the Boosting our Economy package.

**Mr CHANDLER:** You have to remember that all these things we are doing – and we are talking about the same stimulus package – and the works that have been done have come off future minor new works and repairs and maintenance requests. They were out there, but now they are off the list because we are spending additional money on them. It actually reduces our forward requirements for a repairs and maintenance spend.

**Ms MANISON:** There you go. You have answered my question about how the projects were selected so thank you, minister. One less...

**Mr CHANDLER:** I would like to go a bit further. There is a real difference with this stimulus package to the other. I could be critical of the BER here, but again, it was money into education. I will stay right away from that. There was little evidence, from my mind, across the country on how that benefited schools when a lot of schools received things they did not want.

We wanted to ensure this money was spent wisely. As everyone will tell you, the member for Barkly will tell you, schools always have a list of things they would like done in their schools. That is where the list started.

We went to all the schools and asked them to put forward their list of wants. Then a breakdown of priority was done. I want to put this on the record – and I am not verballing Ken here, but I reckon he will back me up.

**Ms MANISON:** You would hope so, he is your CE.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I wanted to ensure this could not be seen as political. I even said to Ken in meetings, 'Make sure, when this list is put together, that it is not biased in any way to any area out there, and that we get a fair spread across the board'. Whilst there might have been some tweaking around here and there, it all came from a want and wish list from departments.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, given the emphasis on getting that money rolling out into the local economy to local businesses, which is an important point, especially since we are going through some pretty tough times out there locally – with employment not hitting the marks that were forecast in the last financial year. There are a lot of people leaving the Territory at the moment as well. I get the importance for a government to get that money rolling out to local business so they can stay in the Territory and keep people in work. I heard some talk from people with regards to the speed in which getting these projects rolling out was delivered, from a school council perspective. I also heard it from consultants' perspective as well, how they felt that they have done some rush jobs here and there. You might not necessarily get the full effectiveness of the infrastructure that you are putting through at the end of the day.

Minister, are you satisfied, with the very tight time frame in which you have to get these projects up and running and get the shovel into the ground, that you will make sure the planning has been done correctly and that consultation with the school community has been done to the best level to ensure you get the best possible infrastructure and value for money, and the education outcomes you are driving towards?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am absolutely amazed at how we were able to pull this together. First of all ...

**Ms MANISON:** What were the turnaround times on most of these projects?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In some cases we had tenders out within a month; that was the requirement.

We had Department of Infrastructure staff working Saturdays and Sundays, up to 2 am in some cases, and the feedback from that it was a great exercise.

**Ms MANISON:** You have a good team there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** One of the positives that I must raise here today – I take my hat off to those departmental staff for Infrastructure who worked damn hard to pull this off. We wanted a quick turnaround on this because the issue was immediate.

I say this with all due respect to whole-of-government: if we left this to normal processes without driving the horse, we could have been waiting 12 months or more to get this money out there through a standard process. If we had gone through, in most cases, normal tender processes, such as working with individual schools, sitting down with councils and working out every little thing that they wanted done, we would be talking about as long as 12 months before seeing a shovel in the ground.

When you have an immediate problem such as ...

**Ms MANISON:** The economy, as it is going backwards. We need to get people in jobs because we have some issues.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... a moving economy, we have to get the money in there. There was a real emphasis on getting this out quickly. How to do that, though, was the important thing. We worked with a list that had already been worked on, and we know that because it has come from the schools. In many cases they had already done the work behind the scenes right through to planning levels. They had worked with people like Leanne Taylor within the department, and some schools had master plans – 'We want this, that and the other' – so they were ready to roll with initiatives that were well planned and wanted by the schools.

It then it was a job for the Department of Infrastructure to work quickly in getting those tenders out there. I do not apologise for pushing them as hard as we did, getting people like Dave McHugh to work hard. I am sure these questions will come up in Infrastructure too.

I am absolutely satisfied that not only has it been done to meet the intent, that is, get money into the economy – and I think 42 contracts are already awarded. Four jobs are already completed from those works, and \$27m is already out there from this stimulus package because of the process we have used. We took a list that was ready, and we drove the department really hard to get those tenders out there.

You picked up on a criticism – the only criticism I have of the project is that in some cases we have tied jobs together. It might be that one school might have four different jobs being done and has put them in one package. There has been some feedback from smaller players saying, 'I wish we had broken those up to four different packages'. I am just thinking off the top of my head – one package might have included some rebuilding work, such as a shade cloth and new playground equipment, and there might have been some new car parking, and that might have all been rolled into one tender package.

There are some smaller businesses, and there might be the argument that they might just do some car parks, for instance, and all of a sudden they have to tender for a package that includes all three. There is nothing stopping a company from tendering for the bigger job and subcontracting that work. In most cases you will get a company that will take on that entire package, but they will subcontract to the smaller companies, the people who focus on those areas. The money will still get there, but it will not be the head contractor. We did that because, when you are looking at as many jobs as we were putting together, if we had broken them up to every single job, the process to get all those tenders out would have been dramatic.

The member for Barkly would well know how much work is done in the tendering processes through Transport, Infrastructure for those types of things. We would have taken twice as long to undertake the process before the first dollar was on the ground. So they were packaged up, and, in some cases, school by school instead of job by job. In doing so we were able to speed up the process to get the dollars on the ground quicker.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr WOOD:** And you emphasise local?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely. The Buy Local policy was used. If they are very small jobs, less than \$15 000 worth, they are a bit different as to how they are used. But, at the end of the day, I am comfortable with the number of locals who are securing this kind of work. It is a high percentage of locals.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you.

**Ms MANISON:** I now turn to international travel. How much has been spent on international travel? Can you please table information on each trip taken, how much it cost and who it was taken by? I have to ask you the question this year, minister: has the department paid for any of your international travel again this year?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will answer that question first. No. Zero.

**Ms MANISON:** Good.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The total cost of travel between 1 July 2015 and 31 March 2016 – international, \$94 000; interstate \$593 000; and intrastate \$2.799m. That does not include things like school excursions, which are all done at the school level. This is departmental travel. I can give you a breakdown of those.

**Ms MANISON:** Would you be able to table the information?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It will not take long; it is only two pages. It is a smaller budget this year than last year. This is international travel. That is the one you are interested in?

**Ms MANISON:** I would like the information on international travel so we can see where people are going, what the purpose of the trip and the cost.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Would you be happy with traveller, destination, cost?

**Ms MANISON:** Yes.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We will do that then. Traveller: Kevin Gillan, Dili, \$1791. Maria Albion ...

**Ms MANISON:** Sorry, minister. For the sake of time, can I put this on notice, please, rather than having it tabled right here and now, if you are not willing to do that ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is fine.

**Ms MANISON:** You will table it?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you. With regard to international travel – I know you were about to read it out, but let us do a summary. Has most of the focus been on China and Timor-Leste, where the staff go?

**Mr CHANDLER:** How about I read you out just the destinations of all the trips. It will take about 30 seconds?

**Ms MANISON:** Great.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Most of it was to Dili with the International travel school – Dili, Singapore, Dubai, China, Istanbul, Indonesia and New Zealand.

**Ms MANISON:** Excellent. Thank you, minister. Could we turn to global school budgets? I have put these questions in writing as part of the written questions. I am keen to find out in the previous year, or the 12 months up until now, how many applications for special circumstances the department has received and how many of them they have approved. These are applications, for example, if a teacher has to go on extended sick leave, things that are not anticipated and that the school really cannot afford to cover.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Some of those circumstances are covered by the central agency anyway - some of those costs.

**Ms MANISON:** I have received feedback; I have heard a few stories where schools have sat there wondering where their application was at or where they were advised that they would not be successful in their application. So it was another cost for them, having to find another teacher and so forth. It is just important to see how that is working and functioning within the global budgeting system.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Two exceptional circumstances funding application rounds have been conducted. A total of 24 applications were received from 21 different schools; 14 schools included sick leave or extended leave costs as part of their claims. Claims have been approved for 12 schools for a total of \$776 955.

**Ms MANISON:** What about the ones that were not approved. You were saying that half of them were not approved, what are the sorts of circumstances that they are applying for and why were they not approved?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think the question was around what would be an example.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. You have said that so far there were 24 applications, 12 of which were approved, and it sounded like they were for extended sick leave, about \$800 000 worth coming out of central and going back to those schools to assist with their global budgets. So, there are another 12 out there; I cannot imagine that schools apply to the department lightly for these exceptional circumstances. What are the types of situations where you do not approve funding?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There is a framework around what is approved and what is not approved, based on the following: the overall budget position of the school; if there is a case where they have lots of money in the bank ...

**Ms MANISON:** If they have lots of money in the bank, you say they have to pay for it themselves, even if somebody is on extended sick leave?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Again, they would go through the entire process to see whether it would be approved or not approved. I go back to the point I made in an earlier answer. There is well over \$60m left in the global budget of schools after last financial year, so there was certainly enough allocation to run the system last year and have a surplus of over \$60m.

The overall budget position of the school; the ability to continue to deliver educational programs; the one-off expense and the degree to which the school could and should have foreseen and managed the risks; the

level of the expense in relation to the school's budget and the ability of the school to meet the one-off cost; the level of risk assessment and loss mitigation, including any insurance that may have been purchased by the school; measures taken to reduce the cost associated with an unforeseen expense and the effect of local management decisions on the one-off expense; and measures taken by the school to reduce the amount of exceptional circumstance expenditure to determine if and how much additional funding is required.

From that, I would argue that in circumstances where it was evident the school could not cover the cost the department has stepped in and picked up the cost. If there was evidence that a school has either not managed or foreseen a circumstance that they should have, maybe that was a decision around why it would not be approved, but I think the overall bottom line would come down to whether the school could afford to do it or not.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, would you be able to provide information on the 12 cases which were not approved, the value of how much money they were seeking to be reimbursed and the circumstances of why they were seeking reimbursement? If I cannot get an answer here, could I please put that on notice?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will commit to seeing what we can provide because it may come down to issues in a school that could be personal in nature. To do so, I think, would be unfair. I will commit to looking for what information we could provide to help give you a better understanding. At the end of the day, like any manager, the principal has a global budget. They have a responsibility to manage within that budget. There is so much of what occurs in our schools today that is still centrally funded, and an example of that is a principal's salary. A principal's salary does not come out of the global budget. It is handled centrally and paid on top of their global budget.

There are so many things outside the global budget that are centrally handled that a normal manager – \$59m in 2016 was centrally funded, and it probably would not hurt to cover off on what that provides. That is remote incentive allowances; freight allowances; remote retention allowances; first aid allowances; principal salary and vehicle; study leave; parental leave ...

**Ms MANISON:** Aside from that, I am asking specifically about schools that applied for exceptional circumstances. We know that 24 have applied for, 12 were approved and 12 were told, 'No, you have to pay for them in your existing savings'.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will commit to finding out if there is information that we can give you. I put on the record that, like any manager that has a budget to work with, they need to work to manage within that budget. As I said, there was certainly enough money in the system last year to – in fact, there was a surplus, well in excess of \$60m.

**Ms MANISON:** Your view is that schools could wear that cost?

**Madam CHAIR:** Would you like to put that question on notice?

**Ms MANISON:** I would if that is possible.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.2

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Wanguri?

**Ms MANISON:** Of the 12 schools which were unsuccessful in receiving approval for their exceptional circumstances application to be reimbursed through the department, how much was each individual application for and what was the circumstance for each individual application.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I accept the question with the promise that I will provide what information I can. In addition that it is known in full knowledge that those that sit on the board, including the financial officer, senior executives and principals of schools, sit on the board. When you have people that are in the know and understand what should be accepted and what should not be accepted – these are not decisions I make. These are decisions that are made by the board. If I can provide the information I certainly will.



**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Wanguri of the minister has been allocated the number 8.2.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to global school budgets, are you able to provide the current student base load allocated to schools within their global budget? Are you able to provide the additional loadings that are applied to students based on things like Indigeneity, disability and location?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The standard loading is \$6282 per student across the Territory. There are three components of funding allocated under global school budgets they are fixed, targeted and variable. The student needs-based funding model is used to allocate the variable funding component. The funding model provides a base rate, as I said, of \$6282 for 2016, with loadings added for cost and equity factors. These factors include a loading for stage of schooling, so the year level, allocating of 10% more to early childhood students and middle year students, and 22% more to senior year students compared to primary students allocated at the base rate; remoteness of the school, allocating up to 5% more to students enrolled in very remote schools; Indigenous status, allocating 30% more for every Indigenous student compared to non-Indigenous students; socioeconomic status, as calculated from parental education and occupation, allocating up to 40% more per student from a low socioeconomic background.

**Ms MANISON:** With regard to the student needs-based model developed with Professor Stephen Lamb, when that was put together did the professor receive any directive from government that the result should be cost neutral in the formula that was put together?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, there was no direction from government or me on what that outcome should be. I should point out that the 2015 base rate was \$6099. This year's rate of \$6282 is a 3% increase.

**Ms MANISON:** Turning to Direct Instruction – what is the expenditure this year, how many schools are participating this year and what programs are being rolled out at those schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** While the information is coming forward, I must tell you that the schools I visited where Direct Instruction has been implemented – I am really confident with what I see there ...

**Ms MANISON:** This is an opportunity for you to share some of that data if you want to point out where you feel you are getting results. Costs, programs being delivered and where – and what data can you point to?

**Mr WOOD:** Can I also ask you add attendance rates for those schools where you might have introduced the program?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Just going through it, there is quite a bit of information here on Direct Instruction. I will start with the following 19 schools, which were selected by Good to Great Schools Australia to deliver Direct Instruction through the Australian government-funded program ...

**Ms MANISON:** Are we focusing on government and non-government as the 19 schools, does that go across both?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Nganmariyanga School is the only one on this list of 19 that is a non-government sector. Alekarenge; Angurugu; Borroloola; Gapuwiyak; Gillen School, but there is only one class there; Mamaruni; Milikapiti; Milyakburra; Minyerri; Nganambala; Nganmariyanga; Ntaria; Numbulwar; Papunya; Peppimenarti; Pularumpi; Umbakumba; Warruwi; and Wugularr School. That is where they are at the moment.

**Ms MANISON:** What is the total overall value the government is expending on it, including cost of purchase of subscription and training, and all the other expenditure associated with the delivery of the Direct Instruction program this year?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In 2015-16 it was \$842 000, and in 2016-17 we budgeted \$1.6m.

**Ms MANISON:** That is quite a step up, doubling that. Is that because you are adding numeracy to it?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Correct, as well as a few more schools that are enrolled in the program now. I just want to put it on the record that we are working with communities on this. There is no demand on any community to take on Direct Instruction.

We work very successfully with a number of remote communities to introduce it and I would hate to think – I know the media has tried in certain circumstances to directly link recent events in north Queensland to what is going on in the Territory. It is totally wrong.

As I said, I am one of those people who reads a lot. I read reports; I can see statistics and all of that, but I still believe in getting some of that raw feedback from teachers on the ground in remote communities. Recently, when we were southeast of Katherine – walking into classrooms where there is orderly learning happening with engaged students and engaged teachers is quite a fascinating thing to watch.

**Ms MANISON:** The data, minister, that you would like to point to of how this has been going since it has started?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Direct Instruction through the Australian government's Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program is delivered in 19 government schools and two non-government schools for students from Transition to Year 7.

The 2015 results for students in Years 1 to 4 indicate that, on average, Direct Instruction students had an improvement in reading comprehension three times greater than students in like schools which did not deliver Direct Instruction.

In February 2016 training was delivered to 178 government school principals, teachers and assistant teachers who were new to the program. In 2016 over 1500 students in government schools are participating in Direct Instruction literacy. I point out that the direct measurement of the improvement over time has been measured against like-for-like schools. We have taken a cluster of schools. Overall, the Direct Instruction schools effect size was higher than the control group and lower in comparison to NT schools' average, with effect sizes of 0.24, 0.14 and 0.59 respectively. For early Years 1 to 4, the effect size for DI schools was three times greater than for the control group ...

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, what is 'effect size' for the layman?

**Mr DAVIES:** Member for Nelson, effect size is a calculation that is used through visible learning by Professor John Hattie. It measures the impact of a teaching and learning program or methodology. You are making a full-year progress at about 0.3 to 0.4 effect size. Anything above an effect size of that nature is a good year-on-year improvement. An effect size of 0.6, for example, would be about a two-year improvement in a year.

**Mr WOOD:** Thanks.

**Mr CHANDLER:** In those like-for-like schools, it was important that we grouped schools that had similar attendance rates and similar outcomes, and which were similar size schools. We grouped those schools that are not using Direct Instruction with those schools that are, and we can clearly see already with the early results that there is an improvement.

**Mr WOOD:** Any improvement in attendance?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In some places, yes; in some places, no. I cannot say there is a direct correlation between Direct Instruction and attendance, although I would argue that as we roll this out further and as more and more children are engaged into the system, there will be an improvement in attendance, simply on the basis that a child understands the system very well. It is a consistent system and they learn that there is nothing to be frightened of with this. Remember, from a basic point of view, Direct Instruction is applying 90% revision in any lesson and 10% new content being introduced into that lesson. A lot of repetition – 90% repetition and 10% new in every lesson, measured every week with the results analysed over the weekends. Teachers get those results on the Monday.

It is not like NAPLAN where you are getting these results once every year. They are getting results every week so they can measure and know where their students are.

The other thing to remember is that many people are still trapped in that mindset that every child in Year 3 and Year 4 will be learning at the same level. Direct Instruction gives you that flexibility. As children advance more quickly they can be moved up levels. In some cases, those who enter a school system or are behind the eight ball in the first instance can be put into other classes. It is not a system that requires aged-based learning; it is based on the ability of the child. Some classes in remote communities have five,

six and seven-year-olds all in the one class doing that particular lesson, and three, five, seven and nine-year-olds over doing another lesson at a different level.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I have a question relating to something you said before, which has been a source of great curiosity for me. You said that Gillen Primary School has only one class under Direct Instruction, you said that there are 29 schools in total?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are 19.

**Madam CHAIR:** Sorry, 19. It is my understanding that Gillen Primary School is the only school that has just one class under DI. Is that correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** Why is that so? There are issues around that that I have become aware of. If you have just one class that has this special attention – I believe you came to visit the school fairly recently and you went to just that one classroom pretty much. The perception is that there is a lot of attention and a lot of resources being put into this one classroom, possibly at the expense of the rest of the school. Can you explain this model and why Gillen Primary School is somewhat an anomaly?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is certainly not an anomaly, but probably a really good demonstration of how we are working with the community. This was a school-based decision. They wanted to take on Direct Instruction in that class and we were happy to provide the resources to do that. Similarly, some teachers have spoken to me recently who feel like they are missing out because their remote school is not using DI. While I will not mention their name, she said to me she was from North Queensland, used Direct Instruction, saw the advantages and now she is in a school in the Northern Territory that does not, so she questioned why we are not supporting that particular school.

Again, we do not want to enforce schools to take this on. We want them to see the value. If they see the value and they want to take it on, we are there to support it. I want to put this on the record. We did not just lift something they are doing in north Queensland and slap it here in the Northern Territory. To do that, I think, would have set it up to fail. We wanted to take off bite-sized chunks that we could swallow. We wanted to lift the capacity within the Northern Territory education system. It is a step-by-step program; it will roll out. If I tried to do this right across the Territory, the department and our budget probably would not have been able to handle it.

We are doing it in a systematic way; we will roll it out working with communities. I think it will become more and more successful because more and more communities will see the value – ‘This school has this and results are improving, so why can’t we have it?’ Of course, we are happy to work with those schools, but we will not force this down people’s throats.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can I ask the question again, as you have not quite answered it. Why was Gillen Primary School chosen as the only school that has one classroom with DI, as opposed to the 18 others, because there are issues that have arisen because of this perception of unfairness.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It was not that the Department of Education or I, as minister, chose Gillen to do this. This was a school-based decision. They wanted to introduce it into their school. As I said, we were happy to support that decision.

**Madam CHAIR:** They wanted it in one classroom?

**Mr CHANDLER:** That was their decision, yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** And when you say their decision, who are you talking about?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The school.

**Madam CHAIR:** The school council?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** This is a school that possibly did not know much about DI and how it was being rolled out throughout the Northern Territory?

**Mr CHANDLER:** You might be making assumptions. I think whilst you will always have people who are detractors to this system – and in fact I have been accused of everything, such as having shares with Good to Great Schools to being a lover of DI. I was not ever a lover of any particular system other than one that I saw having some real potential here in the Northern Territory.

I have put this on the record before, but when I walked into classroom after classroom in north Queensland and saw whole classes quietly learning, listening to the teacher and interacting with the teacher, totally engaged – and this is on the back of having eight or 10 people walking through, cameras on their backs, reporters being in there ...

**Madam CHAIR:** I am not questioning the DI model, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, but I am just putting on the record that it was not the model. It was what I was exposed to; I did not have a clue what it was. I was thinking, 'Why is it working? Why is this engaging children? Why does it appear to be working?'

That is why I am absolutely adamant that we do not want to shove this down communities' throats. If there is an interest, we are certainly willing to work with them. In this case, that school approached the department about initiating Direct Instruction in the school.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you acknowledge there could be some issues in the fact that it is just in one classroom and that a DI classroom requires more resources and has received more attention as a result of that decision?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, but I put it to you that we are coming to you from an incredibly low-base with some of these students. That is why in remote locations – I still do not know whether it is the actual Direct Instruction model itself or how it is being delivered. Is it the engagement of the teachers? Why are we seeing learning rates at the moment three times what – is it because the system is so good? Or is it because we are coming off such a low base?

**Madam CHAIR:** Was Gillen Primary School advised of some of the issues that might arise because of that obscure model? Given that 18 have been fully rolled out across the schools and in one classroom, what advice was given to Gillen Primary School about that peculiar decision?

**Mr CHANDLER:** You have used the word 'issues' a number of times, can you be a bit more specific so I can...

**Madam CHAIR:** The perception that has come back to me from a number of sources is that particular classroom under Direct Instruction receives more resources than the other classrooms in the school. It receives more attention; it received more attention from you when you visited the school about six to eight weeks ago. There is a source of greater attention, more resources and unfairness. That is the perception the other classrooms have in the Gillen Primary School.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I would perhaps question whether or not it is more a perception of some of the staff at the school than what it is ...

**Madam CHAIR:** Staff and parents.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That is interesting, because I visit schools all the time and sometimes you are there to look at one particular thing, other times you are there to visit a whole school.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you are aware of this issue; I know you are. Your executives are aware and you should be aware through your executives.

**Mr CHANDLER:** You keep talking about issues and you are saying that there are additional resources that go into that. There are additional resources that go into the Stars Program, Clontarf and and there are a number of other programs.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, that is true.

**Mr CHANDLER:** This is a different program. Yes, it does take additional resources, but, at the end of the day, it is a program through which we are trying to improve the educational outcomes.

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, I understand that. I am just talking about this particular decision to roll it out in one classroom as opposed to the 18 other schools that have DI that it is rolled out across the school ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** You have me intrigued though.

**Madam CHAIR:** I am intrigued too; I think it is a very strange decision. I do not think it has been particularly effective from anecdotal stories I have heard. I am happy to leave it there, minister, thank you.

We might break for lunch and reconvene at 1 pm. Thank you very much.

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The committee suspended.

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**Madam CHAIR:** We will recommence budget estimates hearings. We are on the Department of Education whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategies. Are there any questions?

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I do not have too many more sections that I need to go through with you. I wanted to touch on a few important areas around VET completions and then disability and special needs transport, but it might be something you will have to talk about in your following outputs when you speak to Transport. I will still ask the questions here to see how we go. Starting with VET, how many students are undertaking a unit of VET in 2015 to date, and in 2016?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will get those figures for you shortly. There is a discrepancy that I hope you have picked up on that they have been counted prior as the courses were counted. Now, if a student is undertaking more than one course, they are only counted once. So when you see a difference in the numbers it is simply because you might be undertaking two different courses, but you are counted once. I will get the numbers.

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. And I will keep going down the questions that I have. How many students have been placed in structured work placements? Is this less than last year and, if that is the case, then why?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In 2015 the total number of all Year 8 to 12 students receiving a full VET qualification was 1087, representing 54% of the total number of students receiving statements of attainment. This is well above the national average of 42%, as provided by the National Centre for Vocational Educational Research.

In the 2015 school year, 860 full Certificate I, II and III VET qualifications were completed by senior school students – that is Years 10 to 12 – 1697 senior school students between Years 10 to 12 received Certificate I, II and III statements of attainment for one or more completed units of competency, representing partial completion towards their full qualification.

Some students were enrolled in two or more qualifications and the total number of students receiving statements of attainment for one or more units in 2015 was 2003. Of students who completed a full VET qualification 44% were girls, and 25% of all students who completed a full VET qualification were Indigenous. In completing their VET qualifications 500 students participated in 784 structured work placements, in addition to students undertaking VET. In NT schools, 157 students are participating in school-based apprenticeships or traineeships, with 70 of those being Indigenous.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, is there any way I could get a breakdown of the 2014 numbers and the 2015 numbers, firstly for structured work placements, secondly for completion of Certificates I, II and III, rather than them all grouped in together?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Ms MANISON:** Also, how many school-based apprenticeships were there in 2015 compared to 2014? Would you like me to put that all down in a question, Madam Chair?

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### Question on Notice No 8.3

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you restate the question please, member for Wanguri?

**Ms MANISON:** For the year 2014, how many students were placed in structured work placements; how many students achieved a Certificate I; how many students achieved a Certificate II; and how many students achieved a Certificate III? How many students were doing school-based apprenticeships? Can I please have that same data for the 2015 year?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you accept the question, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Wanguri of the minister has been allocated the number 8.3.

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**Ms MANISON:** Minister, just turning to disability support throughout schools. You hear more and more families having challenges of raising their children and getting through their education with autism and being at different levels of the spectrum. How many staff are there and what work is the department doing to work with students with autism throughout schools? What support do we have?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The Department of Education supports students with special needs in mainstream classrooms and through special schools and centres across the NT. Special education services are provided in three modes: special schools; special centres; and special programs. In February 2016 there were 581 students accessing services throughout these modes. Across the NT there are four special schools. There are 10 special centres dedicated to the delivery of education services to students with high-support needs. There are two special programs that cater for students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

The new Henbury School provides 120 middle and senior secondary places for students with disability. New facilities at Kintore Street School are due for completion by June 2016, Henbury is at a cost of \$33m and Kintore Street at a cost of \$2.65m. A new special school in Palmerston, at stage one for \$21.35m, is due for completion in September 2016. It will provide 84 preschool and primary school places for high-support special needs students, catering for disabilities ranging from academic and behavioural through to severe physical and intellectual disabilities. A planned stage two will offer middle school programs for 60 students.

Do you need to know the numbers of students in which schools?

**Ms MANISON:** If you have a number of how many children within the government sector you know have autism, it would probably be helpful to understand the extent of the support that is required – appreciating that the support will be very different with the different needs of each student.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have the number of students enrolled at different schools. In the Malak program for autism there are six students, and in the Rosebery program there are seven students. There could be many other students in other schools that are on the spectrum, but these are particular, designated programs.

**Ms MANISON:** Do you have an overall figure within the Territory education system of students who are identified with autism?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are 983 students in Semester 2, 2015, and 1001 students in Semester 1, 2016 enrolled in mainstream NT government schools that are supported under this program. But the 581 that I mentioned before are in special schools and so forth.

**Ms MANISON:** Is that generally students with a disability or specifically autism?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The 581 is a whole range, and the 1001 students in mainstream schools – my own son did not go to a special centre until he went to the senior college. He was in mainstream school so I cannot rule out that any of those children are not on the spectrum. One thing we have spoken long about is that there has always been a bucket of money, and it has not changed much over the years. There have been ongoing discussions between all of us around the fact the bucket has not grown, but the number of students continues to grow.

After thinking long and hard about this, we will increase the budget by 10% this year and throw another \$500 000 into that bucket, simply based on the fact that over the last few years, because of the increased numbers, the actual quantum allocated to each child is shrinking.

**Ms MANISON:** Is that by increasing the weighting for disability services within the global school budgets for how you roll that out?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There is a pool, but I do not think the weighting will change. At the moment you have what has been allocated in the global school budget, which is weighted as per the standard practice. This is additional money that will now be thrown into that bucket; it will be centrally funded though.

**Ms MANISON:** How much was that, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is \$500 000, so it was an increase of 10% in the budget.

**Ms MANISON:** Very good, minister. With regard to how many staff we have within the department who are providing support for students with hearing loss issues, what is the difference?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Just hearing loss?

**Ms MANISON:** Yes, hearing loss in particular.

While I am here, how many staff within the department are specifically working with the issue of helping students with autism?

**Mr CHANDLER:** SESS included?

**Ms MANISON:** Within the central agency as opposed to out in the schools, how many staff are there to support students with autism?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Those last two questions, I am happy to take on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.4

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you restate the question for the record, member for Wanguri?

**Ms MANISON:** How many non-school based staff are within the Department of Education working to specifically support children with autism, and how many of those staff in non-school based positions are working within the Department of Education to support students with hearing loss?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Wanguri of the minister has been allocated the number 8.4.

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**Ms MANISON:** Minister, within schools, if parents and staff recognise that there is an issue there and they need to have a child or student assessed, how do they go about having a child assessed and how long does this take to occur, on average? What is the process and how long does it take?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am hoping it does not take as long as it took us. It is quite frightening how the system is quite complex in regard to additional school funding. We know that once a child has been assessed and all the boxes are ticked, additional funding can flow through to the schools to help with that. I can only go by experience, what my wife and I went through many years ago, and I think back then it would have taken at least 18 months before we had an idea of what direction we needed to go in. I am assured it is not as bad as that today.

The other point which is important is where I can see some real improvements in this area around the NDIS. To couch that clearly, there are a number of services that are not provided in the Northern Territory simply because the numbers do not add up to support that business. One of the reasons is the new

Henbury School catering for years 13 and 14, in addition to now holding on to the old Henbury School and what we will do with that, but it is also about how we are partnering with Carpentaria Disability Services.

I am probably talking out of school here, but there is an opportunity for space to be provided in infrastructure like that where somebody who is a specialist in that area can set up at a low cost. The space is provided where they can provide services for parents with children with special needs they would not normally be able to avail themselves of in the Northern Territory. I am hopeful through the NDIS we will see a quantum change in additional services for the first time flowing out of the Northern Territory.

That will not solve all the issues. It is not helpful if you live in Yuendumu and the service is in Darwin unless you can get to them. There is still some work to be done, but we are working to improve the system overall.

**Ms MANISON:** I know it goes across the agencies, but do we not have an average time in general?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have to take that on notice. A lot of this would sit within Health.

**Ms MANISON:** I appreciate that. If that comes back to be the answer, then that is the answer. It will be great to put it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.5

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Wanguri.

**Ms MANISON:** If a student is requiring an assessment to see if they have a disability, how long, on average, does this take to occur from the moment it is decided the assessment is required? By region as well, please.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked of the member for Wanguri of the minister has been allocated the number 8.5.

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**Ms MANISON:** Minister, just to refresh, the weighting that is put onto a global school budget for a student with disability – that was ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Did we answer that before? There is no weighting for disability because they are funded under separate programs. If the program is provided, it is funded; it is not based on the ...

**Ms MANISON:** Funded as opposed to the weight. Thank you.

We have all been lobbied very hard by the group of parents who are passionate about seeing more options for students, particularly with intellectual disabilities, for their post-school options. What work is being done in this space?

I am very pleased to see the swift construction of the Henbury School. That will be a very proud achievement of government at the end of this term. I am glad the government took up the option to build the new school. The school is looking fantastic and it will be a welcome addition to support parents in Darwin with children with special needs.

We know the question always was, 'Where to afterwards?' There are many services about, but there are still many parents with concerns about their options to continue education after Year 12.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It has been an interesting journey so far. I entered this job with the same frustration, wondering where Education's responsibility finishes and other department's responsibility – whether it be health and other services – start. To me there has always been this challenge in the transition from one to the other. No department has ever picked up and wanted to run with this.

I have often thought, from an outsider looking in, 'Who cares?' It should be government that is helping in this space, and rightfully so, but in departments we work in our little stovepipes. We have budgets to be



careful with. Where do we overstep the mark and where should somebody else be stepping in? Any department that puts up its hand to take on something is left to pick up the barrow and run with it. Usually no other department will step in and provide assistance while you are filling that vacuum.

Post-school programs to support young people with disability have a shared responsibility the Northern Territory Department of Health, and the Australian government's Departments of Human Services and Education and Training.

Before transitioning from school to a post-school option, the Department of Education provides special needs students with opportunities for work experience and targeted enterprise activities. Schools support students and their families to develop personalised transition plans that identify appropriate post-school pathways. The Department of Education coordinates a supported work experience program delivered in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs that aims to develop the work skills of students with disability and plan for their smooth transition from school. Annually this program attracts \$155 000 in funding and supports approximately 140 students.

The Department of Education also delivers a remote transition from school grant scheme to further support students with a disability from rural and remote locations. Under the scheme \$153 000 is available per year to assist the development of enterprise activities and community connections in the last years of schooling. In 2016 the Department of Education published the revised students with disability policy, which included transition from school guidelines to assist schools in developing personalised transition plans for students approaching school-leaving age.

DoE supports the transition planning of students with disability from schools to a range of post-school options such as:

- tertiary education with support through the Australian government's National Disability Coordination Officer Program, hosted by Charles Darwin University
- job seeking for students not able to work in the open labour market, but able to work for at least eight hours per week in a supported environment; access to this program is through the Australian government's Department of Human Services, Disability Employment Services
- community pathway programs for young adults with moderate disabilities, funded by the NT Department of Health
- access to individual packages for young adults with severe disabilities, which provide in-home support with some community access, funded by the NT Department of Health
- one full-time equivalent position working across the NT to assist schools and families with the coordination of this work.

Through the *Education Act* 2015 all NT students are allocated 26 semesters of government education from Transition to Year 12. For students requiring additional time there is capacity to approve an extension where there is a clear educational need, an approved plan and an agreed review process.

We set out with the new Henbury design to ensure that there was capacity within any new plan that we built to cater for Years 13 and 14. I couch that with the provision that many parents are working on a transition pathway for their children and will not take up the options of Years 13 and 14. There will be other parents who are in particular circumstances and will. That can be negotiated with the principal and the CEO to extend the years that we provide a service, but I think having the capacity to cater for those years is a step in the right direction.

I think the \$10m allocation from this government to Carpentaria Disability Services is another step in the right direction. I think that would be a wonderful precinct; it will end up being able to cater for the early needs. Hopefully that is where we go with the Henbury, the new school in Palmerston, Namarluk – and that was under the former government, a fantastic school that has provided additional services. Whilst I will never argue for more, I think having the new school in Palmerston, together with the senior college, Namarluk, Henbury and Carpentaria Disability Services, we are starting to put together a very good set of resources for special needs across the Northern Territory.

**Ms MANISON:** Thank you, minister. Going to the issue of access to special needs transport for students – and I appreciate you might say you may need to take this question in the Transport sector, but I will give you a bit of an example.

I have a constituent who lives on Asche Street in Muirhead. Asche Street is built for buses. It is one of the main roads in Muirhead so it can take them. It is to the point where directly outside this person's house they have parking lanes that are built in. It is not just the road; you can actually pull over at the side of the house. This parent has to send their child out, and I know it is only 250 m up the road, but when you have a child with special needs - we know what it gets like in the Wet Season and so forth. They are trying to create a system where one parent does not miss out and then another parent gets something. Even though they have a really easy place to pick up their child with special needs, their child has to go down the road to get picked up by the school bus, which seems a bit strange.

My understanding is that there has been a change of policy about school pick-ups for children with disabilities. Going from written questions that the member for Casuarina had received from you – written question 463 – you specified that there were 25 students who currently accessed special needs transport across the Territory via group pick-up, and 19 students from alternative locations to their home address. How many of the 44 students who have been deemed eligible for – let us put it this way; why has it changed that you cannot get door-to-door pick up? Especially given we are talking about students with disabilities and parents have enough challenges on their hands, who have to take their children elsewhere to get to these pick-ups. Is this something that you are reviewing at the moment?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am. I have to tell you, there have been absolutely no cut backs to special needs services. In fact, since 2011 we have put another five buses into the system, so the system has grown as has the number of students. At the moment there are about 298 students across the Territory using our bus services to get to and from schools.

Just to clarify – and I am wearing two hats here at the moment. The Department of Education is effectively the client here. They work with parents to determine what their needs are and how that would be best addressed. At the end of the day, the Department of Transport provides the service to pick up those children based on the information that is fed from the Department of Education.

Not all circumstances involve children with disabilities and severe disabilities being picked up by the Department of Transport. In some cases, parents have the capability and the want to do this themselves. It is only in circumstances where it is a last resort that parents are severely restricted in any way of providing a service. It is not an absolute guarantee. It is a needs basis system in place.

The system has grown. Some of the problems that are more recent, but not in all cases – Mr Wood would love this, is around town planning. In some cases we have large buses that have been put on because of a growing number of students who are not capable of getting down some of the smaller streets.

The street you mentioned is one that is suitable for buses; I get that.

**Mr WOOD:** It is only in Palmerston ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** But there are a few streets that the larger buses cannot get down. A driver might say they can do it but they have to do a three-point turn at the bottom, and on some of the roundabouts it is dangerous to be reversing a bus in small cul-de-sacs. It comes down to safety. In that circumstance often buses will come to an end of a cul-de-sac, for instance, and that is where the pick-up will be. Parents are usually helping their children get to that pick-up point. It is not a perfect system. In fact, we are doing some work on reviewing how we are doing it.

Recently there was a review undertaken last year by the Departments of Transport and Education – I think it was last year – and there were some good outcomes with that, but more money is being spent today. Since 2011 there has been an increase of five buses. I am looking at having the system looked at from the perspective of an outsider looking in to see if there are better transport systems in other jurisdictions than what we have here. It is an area I am extremely interested in, even to the point of suggesting that if it comes down to the necessity for smaller buses – it might mean more drivers and buses in the end, but until we see the recommendations of the review ...

**Ms MANISON:** You are looking at it?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Absolutely.

**Mr WOOD:** I have one question.

**Ms MANISON:** I have one last question for the Education session, Gerry. Then I am done.

Minister, planning for new schools is important to make sure we keep pace with population growth. You have land allocated in Zuccoli for a new government school. In my electorate in Muirhead we are coming close to getting the last stages of houses going, and Leanyer is chockers. We have always had provision for the new school in Muirhead north coming up.

What new schools are on the books; what years are they forecast for and are you looking at the city cluster at all, given they are in high demand as well with those schools? I asked last year. Around the Casuarina by-election there was a lot of talk about the new school in Muirhead and it seems to have gone quiet, so I am seeing where the plans are at right now, including with Zuccoli and any other plans for any other new schools.

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are certainly ongoing plans to develop new schools. It was quite clear over the last few years where we have been allocating resources for special needs schools. We will have a new long-distance education centre at Darwin High School being opened, hopefully, next month. The reality for us will always be based around the growth. You are absolutely right; Muirhead is an area that we ...

**Ms MANISON:** Yes. We have Muirhead north and 2 CARU coming on next. Nakara is a very busy school, as are Leanyer and Wanguri schools.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The issue will always be with what we have as a system by way of capacity. We have plans in future to fill – I will not say the void because we still have capacity within certain schools, and it is important that we use the capacity in the best way we can. The plan by John Glasby put in a timetable ...

**Ms MANISON:** Is that a couple of years old now?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. The population growth ...

**Ms MANISON:** I have a lot more doors to knock on in Muirhead than I used to, minister. Just to let you know.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I can understand that. I think Zuccoli was planned for 2017-18, Muirhead over the two years 2018-19 and 2019-20 and Berrimah over 2020-21.

**Ms MANISON:** So that is a new government school going into Berrimah?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Possibly. There is no actual firm commitment yet. This is based on what the plan suggests we will need. The land has been allocated for a school ...

**Ms MANISON:** Whereabouts is that land, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Land is allocated in the new Berrimah Farm subdivision for a school. I would be misleading you if I said this would be the school. The land has been allocated ...

**Ms MANISON:** You are making provisions for it, which is essential with a new development.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Given Defence's commitment to northern Australia, if we see a continued growth, particularly in the Muirhead area ...

**Ms MANISON:** It has grown. All the development applications are in. We know that 2 CARU and Muirhead north are full-steam ahead.

**Mr CHANDLER:** You will find, like any government, you are responsive to where the needs will be. There are certain schools where there is plenty of capacity. Darwin city is one area. If you look at schools like Larrakeyah – they are full – go to Parap and they are full. Down in Ludmilla you have capacity there. What do you do to attract more parents and students to Ludmilla? I think they are all scared because the CE has something to do with that school, but that is another story.

**Ms MANISON:** Effectively, minister, you are saying that in the forward works the next new schools to roll out will be the new school in Zuccoli, a primary school co-located with the private school, for which you gave a grant to the Catholic schools ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** We were looking at the plans yesterday and it is looking good.

**Ms MANISON:** Muirhead north, not Muirhead ...

**Mr WOOD:** A new high school in Litchfield? The Weddell College?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Just commit to everything, Gerry.

**Ms MANISON:** ... and Berrimah. Are any others on the horizon at this point?

**Mr CHANDLER:** With commitments to Taminmin of \$10m for new science labs, what we are doing around existing schools is a huge bonus. We could, effectively, have taken that \$68m stimulus package and ...

**Ms MANISON:** Built a new school.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... put it into a new school somewhere, but we have shared it around and used the money quickly.

**Ms MANISON:** The infrastructure required upgrades as well, so it is a win/win for everyone.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We will base our rational decisions on science and where the numbers are growing; that is where the resources will go.

**Ms MANISON:** It is good to get an update because originally Muirhead was looking at coming along in about 2017, next year. It is good to see where that is at.

**Mr CHANDLER:** As I said, it comes down to the capacity within our existing system, as well as watching very closely where the growth is.

**Ms MANISON:** Absolutely, making best use of resources and where population is ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** You should be on this side.

**Ms MANISON:** It is good to hear that there is planning. Thank you, minister, for a very informative Education session. I will stop questioning you now and put the rest of my questions on written notice – after the member for Nelson goes ...

**Mr WOOD:** That was four-and-a-half hours and the Independent gets one-third of that. I will go for only one-and-a-half hours.

**Ms MANISON:** Minister, you can still table some of those global questions to save me having to resubmit them.

**Mr WOOD:** I was going to start on Output 1.1, but it looks like Early Years has been and gone. Be that as it may, I will ask a fairly global question. How many education staff and teachers operate within the correctional areas? Do you provide teachers to Holtze, the youth detention centre and Barkly Work Camp and that ones at Nhulunbuy and Alice Springs?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to take that on notice. I do not have those figures.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.6

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Could you provide the number of staff and teachers the Department of Education provides for Correctional Services? Could you give me a breakdown of where they operate from?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do, yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Nelson of the minister has been allocated the number 8.6.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Do we have any other whole-of-government questions?

**Mr WOOD:** We probably would but we need ...

**Madam CHAIR:** We have not gotten to the first output group yet.

**Mr WOOD:** We will have a special day just for the opposition.

**Madam CHAIR:** Do we have any other questions at all to the Department of Education and the minister?

**Ms MANISON:** We do, but they will be in writing.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay, that being the case, that concludes consideration of the Department of Education. On behalf of the committee I thank departmental officials for their presence here today. Thank you very much.

**Ms MANISON:** Madam Chair and minister, thank you very much for all the work and effort that has gone in, and for the frank conversations. I appreciate all the work the department staff have put in to prepare for estimates.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. We will have a five-minute break and then we will move on to the Department of Transport.

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The committee suspended.

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#### DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I invite you to invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Transport.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon. I would like to introduce the officials from the Department of Transport who are here today. Andrew Kirkman, Chief Executive of the Department of Transport to my right; Fotis Papadakis, Chief Financial Officer to my left; Simon Saunders, Executive Director of Transport Services to my right; Louise McCormick is over the back here; we also have Nicholas Papandonakis, Executive Director of Transport Planning, Policy and Reform; Inga Davis sitting behind us, Office of the Chief Executive Division; and Alex Rae, Director of Passenger Transport.

Madam Chair, the Department of Transport has achieved an enormous amount to date in the 2015-16 year. Transport is a key enabler of economic growth and ensuring the prosperity of the Northern Territory community. We have been working hard in this area as we recognise that reliable roads, efficient ports, good rail services and effective logistics infrastructure are key to sustaining business activity, attracting new investment and expanding our industries.

Transport infrastructure also plays a crucial role in connecting remote and regional areas across the Northern Territory, and providing access to essential services, jobs, economic development opportunities and social cohesion. In the last year, achievements have included improving infrastructure, roads, rail, barge landings and aerodromes; sustainable development of regional, domestic and international aviation services and infrastructure; seeking ongoing reform at the national level for the transport sector and ongoing efforts within the Northern Territory for transport related reform to better suit the needs of industry; planning for the future through delivery of the integrated transport planning and infrastructure investment roadmap and its associated strategies; working with the Australian government to realise the initiatives in the *White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*; an enhanced focus on road safety and delivering community and school-based safety initiatives.

On Monday this week, the Coalition government committed more than \$130m for Territory roads, which is certainly welcomed by the Northern Territory government. The funding shows the value of the

Commonwealth and Territory governments working together. The projects announced include the upgrade of the Keep River Plains Road, \$40m from the Australian government; further upgrades to the Outback Way; \$28.m Australian government funding for Plenty Highway and the Tjukururu Road; and upgrade of the Adelaide River Floodplain to provide all weather access, \$62m Australian government funding. The Country Liberal government is committed to providing a further 20% funding, which is a Coalition government requirement for the federal roads programs. This will see an increase to each project of 20%.

Another year of huge investment in roads and transport infrastructure of \$589.6m in 2016-17 will allow all aspects of this of this important work to continue. The 2016-17 transport infrastructure budget comprises \$495.9m in capital works, including minor new works of \$10.7m for roads, and \$9.4m for transport assets.

A further \$10m is to continue the Regional Economic Infrastructure Fund. The fund provides grants to enable local government and organisations to invest in local jobs and growth throughout the Northern Territory. This is a highly successful and popular initiative and we are pleased to be able to continue it.

We are also providing \$81.5m in repairs and maintenance, which includes sealing of around 245 lane kilometres of Territory roads, gravel re-sheeting and reforming of around 980 km of unsealed roads, and maintenance grading of the Northern Territory's 15 400 km of unsealed roads. A further \$2.25m is set aside for infrastructure-related expenses to plan for the future transport needs of Territorians.

A high number of projects announced in last year's budget will continue to be developed, including completing the seal of the Litchfield Park Road and bridging the Lower Finnis River; high-level bridges over the Roper and Wilton Rivers; completing the seal of Larapinta Drive and the Inner Mereenie Loop tourist drive; improving barge landings across the Top End, including Maningrida, Gapuwiyak, Galiwinku and Ramingining; ongoing maintenance works for the Nightcliff jetty; upgrading the Outback Way roads, including the Plenty Highway and Tjukururu Road; upgrading Palmerston roads for economic growth; and completing the \$103m duplication works on Tiger Brennan Drive.

The Northern Territory government is delivering on its commitment to develop a liveable greater Darwin with a beautification program now under way. Contracts to the value of \$3.2m will see six locations on urban roads across Darwin and Palmerston enhanced with significant landscaping works. Works will include irrigation, planting, grassing, signage, lighting and landscaping within verges and medians of selected roads and intersections. The Green Space Landscaping Program will assist in minimising the impact of development on the urban environment through using tree and plant species that complement existing native vegetation in previously planted areas. It will also provide a sense of arrival and identity at key locations on the urban road network.

These are merely a few of the highlights which are in progress to unlock the potential of the Northern Territory. Some program highlights for 2016-17 looking to develop our transport infrastructure include the following. In Darwin we will provide \$8m to undertake dredging of the Cullen Bay navigational channel and around the pontoon. This work will remove hazards which are obstructing vessel access to the entrance channel. The Cullen Bay ferry service provides an essential transport method for Mandorah and Tiwi residents, and this work will ensure the safe passage of the ferry and any other boats moving through the area. In Palmerston we will continue our investment in roads, recognising the population growth in the area, and \$6m will be spent to provide improved heavy vehicle access into Pinelands through an intersection upgrade at McKinnon Road.

Our support for the sustainable transport options will also continue with \$1.5m to construct the new cycle path link from Howard Springs to Coolalinga. In rural areas across the Top End we will invest \$2m to upgrade the barge landing and hardstand areas at Wadeye and \$4m to construct the Rocky Creek Bridge and complete the Fog Bay Road upgrade. This will improve road safety, increase flood immunity and facilitate community engagement and regional development.

Tourism operations and recreational fishers will benefit from upgrades to provide better access. This will include \$15m over two years to upgrade and seal selected sections of Gunn Point Road and \$1m for Corroboree Billabong road access upgrade. The Tiwi Islands, developing new timber export industries, will be supported through \$27m being spent to seal the road to Port Melville.

Those utilising the Victoria Highway will benefit from the construction of the new high level bridges over Little Horse and Big Horse Creeks for \$34.5m, which is jointly funded by the Northern Territory and Australian governments. Also in the Katherine region, Lajamanu Road will be sealed in selected sections between Kalkarindji and Lajamanu at a cost of \$5m. The Roper Highway will also have \$4m spent on it

during 2016-17 out of a total program of over \$13.5m over four years to upgrade and seal sections between Fizzer Creek and Ngukurr.

The Central Australian region will also benefit with selected sections of Maryvale Road being upgraded from a \$16.5m program over two years. This will improve access for local communities and increase the potential for growth in the pastoral and tourism industries.

The Tanami Road will also get \$3m upgrades in sealing targeted sections. This is part of an ongoing program to improve access and reliability of the road to support mining operations in this region and to enhance the regional economy through productivity improvements.

In the Barkly region, access to the Utopia health clinic will be improved by a \$6m two-year program to upgrades to the Sandover Highway, and \$1m of this will be spent on stage one in 2016-17 to extend the seal to the clinic.

In the last 12 months the department has continued its contribution to red tape reduction, responding to the needs of businesses and industries in designing services to suit customers. Territorians now benefit from a vastly improved Motor Vehicle Registry, where there is no longer a need to attend an MVR service centre. They can now conduct most transactions just about anywhere through the various online portals, including the Northern Territory Rego app, or at over 20 Australia Post retail outlets across the Northern Territory. Modernising the mover's registration and licensing database has allowed MVR to halve its staff training time.

There has been a significant reduction in customer waiting times across MVR service centres. Lowering of staff turnover and processing of fewer renewal transactions has given MVR shopfronts more capacity to deal with complex front counter transactions. We have also outsourced vehicle licence assessments to the private sector.

In the last 12 months the government has also finalised the review of the commercial passenger vehicle industry and started work to deliver on a range of new initiatives which will not only benefit passengers and the community, but also drivers and operators within the industry. Achieving improvements in the CPV industry requires a comprehensive and integrated package of measures and dedicating the required resources over a sustained period.

Government's decision was to support this with the move to a coded regulatory approach, with industry utilising an enhanced code of conduct and key performance indicators; network operators and drivers working with government to ensure a safe, efficient and quality service is delivered to customers; improved driver and passenger safety with revised taxi and mini-bus security camera specifications; adopting the latest technology as well as providing security and/or marshals at high-use ranks such as the Darwin CBD and at the airport; the introduction of prepaid taxi fares at specific times such as late night travel from the city; cutting red tape by removing courtesy vehicles from the requirement to be licensed as CPVs, thus enabling establishments such as pubs and clubs to easily put these services in place; releasing 13 taxi licences by a ballot in Darwin, but it being on hold during the review process; and retaining the cap on taxi licenses in Darwin and Alice Springs for the next 12 months, with performance being assessed against service standards and key indicators.

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, you are well over 10 minutes. Do you have much to go?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There is about a page and a bit.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The Northern Territory government is committed to improving driver, passenger, rider and pedestrian safety on our roads. Too many people get injured and, tragically, die on our roads, which is something we have been working hard to address. I have been encouraging the development of new and innovative ideas to supplement existing initiatives and programs in this area.

The department undertakes education and awareness programs which complement the DriveSafe Remote, DriveSafe NT urban and Motorcyclist Education, Training and Licensing programs. In the 2015-16 financial year to 31 March road safety community engagement officers were delivering 327 community and school-based road safety education sessions.

We have also introduced a program that awards novice drivers who maintain an unblemished traffic infringement history during their provisional licence period with a free 10-year driver's licence from the Motor Vehicle Registry.

The highly successful DriveSafe Remote program continues to deliver across remote communities. The program provides a licensing pathway for those in rural communities who are geographically disadvantaged to access learner driving services. Having unlicensed drivers is a major social and justice problem for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially in remote communities. The program helps people in remote communities become competent and safe drivers, increases their employment opportunities, mobility and ability to participate in important cultural events, and furthers their education.

Progress has been made in the aviation area with the Northern Territory continuing to be well-served internationally and domestically. The two-year trial air service between Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs commenced on 19 October 2015. Since its launch almost 3800 people have flown on the service, of which two-thirds were non-government users. This shows strong community support for the service.

A further \$1m has been provided for Budget 2016-17 to support the second year of this trial service. This important service opens up business links for local businesses and residents to benefit from improved air connections, providing for better access to health and other essential services, while opening up tourism opportunities for visitors and residents to travel to regional centres.

All of this work sits within the framework of the Integrated Transport Planning and Investment Roadmap, which this government announced in December 2013. The roadmap has guided the development of the Territory's transport infrastructure and services throughout the creation of a suite of planning strategies and reforms, which the Department of Transport has been leading. All of these are either well under way or nearing completion and set the platform for how investment in transport and its associated infrastructure will drive economic growth in the Territory for years to come. I would like to take this time to thank the hard-working department staff, whose invaluable expertise and experience have contributed to these achievements.

Madam Chair, I welcome any questions the Estimates Committee may have for me.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the statement?

**Mr WOOD:** Can I ask for clarification that all capital works are your questions and not Department of Infrastructure?

**Mr CHANDLER:** On roads and transport, yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Just clarifying that. The corridor to Glyde Point, I was told by the minister for Planning to give to you. Would that come under Transport Planning, Policy and Reform?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It actually comes under the Department of Lands and Planning; however, I will take the question later today.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, I thought that that might happen.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there no more questions to the statement?

**Mr VOWLES:** I do; I am waiting for Gerry to finish.

**Mr WOOD:** In the Department of Education section we did not get to one category because all the questions were about the opening statement. From the Independents' point of view, we are entitled to questions, but it is very difficult if we are going globally for us to hook in because we have no idea what you will ask about. If it is categorised, we would have a chance to get in and have some questions.

**Mr VOWLES:** I am sure Madam Chair will keep track of track, but I will stick to the output groups.

**Mr WOOD:** I am not blaming you. I just know that time wise we have very few questions.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay, we will try to keep the questions on the statement to a minimum and then we will go into the output areas, unlike what we did for the Department of Education.



**Mr VOWLES:** Madam Chair, I want to seek clarification from the minister, if I can. I have a question around a logistical master plan, if there is one. Do you want me to ask that in Output 4.6 or can I ask that now? Is there one around roads or any work being done on a logistics master plan?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Transport Infrastructure Planning, which is Output 4.6.

**Mr VOWLES:** I will wait until then.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay, are there any questions on the statement?

**Mr VOWLES:** I want to seek another clarification from the minister if I ask this question. The output group in Budget Paper No 3, page 217, around the outputs of the lessening amount from the NT government and the increase in the Commonwealth government?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In the overall budget allocation?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes, just the government output and the increase from the Australian government, what that detail is, thanks.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sorry, member for Johnston, I am just trying to clarify where to find that particular ...

**Mr VOWLES:** (inaudible).

**Mr STYLES:** Appropriation, yes.

What often happens when you are setting down a budget – I will give you a very similar scenario. When we set the budget this year we could not put the money in for any of the things we were discussing with the federal government. As you know, I think it was yesterday, they announced \$130m of additional funds. I had it on pretty good knowledge that it would be brought into this next financial year. But, like most people know, until you actually get the signature on the paper or the commitment made, you cannot put it in the budget.

What happened here was, from the money that was budgeted we have had additional money come in to the year through federal funding. Things like Tiger Brennan Drive - different payments come through at different stages. At the end of the year you often end up with a higher budget than what was anticipated.

**Mr VOWLES:** You were given a heap of written questions before. Will you table those or do you want to run through – I can just ask the questions if you do not table them.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to answer the questions as you ask them.

**Mr VOWLES:** Any consultancies over \$100 000 from the agency?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, there were. We had three consultancies of over \$100 000. The first one was the provision of consultancy services for heavy vehicle alternative route that went to Aurecon Australia and it was for \$191 666. The second project was the Darwin Regional Transport Plan, the company details are Parson Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd for \$152 955. The Darwin City Centre Master Plan was Jacobs Group Australia Pty Ltd and that commitment was \$102 509.

**Mr VOWLES:** I will just go to international travel. What are your total costs for international, intrastate and interstate?

**Madam CHAIR:** Are these still questions on the statement?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes, still on the statement and then I will go to the outputs.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do not recall talking about international travel in the statement, but that is okay.

**Madam CHAIR:** No, that is a whole-of-government question. Do you have any questions on the statement? I will put my foot down this afternoon.

**Mr VOWLES:** I just thought he mentioned travel in his opening statement.

**Madam CHAIR:** He mentioned travel, okay.

**Mr VOWLES:** He talked about linking the world together through transport.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will give you some latitude there.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will break it down into international, interstate and intrastate. International travel was \$12 085; interstate travel was \$128 747; and intrastate was \$330 170.

**Mr VOWLES:** I just want to zone in on a particular trip to South Africa, minister. I just want to clarify; I have here Darwin, Sydney, Johannesburg, Durban, Sydney, Johannesburg, Darwin.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Darwin, Sydney, Johannesburg, Durban, Johannesburg, Sydney, Darwin. Yes.

**Mr VOWLES:** Okay, so I got that wrong there. What was that trip for?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It was for an airline conference and meetings.

**Mr VOWLES:** Who approved that travel?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Essentially it comes through from the CE to me for any international travel.

**Mr VOWLES:** What was it for, minister, sorry?

**Mr CHANDLER:** For an airline conference and meetings with particular airlines.

**Ms FYLES:** It sounds exotic, any more details?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sorry?

**Ms FYLES:** It sounds interesting, any more details?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is the World Routes conference, where all the airlines get together in different parts of the world and discuss with government officials where future airline routes are being looked at, and where there might be incentives to go to those regions. We are always very interested in growing international airlines.

**Ms FYLES:** Is it held regularly? Have we attended previously?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, I believe so. Absolutely.

**Mr VOWLES:** What was the total cost of that trip?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It cost \$6785.14.

**Mr VOWLES:** So you would be aware that the requirements for the acquittal of that trip were not done. Can I ask why that was not done in the required time frame?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Are you assuming that I went on that trip?

**Mr VOWLES:** No. I am just asking for clarification.

**Mr KIRKMAN:** That trip took a bit of time to acquit. We have acknowledged that it should have been done a bit sooner, so we will put systems in place to make sure that gets done in future.

**Mr VOWLES:** Minister, you said that you will have to approve international travel from the department. I have a query – the trip was 18 September 2015, and the approval date I have here is 6 October, so once the trip was completed it was approved. Is that correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, I do not think that is correct.

**Mr KIRMAN:** No. Approval was definitely obtained from the minister prior to that travel being undertaken. It might have been a system matter, not being approved in the system until that point – if that was

something picked up by the Auditor-General. In terms of the official approval, it was definitely done prior to travel.

**Mr VOWLES:** And when was that done?

**Mr KIRKMAN:** I think it was done in the week preceding.

**Mr VOWLES:** Do you have further information on that? Is this a normal process that it takes so long to approve it officially on the system?

**Mr KIRKMAN:** It depends on how long invoices and the like come in, so for an international trip like that it might take a little longer than normal. It should not have taken that long.

**Mr VOWLES:** Are you able to provide any documentation to support that?

**Mr KIRKMAN:** What part of the process?

**Mr VOWLES:** The Auditor-General's report says here it was 6 October and the trip was made on 18 September. I am seeking more clarification. Do you have any documents clarifying this travel booking issue?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We could go back and get the original paperwork that I would have signed and look at the dates those briefs are signed off.

**Mr VOWLES:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It was probably delayed because I wanted to go. They would not let me.

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#### **Question on Notice No 8.7**

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you restate the question for the record please, member for Johnston.

**Mr VOWLES:** Could the minister please provide further documentation clarifying the approval process for the trip to South Africa?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you accept the question, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do, yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Johnston of the minister has been allocated the number 8.7.

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#### **Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy**

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any other questions on the statement? We will move on to agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy. Are there any questions?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes, Madam Chair. There has been a \$5m reduction in the allocation to Transport, which is not clearly explained in the budget books. Can you itemise the reductions in this area and give a brief explanation, please?

**Mr CHANDLER:** In Budget 2015-16, in the estimate, the increase in passenger transport output is mainly due to a funding increase to provide a school bus service from Batchelor to Taminmin High School. Also, the increase in passenger transport output is mainly the result of an increase in funding to provide an inter-town regional bus service, increased funding to the Batchelor/Taminmin High School bus service, and indexation applied to base funding allocations.

There is a list of things here that talks about where there are increases. I would have to read them all through to give you an understanding of how it adds up to \$5m. It is not just one budget item that has been removed from the budget.

**Mr VOWLES:** Is that a detailed long list, minister? Would you be able to table it if so?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am advised that depreciation was a large component of that \$5m as well. The list is three-and-a-bit pages long and it is written in large font. I am happy to read it if you want. I will read it out. The increase ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** Will you table it?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is your time. No, I will read it out.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Okay. More obfuscation.

**Mr CHANDLER:** If you want.

**Mr WOOD:** No, we do not want. We just want it tabled.

**Madam CHAIR:** Member for Johnston, it is your call. It is your question; what do you want?

**Mr VOWLES:** In the interests of time, I will put that in a written question.

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Johnston?

**Mr VOWLES:** Oh, no, I will put in a written question. He already has the info. That is fine.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any other questions on the whole-of-government?

**Mr VOWLES:** Not unless the members for Nelson or Karama have ...

**Mr WOOD:** No.

**Madam CHAIR:** If that is the case, we will conclude consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – TRANSPORT Output 4.1 – Passenger Transport**

**Madam CHAIR:** We will move on to Output Group 4.0, Transport, Output 4.1, Passenger Transport. Are there any questions?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes. Minister, the opposition is very supportive of the announcement made yesterday regarding the passenger service on the Tiwi Islands. Can you outline any other planned expansion of bush services in 2015-16?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We have had the recent announcement about Wadeye. There is another regional bus service that has been utilised extremely well by the community. I put on the record that it is the same as the bus service on the Tiwis. The funding we have provided is setting up the service and provides for a baseline service. Any additional services they may want to run because of community need, interest or want, will be done on a fully commercial basis. For instance, on the Tiwis the funding will provide the service from Monday to Friday, but the community has already said there will be needs on the weekends, whether it is for sporting carnivals or cultural events, including sorry business, funerals, etcetera. At that time, the service will be required to operate on a commercial basis. They are aware of that and are quite happy with that set up.

There is also another \$453 000 in the budget to assist with setting up services in other regional areas across the Territory. Another area we are doing some more research on at the moment is how we might increase ferry services in and around not only Darwin Harbour, but across the Top End. Early days yet, but we are doing the research now on that.

**Mr VOWLES:** Is there a cost to use the Tiwi bus?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, there is. Whilst the operations have not been completely ironed out, I am assured that it is around \$15 one way from one community to the next.

**Mr VOWLES:** How many incidents of assaults has the agency recorded against bus drivers this year? Is there a particular area that is bad for these incidents?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will talk in general whilst that information comes to hand. It is something we are mindful of. I know what happens from time to time on our bus network. That is why over the last couple of years we have moved to put security officers on a number of key interchanges in Darwin, Casuarina and Palmerston to assist with the transit security officers who do a pretty terrific job. We are working with the agency at the moment on how we might improve the services we have today.

At the end of the day, we have to ensure that not only do we have a duty of care to protect bus drivers, but also the passengers. That is why we have transit security officers and have security officers at our bus interchanges. They have a very good relationship with the police and, in addition to that, to help with security we have installed a lot more CCTV cameras than what we had before.

The number that you probably are interested in – there has been nine assaults on bus drivers within the last – I will just give you the date for 2014-15. The results for July 2015 to May 2016 say there have been 13 assaults on bus drivers. Do you want any other ...

**Mr VOWLES:** Just where. Is there a common – is there a place where it is happening or is it just random?

**Ms FYLES:** Is there no bus route?

**Mr CHANDLER:** One bus route that stands out? I do not think there is one bus route that stands out. What was very clear, and why we introduced a security officer, were the interchanges. That was where some of the issues were happening – they provide a bit more security for people that are waiting for buses and for students.

The one that I have always been wearing the hat for, from the Education minister's perspective, and where the department has done a lot of work – there is not such a clash of patches coming in to different interchanges at different times. I know a couple of years ago we were having a lot of trouble with student clashes. I know even in Palmerston you would have a lot of children coming into that bus interchange and shopping centres, causing a lot of issues.

I am not trying to play funny buggers or anything here, but what was interesting in all the assaults, passengers on passengers, after they had hopped off buses and were walking away from bus interchanges or walking into shopping centres, were young girls on young girls. Vary rarely, even in the shopping centre where my office is out at Palmerston, if ever, have I seen blokes go and have fights. It is usually young girls. I find that quite remarkable. It certainly is an area that we acknowledge and we are working on it.

**Mr VOWLES:** Thank you, minister, and just leading on to that. How many incidents of assault have happened, of any sort, at the interchange of Casuarina, Darwin and Palmerston? Do you have a number and a breakdown of those?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Member for Johnston, whilst there is no standout, the route numbers that there are probably more issues on are routes 4, 10, 8 and 9.

**Mr VOWLES:** What were the numbers?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.8

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Johnston?

**Mr VOWLES:** Could the minister please provide individual breakdowns of assaults in Palmerston, Casuarina and Darwin, or on bus routes 4, 10, 8 and 9?

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the question?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** That question is allocated the number 8.8.

**Mr VOWLES:** What is the 4, 10, 8 and 9, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Nightcliff, Casuarina and Palmerston, and Casuarina to Palmerston.

**Ms FYLES:** In terms of the public buses that provide school bus routes, when those routes are full and children are denied being able to get on a bus is there a policy around that?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am yet to come across someone that has been denied.

**Ms FYLES:** It is some feedback I have been getting and I am happy to – the bus is going from Nightcliff across to O’Loughlin, I think to the Casuarina interchange, but kids are being told they cannot get on the bus in the morning. Parents have to get them and take them or they are late for school.

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, only if someone has been suspended from using the bus.

**Ms FYLES:** No, this is because the bus is too full. Sorry, I should have clarified that. It just raises safety concerns.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The issue that we are aware of with O’Loughlin College, where we had to put an additional bus on to cover – it is not something that usually happens, but in that case there was an additional bus that was put on.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.7**

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have an answer from an earlier question around when the overseas trip to South Africa was approved. Approval was received from the Minister for Transport for a departmental employee to attend the World Routes conference in Durban, South Africa on 3 September 2015. The conference was held from 18 to 24 September.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is the answer to question 8.7.

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**Ms FYLES:** Further to that question – obviously it looks like that issue has been dealt with. If I get more feedback I will write to you directly. Sometimes children are required to stay late after school which means they catch a public bus and not a school bus home. What is the agency’s policy around intoxicated people getting on those buses? I have had advice that ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Not the students?

**Ms FYLES:** No, students are catching a public bus and an intoxicated person was getting on that bus. Are they allowed to get on a public bus - they were being unruly in their behaviour?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The policy says no. Unruly behaviour is not acceptable. The drivers are the ones who ultimately make the decision as to who they let on the buses. In my understanding, they should not be letting drunken people on in the first place, those they can openly see ...

**Ms FYLES:** Feedback was received that students felt uncomfortable with the behaviour of these people who were clearly intoxicated getting on the bus. The bus driver stated that because they had been drinking they had a responsibility, the Sober Bob campaign, to take them. That was the feedback that was received. But it was a one-off ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think there would be a measure of common sense required in that. My advice to a driver would be not to take somebody on who is overly drunk, but they have to make a judgement call. If someone has had a few drinks and they go on board, I think that is okay. If someone is absolutely intoxicated and they think there is a danger to themselves or to the public, then they should be making the call not to let the person on the bus.

**Ms FYLES:** Just one final question in this topic; if a student is trying to get on a bus and they have stayed behind for an after-school activity and those buses are full, is there a policy around the drivers having to

take students so they are not left at bus stops waiting for the next bus? We are not talking young students; we are talking middle school and high school.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is still free bus travel for students throughout the day.

**Ms FYLES:** It is more if the bus is full.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. I would say that a driver would pick a child up. At the end of the day, it is very rarely, only during peak hours ...

**Ms FYLES:** Is there a specific policy, minister, around student travel?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think there were lessons learnt years ago with the tragic event in Queensland that have affected many of the policies of government bus services across Australia. That it is just a common policy; drivers will not leave a child behind on the side of the road. I have just been advised that we would send another bus if we had to.

**Ms FYLES:** Thank you. I appreciate that. This is something that obviously is concerning for parents and students.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any other questions on Output 4.1, Passenger Transport?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes thanks, Madam Chair. I just have a few more questions ...

**Mr WOOD:** We have an hour-and-a-half.

**Madam CHAIR:** The opposition gets first dibs.

**Mr VOWLES:** Moving ahead, minister, how many public transport safety officer positions are being funded?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are 14.

**Mr VOWLES:** Are there any vacant?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Two at the moment.

**Mr VOWLES:** Two are vacant. Are they being recruited or cannot get recruited? What is the situation?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I believe that is under way at the moment.

**Mr VOWLES:** Do you think 14 is enough for transport safety officers or could we increase them?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, we have been working on it, and without trying to go too far, whilst I had the portfolio of Police minister I did a lot of work around how we might work across agencies with police, the Public Housing Safety Officers within Housing and the transit security.

We also have officers involved in custodial duties and transportation of prisoners. There is a real role out there at the level of public safety officer and we have been doing a lot of work in that space. The answer, member for Johnston, is yes. How we achieve that as a government is a broader question, but we are certainly working in that space at the moment.

**Mr VOWLES:** How many cars do you have on the road at one time?

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are four vehicles. Two are on the road at many times. They are targeting the times of most incidences. We look at the history of when incidences are likely to happen on our network, which is where we try to target the majority of our resources.

**Mr VOWLES:** What are the response times? I am hearing reports of people going to – you have to ring the police then the police ring the public safety officers, and one car is at Palmerston but the incident is in town. The response is to call the police again – a merry-go-round – and in the meantime the incident is still occurring. What is the response time? Do you have that data; do we keep that data?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I doubt there would be data that would break down every time there would be a call, but you are absolutely right. With two vehicles on the road, you can imagine if one vehicle was in Palmerston and the other was in Darwin, and then there was a call to Casuarina. There would be a time frame to get there.

It depends on the severity of the call. At the end of the day it comes down to, if there was a severe assault going on at an interchange, for instance, the very first call should be to the police. If it is a minor disturbance, sometimes it can be dealt with by security officers on-site at an interchange. If there is a situation on board a bus, they are in contact the whole time with base. I believe it is like an open mic and they can keep an eye on what is going on. If it is serious then police are notified and it depends on where the location of the transit safety officers.

I know of one recently where it just so happened the transit officers were following a bus and there was a call that came through, and they could respond very quickly because they were there. Conversely, if there is a distance between where they are and where the event is occurring, there will be some time. But the severity of the complaint will be dependent on how quickly police can respond.

They are in the same situation. If a police unit is close the response time will be quick. If they are a while away it will take a little longer.

**Mr VOWLES:** I am aware a safety review and audit were completed, and there was a recommendation for around four new transport officers and two admin positions. Have they been filled? What is happening with those recommendations?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The recommendation was for two additional transit safety officers and they have been filled. But at the moment, as we pointed out, there are two vacancies with recruitment, but that could be natural attrition or people leaving for other jobs. Last year there were several who moved across to become police officers because they were good officers doing a good job.

I add that it was a \$1m commitment in 2014 that employed those security guards at each of the interchanges. That is a total of six who are employed at those interchanges. Again, that helps to address some of the concerns. It has gone down well, particularly with the elderly. Some pensioners have told me they feel safer at interchanges when they see security officers there.

**Mr VOWLES:** I am aware you had a full external review and an audit happening. That has since ceased. Can you explain why?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sorry, an audit?

**Mr VOWLES:** A full external review was happening or was about to happen. I have heard that it has been cancelled due to budgetary constraints. Is that correct?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The safety review was conducted in 2014. It recommended the recruitment of an additional two transit safety officers and an additional car be purchased. The recommendations were implemented immediately following government's acceptance of the report and its 25 recommendations. The only thing at the moment they are still working on – so it has not come to a stop – is some of the legislative changes around equipment and what officers can do.

**Mr VOWLES:** The public perception is that if there was an incident happening on a bus, the transit officers could go in and drag those people out and arrest them. But that is not the case. My understanding is ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, they can arrest people. They have ...

**Mr VOWLES:** And search?

**Mr CHANDLER:** They have powers of search for weapons. They are covered for that.

**Mr VOWLES:** What about their safety? What do the officers have for their own safety?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Obviously, they are trained and there is ongoing training that takes place. It is no different whether it is a security officer, a police officer or a transit security officer; you have to ensure that you put yourself first before anything else. You do not enter into a dangerous situation if it will endanger



your life. However, they are provided training and with tools to undertake their jobs and the training to utilise those tools.

**Mr VOWLES:** Just one more question then my turn will be up and I will hand over the members for Nelson and Karama.

The commercial passenger vehicle review is completed. It was a long time for the recommendations coming out. Why was there a delay? Also, while you are at it, since I only have one question I want to put two into one. Can you tell me how many commercial vehicle passenger licences, or taxi licences, there are and the total amount of money or income from those licences?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The government has undertaken a review of the commercial passenger vehicle industry across the Northern Territory, focusing on developing a contemporary regulatory model which supports the provision of quality transport services to the community and a viable industry.

On 22 February 2016 the Northern Territory government announced the final reform package for the commercial passenger vehicle industry. The reforms provide the basis for a competitive and sustainable CPV model which allows for industry development, is responsive to population growth pressures, has a focus on quality service and holds the needs of customers as its primary driver.

Achieving improvements in the CPV industry requires a comprehensive and integrated package of measures, and dedicated and required resources over a sustained period. Government's decision supports this with:

- the move to a co-regulatory approach with industry utilising an enhanced code of conduct and key performance indicators with networks, operators and drivers working with government to ensure a safe, efficient and quality service is delivered to customers
- improved driver and passenger safety with revised taxi and mini-bus security cameras, adopting the latest technology as well as providing security and/or marshals at high-use ranks such as the Darwin CBD and at the airport
- the introduction of prepaid taxi fares; we are hoping at this stage that will be operational around 1 October
- cutting red tape by removing courtesy vehicles from the requirement to be licensed as CPVs, thus enabling establishments such as pubs and clubs to easily put these services in place
- releasing 13 taxi licences, by a ballot in Darwin, that have been on hold during the review process
- retaining the cap on taxi licences in Darwin and Alice Springs for the next 12 months, with key performance being assessed against service standard key performance indicators.

The Department of Transport announced the opening of the 2016 taxi ballot. The ballot was opened for one month and closed on 20 May 2016. There are 13 available taxi licences for Darwin only, being nine standard taxis and four multipurpose taxi licences. On 20 June I announced the taxi ballot draw would be on Friday 1 July 2016.

Was part of that question about the number of taxis?

**Mr VOWLES:** Yes, and estimated income.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Taxi numbers – 157, and 39 wheelchair accessible taxis. Revenue is around \$3.5m divided across those taxis and the other revenue that is generated.

**Mr VOWLES:** Is that private hire cars or ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Mr VOWLES:** Can I just get a question on notice around the estimated income from the taxi licences?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, we have that information so we can do that.

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**Question on Notice No 8.9.**

**Madam CHAIR:** Could you please restate the question for the record, member for Johnston?

**Mr VOWLES:** Could the minister please provide the estimated total income from taxi licences?

**Madam CHAIR:** Do you accept the question minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do, yes.

**Madam CHAIR:** The question asked by the member for Johnston of the minister will be number 8.9.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Independent members, do you have any questions on this output group, Passenger Transport?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, I do. Minister, are all school buses now air conditioned? Do all school buses have seat belts? Is there a policy in regards to children standing in school buses or on school buses where they travel over 100 km an hour?

**Mr CHANDLER:** All are air conditioned, and where there are any zones where buses will be travelling at 100 km an hour they have seat belt requirements, yes.

**Mr WOOD:** One of the concerns has been children standing because you cannot always get a seat. There has been concern about buses on the highway and children standing, so I did not know whether there was a policy in relation to that.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The policy is quite clear on that. There should not be children standing on buses if those buses are travelling on roads where they are travelling in 100 km zones. There would be possibilities if students were hopping on buses that were standard commuter buses. Like the member for Nightcliff raised earlier, a student after hours might be on a commuter bus and those buses often travel in 100 km zones and do not have seat belts.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, in relation to the airline connection between Katherine and Tennant Creek, what is the government's financial input into that?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The estimation that we put in the budget is about \$1m a year, but it all depends on the uptake. At the moment, it has been exceptional, as in, two thirds of the uptake has been by the commercial and private sector with only one third of that being taken up by government departments. I am encouraging government departments to use the service. At the end of the day, it is good to see that the community is really supporting it. The more the community use it the less impact there is on the budget. It does peak and trough.

You have time through the Dry Season where seat counts are extremely high. There was a period during the Wet Season, over the Christmas period, where things slow down even from the government sector and the seat numbers drop off significantly. In fact, I think we had one service that was cancelled through the lack of numbers and it was deemed at that stage that it would not be commercially sensible to fly a plane empty. It was a good call from the airline. The airline would still get their money, and the government is still paying for it, but it did not make sense commercially.

**Mr WOOD:** The last question on this section is about the bus service to Holtze prison. There have been figures quoted at \$400 000 and I am wondering, are you able to provide how that cost was achieved? Could you tell me whether you were looking at a single bus service just to the prison or, as I have been trying to ask the government, a bus service that was an extension of an existing bus service that went to the INPEX village, the prison and Howard Springs Nature Park? There would be a difference between the two.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We certainly have been very supportive of the Salvation Army. I know they put together a proposal to put a bus run together. The Chief Minister, I believe, last week signed off on the grant for the Salvation Army to run the service. From the information we were able to garnish, it did not seem – there was some media around this and some outlandish statements were made on the costs that people would be up for, \$50 and \$60 ...

**Mr WOOD:** Depending where you got your transport from.

**Mr CHANDLER:** To be fair and upfront, if someone was travelling to Palmerston, for instance, on a public bus and then they were able to get a taxi or a mini bus out to Holtze, it certainly would not be the \$50 or \$60 that was quoted.

**Mr WOOD:** What was quoted was \$400 000 for this bus service and that is what I am wondering. Was that plucked out of the sky? Was it just a single bus service to the prison or was it an extension of an existing bus service?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The Department of Transport provided advice to me, noting that the cost per annum of a bus service to the Darwin Correctional Precinct could range from around \$50 000 for a very limited service a few times per week through to at least \$250 000 for a regular and consistent public bus route.

Costs varied substantially based on the level and type of service required. For example, a public bus route servicing Howard Springs Reserve and the Darwin Correctional Precinct from Palmerston bus interchange hourly, seven days a week, would cost in the order of around \$350 000 per annum.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, could I just interrupt. What I have always said is you have a bus service that stops at the 15 Mile. What would be the cost of extending that bus service to the INPEX village, the prison, Howard Springs Nature Park and return? There is an existing bus service. You do not have to start a new bus service up from the interchange as there is already a bus going along the Stuart Highway.

**Mr CHANDLER:** With all due respect, member for Nelson, if you make any changes to a bus route you often have an impact on the next service if that bus is due to be somewhere else. So, yes, it may go to the 15 Mile now. If that bus was re-routed to an extension of that route then that bus was tasked with the next job – a bit like an aircraft, it gets to Darwin and will fly back somewhere, and if you task it with something else it can impact that.

So some work was done in that area, and it is probably worth noting there has been a substantial amount of work undertaken around our bus network and the improvements we could make. I am biting at the bit to release a strategy that the department has worked hard on, which will bring some amazing improvements to our bus network across the Top End, including the rural area. But I am not in a position at the moment to talk about it.

**Mr WOOD:** I do not want to hold up much time with things that may or may not happen. The request was for a trial. The only way to find out if people would take this up was by trial. Considering the government is putting out buses in remote areas – this is not remote in that sense, but it opens up opportunities for people such as INPEX workers to go to the INPEX village, or prison officers and staff. I asked you earlier about how many teachers operate at Holtze.

It is not just about the visitors, and it never was, but it was a way of at least giving visitors an opportunity to catch the public bus service without having to catch a taxi or ask the Salvation Army to do something which, I think, is more the responsibility of government rather than the Salvation Army.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think we will probably disagree on that point. I do not think it is government's job to do everything.

**Mr WOOD:** No, no.

**Mr CHANDLER:** If there is an opportunity for the private sector or the NGO sector to do a job and they need some support, I am only too happy to support them in that endeavour. I am hopeful that it is a great success. They have to grow the service and, if that is successful, the government will have to either further support it or look at taking it on as part of the current network.

**Mr WOOD:** My intention was never to only have it for the prisoners' families. If you take that out of it, you make the opportunity for a bus service going partially into the rural area less viable because you have taken some of the customers off that service. I hope the government will at least give it a try to see where it goes.

**Mr CHANDLER:** We need some more residential land development out there, Gerry.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, remember how I took you there and said it was a wonderful place for 1 ha and 2 ha blocks, and you turned around and turned it into an urban development. That is another issue. Thank you. That is all my questions.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Minister, just some clarification in regard to bus stops, are they under Output 4.4 or this output of Passenger Transport?

**Mr CHANDLER:** This one is fine.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Okay. I have heard concerns from parents that a number of bus stops in the greater Darwin region, in school areas, do not have actual bus stops. They have the yellow pole or blue pole rather than a formed bus shelter. What is the policy in relation to rolling out bus shelters within a 10 km to 20 km radius of schools?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am not sure it is an actual policy; it is an ongoing program that we continue to upgrade, in some cases upgrading older infrastructure, especially the well-used bus stops. On a prioritised basis we would commit to putting in – I would not call them permanent, but structured bus stops. In fact, we are talking to a number of businesses at the moment about types of structure, and they have improved over the years. Although, I must say, I like the artwork that was done on the old concrete ones recently. I think it is fabulous. But there has been a change of design over the years.

I think we have three types of bus stops today that have improved over the years. We are looking at other designs at the moment, but there is an ongoing commitment to continue to roll out bus stops where they are deemed necessary. If there are any that you might want to put forward because of the number of people using them please let us know and I am happy to look at it.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Minister, I am very aware of the program that is prioritised on the base of passenger usage numbers, so that is a standard policy that exists now. For bus stop shelters it is based on the passenger usage number in regard to prioritising. What I am pointing out is that you might get lower usage at some stops, but the clients are accessing that stop for school purposes. They are near a school and are getting off from wherever they have come across the network at that school. Would there be a criteria policy change to prioritise bus shelters at stops where the passengers – even though the number might be lower – are required to use that stop to access a school?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is taken into consideration. I need to clarify – your argument would be that if there was a shelter it might be a better utilised stop?

**Ms LAWRIE:** Well, it is a necessary stop. It is a stop accessing a school and is a stop they have to use. For parents and children using a stop without a bus shelter is far less than adequate. I cannot hypothesise as to whether with a shelter more people would use it, but I am saying there are parents and children using bus stops that do not have a shelter. They use those stops to access a school. Could a priority class come into the roll-out of the bus shelter program to accommodate that?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am happy to look at that; it is probably not a bad idea. The other thing to consider is, because there has been a large amount of work done on our bus system, how it operates and how we can make it work more efficiently with a customer service focus. There may be a need in the future to adjust some of the bus stops from where they currently sit.

Over the years, there has been a bit of an ad hoc approach. With all due respect it probably gets mucked up by politicians who have asked for a bus stop because it suits an argument at the time – on all sides over the years – and it has become a very clunky system, if there is probably no better way to describe our bus service. There are some real efficiencies – and I mean better use of the bus service and making it a better user system, meaning more regular, frequent buses into our system. It may require in the future some adjustments around some of our bus stops. I put that on the record now. I like your idea about those bus stops that are associated with schools and probably should be part of a priority list of getting shelters put in.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Okay, I will write to you on that. Thank you, minister.

**Madam CHAIR:** Are there any more questions on Output 4.1, Passenger Transport?

### Output 4.2 – Registration, Licensing and Road Safety

**Madam CHAIR:** We will go to Output 4.2, Registration, Licensing and Road Safety. Are there any questions?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes. Minister, I received this wonderful letter from your chief executive dated 6 June. It was in regard to election signage. Your chief executive said:

*In addition to this policy ...*

Which is where you should put your signs:

*... it should be recognised that unsafe acts, such as creating a distraction or obscuring a regulatory or warning sign, are illegal under the Northern Territory Traffic Act. All activities near roads are to be controlled and conducted safely.*

It went on to say:

*This policy does not aim to restrict election advertising material but seeks to ensure that motorist safety is not compromised.*

Why does this not apply to the signs that cover our highways at the present time, many of which are a distraction? Many of them are third party, many advertise who will win tonight's State of Origin match, and most are illegal. Whilst I am happy to abide by the rules ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** I wish everyone would, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Years ago, when I put chickens on an outer Darwin sign, within two hours the department said that was heretical and removed them. Whilst I agree with the election signage policy, will the government enforce its own signage policy, which in this case is now becoming not only an eyesore, but a distraction for people driving along the road?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have to admit that I agree with you, member for Nelson. It is something we have been working on for a while. A couple of areas that come to mind are the 11 Mile area through ...

**Mr WOOD:** It is getting worse.

**Mr CHANDLER:** ... to Humpty Doo ...

**Mr WOOD:** Look at Coolalinga and McMillans Road, now starting to have signs on them.

**Mr CHANDLER:** At the moment we are working on – and I actually committed to you; I have done this before. I have committed to you that I would like to sit down and chat with you because I have some ideas. I have even spoken to the department on a couple of ideas to go forward on this, where businesses would still have the opportunity to advertise in a far more structured way. I know in the past, previous governments have provided – you see them in Palmerston, like a horseshoe sign, but they are very small and you cannot read them. You have gone past them before you even notice them.

**Mr WOOD:** We can do better than that.

**Mr CHANDLER:** There are other ways that I think we can still provide the opportunity for businesses to advertise in a safe way. I have put a few ideas through to the department to flesh that out, but I am happy to sit down with you and discuss those ideas. We do not want to prevent business from thriving in the Territory. We all know that is what we should be doing, as governments, to promote business. At the same time, safety is an issue.

This is not a new problem. We know that these signs have been there for years, some people recently, I think, have taken it to the nth degree. From the way I see it, there are two things that I worry about: one, in a build-up storm, a sign being lifted up by high winds and thrown into a car. So it is dangerous if we do have a big blow like a cyclone and a business fails to get their sign in from the road. Two, the rubbernecking that occurs when people are looking for a particular business and are not watching the road whilst looking at signs.

There are all these issues that I am acutely aware of, and that is why we are trying to find a solution that will meet the needs of the business community and ensure that our roads are safe. I would be happy to sit down and flesh out some of those ideas.

**Mr WOOD:** I would be too, but the problem I have in the meantime is that many of these signs are illegal. If someone drives into them and is injured or killed, has the government put itself at risk of being sued for not applying its own signage code? In other words, it has allowed signs on the side of the road or the centre of the road which do not fit within its own guidelines.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I would have to seek some guidance on the legal side of it, but I know that the department, if they do find a sign that is deemed unsafe, will take action to remove it.

**Mr WOOD:** I could show you heaps of them. Minister, I am happy to sit down with you and sort it out. I am not against signs being on the highway, but I think we need to be a lot cleverer and not ruin our highway. Because tourists must think they have come to Hicksville these days, and Humpty Doo is not pretty, but I think we can do a lot better.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Did you hear that, the member for Nelson says that Humpty Doo is not pretty? That is a press release.

**Mr WOOD:** Sorry, I will say that again. The signage along the Arnhem Highway at Humpty Doo does not do the place any good. Anyway, minister, I will move along. One other question minister – when will you release the reports in relation to the open speed limit changes? Was there a risk audit done by the department and what did that audit conclude?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will have to seek some guidance on the actual report itself, but overall we committed to upgrade, from time to time, sections of road where we could increase the speed limit to the open sections. I think this year we have allocated \$1m. There is another 18 km, if I am correct, around the Ali Curung turn-off, along that section there. I would suggest that there are areas ...

**Mr WOOD:** I hope it is not over the bridge there, which is right next to the Ali Curung turn-off?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am advised that the actual report is on the website.

**Mr WOOD:** I will have to go and look for it. From a risk audit point of view, on the Public Accounts Committee, we hear all about risk. Did the government actually do a risk audit in relation to now allowing an open speed limit on the sections on the highway?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes. The other thing to consider is that we said we would only ever lift the speed limit using a science-based approach. The report gives us what was required to lift the standard of roads. At the end of the day, I also have a responsibility – if we have what you might think is a perfectly good road, will I commit large sums of money doing slight upgrades required to make it over the speed limit, or do I put that money into constructing a new road somewhere?

There will always be a balance. I think it would have been foolhardy to have just introduced a policy where we were going back to the way it was pre-speed limit days and say it is open slather. I think that would be foolish. I think there are many sections of our road network that open speed limits would be, in my opinion - I am not an expert - inappropriate. It is not 20 years ago; there are more cars on the road now. It is very obvious, between here and Katherine, the amount of traffic on that section of road. You go through Acacia Hills and so forth – I know it used to be open speed limit years ago. I have driven it many times at high speeds, but there are certain roads, particularly around the Barkly and between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, that are great, open, straight roads.

There has not been a great difference, since the reintroduction of open speed limits through that section, where the average speeds have increased dramatically. Do not quote me on the numbers, but prior to the speed limits being opened, I think the average speed was 132 km/h and it has lifted to about 136-137 km/h.

**Mr WOOD:** You would have known that the Labor Party did a review, and it was 140 km/h average and they brought it down to 130 km/h. We had better move on from that.

**Madam CHAIR:** We have less than an hour to get to Infrastructure. I know the member for Karama has a question on transport.

**Ms LAWRIE:** I have one question in this area and two questions under 4.4. In regard to this area, minister, I wrote to you, seeking permission for the Malak markets to have a sign on the Malak Crescent signpost. I suggested that it could be like the tourism signs, which I believe are brown and white. I received a response, essentially saying no and that was not deemed a tourism drawcard.

Minister, I am concerned that where you have the Malak Crescent signpost, for example you have a B&B signage on there – that is a good thing, promoting a local business. I cannot understand why on earth we cannot have a sign added to that signpost to point out the Malak markets. I wonder whether or not these requests have come from Parap markets, Rapid Creek markets, Nightcliff markets, Palmerston Markets or Mindil Beach. Markets are a drawcard. They are something to celebrate, and it helps the markets if there is a sign on the road network, pointing in the direction of where the markets are held.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Was it a recent letter?

**Ms LAWRIE:** Yes, it was.

**Mr CHANDLER:** All right. I will certainly look at that for you. If you have already received a letter back saying no, I will certainly look at that.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Thank you, minister.

**Madam CHAIR:** Given the time constraints would you mind, minister, if I ask if there are any final questions on Transport in the remaining output groups?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I agree.

**Mr WOOD:** The problem is the road assets. We can ask without particular outputs?

**Madam CHAIR:** It seems we have three final questions and then we have to go on to Infrastructure. Is that all right, minister?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am in your hands. I am scheduled to be here. I will do whatever you want me to.

**Mr WOOD:** I will try to squeeze the five questions into three. I was going to ask, did your department negotiate with Koolpinyah Station regarding the infrastructure corridor to Glyde Point and, if so, what were the details of that land acquisition? I asked that of Minister Tollner, who said not to ask him but to ask you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do not know if I am talking out of turn, but I was the minister when those negotiations were undertaken. The only thing I can recall is that they were done in such a way that there would not be an exchange of money. We were looking, at the time, for an exchange of equivalent value land, so land owned by the government. I believe at that stage – and if I am wrong and it changed after I was minister, I apologise – three options were put up.

The Valuer-General provided the value of the land we wanted to acquire. We then found three separate parcels of land of equivalent value, which were provided as options for the owners of Koolpinyah Station to take in a land swap deal for the corridor.

If I am wrong I apologise.

**Mr WOOD:** Are we allowed to know what parcels of land were offered and if they freehold? This is a leasehold. I would imagine there are two different values.

**Mr CHANDLER:** No, they had to be of the same value. That is why the three parcels that were ...

**Mr WOOD:** But if leasehold land is being swapped for freehold land ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** I do not have that detail. Madam Chair, I will take that on notice if I can, because I am talking outside my current portfolio.

**Ms LAWRIE:** You can take it on notice and it can be referred to another agency.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, we will do that.

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**Question on Notice No 8.10**

**Madam CHAIR:** Restate the question please, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, could you give us the details in relation to the negotiations that would have occurred regarding the Glyde Point corridor and the acquisition of land from Koolpinyah Station.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Can I just clarify one thing – I am not sure if there are commercial-in-confidence parts to the negotiation that I will be able to report on. My understanding, at this stage, is like for like in value. That was in the hands of the Valuer-General to find the value of that land. Three options were put up. I believe that was accepted, but any other information I can get in that regard, I will attempt to get for you.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay.

**Madam CHAIR:** We will allocate number 8.10 to that question.

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**Mr WOOD:** The Temple Terrace/Glyde Point Road/Stuart Highway intersection – minister, I think you went from \$6.5m to \$11m. Can you tell us why the budget blew out to that extent?

**Mr CHANDLER:** What was the road again, sorry?

**Mr WOOD:** The Temple Terrace/Glyde Point Road/Stuart Highway; the road to the Litchfield Hospital.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will just pass over to Louise McCormick.

**Ms McCORMICK:** That has expanded as we have looked at that road, because when we initially designed it, or when Infrastructure designed it, they did not take into account the traffic growth in the area with all the other developments occurring, such as the Gateway development, Maluka Views and a number of other things. If we had built it in its original form we would have had the same congestion issues that we had at the Howard Springs intersection, which you raised with the department a few years ago.

The Department of Transport actually provided additional funding to ensure that the capacity of that intersection was available for the growth in traffic.

**Mr WOOD:** I understand that, but there was a community meeting held quite early, and many of those issues in regard to the Army traffic and the extra lanes were all relayed to the people who ran that meeting. Were they not taken into consideration?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Well, they listened.

**Mr WOOD:** But the contract – we hoped we were going to a meeting where the tenders had not been called for by that stage. We were asking for contributions from the community about the state of that intersection.

I will put an additional question then. By changing that contract mid-way, has that incurred an extra cost that would not have happened if the tender had the one contract with all those extra lanes upfront at the beginning of the tender process?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Possibly, but that would be hard to judge. The one thing that certainly was not signed off at that stage, when the planning was done for that intersection, was the Gateway. That was not signed off as a done deal. There has been a huge increase in traffic flows into Palmerston, which is why we have brought forward about \$57m worth of road works across the Palmerston network.

**Mr WOOD:** Taking the dual lane road to Roystonea Avenue was raised at the community meeting. They said they did not have money at the time. Many of those things were raised.

**Mr CHANDLER:** To be honest, it is a fantastic problem to have ...

**Mr WOOD:** I am not disagreeing. It has always been a bottleneck.



**Mr CHANDLER:** It is a huge intersection. You drive through it – it is massive.

**Mr WOOD:** Just quickly, thank you for the cycle path. It has taken a while and I have had a briefing from the department and also about Gunn Point Road.

I have some questions about McKinnon Road upgrade. Is that \$6m for a signalised intersection, because that part of the Stuart Highway is very busy and a lot of trucks come out of that industrial area?

**Mr CHANDLER:** The answer to that is yes.

**Mr WOOD:** There will be two sets of traffic lights within a few hundred metres. You have not been able to work out a way of running a service road past FreeSpirit Resort and along that big drain to take it in there as ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** We could build an underpass.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay. It means there will be two sets of traffic lights within a couple of hundred metres of each other.

**Madam CHAIR:** Any more questions?

**Ms LAWRIE:** Yes, thank you. Probably no shock. Vanderlin Drive duplication – \$11.4m on the program, I think it is. I had you out on-site with your departmental officers, talking about the need for a noise barrier to be scoped within that project, and the need for a roundabout. We had discussions as to the location of the roundabout. The consensus was the most used intersection was the Shoal Bay turn-off. Can you please provide any feedback or decisions resulting from that meeting on-site?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Just that all the information you provided to both Dave and I has been brought back and is being considered at the moment, trying to work out what the best solution is around that. We spoke afterwards regarding the noise barrier and whether or not a noise wall would be more effective and how high – all this work is being done at the moment – a wall would need to be to prevent the sound in addition to cost.

I threw in, as a bit of a left-field question, whether it would be better to invest in double glazing, for instance, for those homeowners along there. Whilst it does not reduce the noise if you are in the back yard, the most important thing, you would agree, is whether that would work inside for sleep patterns and so forth. I am asking for some work to be done.

I understand the area near the rise in the hill will be flattened. Remember when you told me to drive out of that intersection? Please remind me which one it was.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Right-hand turn out of Kalymnos into Vanderlin Drive.

**Mr CHANDLER:** One thing the driver pointed out was the blind spot created ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is the curve.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes.

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is the curve in the road, not the height. The height is a problem, but it is the curve.

**Mr CHANDLER:** But also the pedestrian fence.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Which is a fairly new upgrade, by the way.

**Mr CHANDLER:** That also provides a bit of blind spot ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is completely blind-spotted.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I empathise, after using the intersection, that it would be problematic. We are looking at solutions for that right now. I thank you for the opportunity to be on-site and to learn a bit more about some of the issues along that section of road.

**Ms LAWRIE:** The feedback I have had from residents is that they do not want the window glazing option. They would like to step outside and not deal with that volume of noise as well. I thank you and will await any further feedback, bearing in mind that if you want to make a decision – we are some weeks away before caretaker mode. If I do not have an answer by caretaker mode time, I will be writing to both major parties.

The other dangerous intersection constantly drawn to my attention is McMillans Road and Kalymnos Drive. I have written to you about it in the past and raised it on a number of occasions. The traffic is banked up in peak hour, both trying to exit Kalymnos left into McMillans where there is a slip lane, but also right into McMillans, where there is a break in the dual carriageway. Traffic is banked up in peak, exiting in the morning, just as traffic is banked up in peak, trying to get into Kalymnos in the afternoon. It has consistently been drawn to my attention.

I am very serious about that intersection needing a safety upgrade. The department has indicated through correspondence that it is looking at upgrade options. I continue to press for a roundabout; additional slip lanes into that intersection will not improve the safety to the extent that we need. It is quite a serious matter. I ask you, minister, to provide any undertaking you can as to when we will get some serious attention paid to that dangerous intersection.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is a minor new works project that has been approved.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Minister, it is about slip lanes. That minor new works project is an extension of slip lanes and some small treatment works. It is not a minor new works project; it is a capital project that requires a roundabout. I really urge the government not to waste money on a minor new works program when it actually needs to be bumped up into a capital program with a roundabout.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, I will consider that.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Final question – has the department considered traffic lighting the existing roundabout of Lee Point Road and Vanderlin Drive in peak hour? You may be aware, minister, at major intersections in Canberra that are roundabouts, during peak hour to deal with peak flows they traffic light the roundabout. They control the flow of the roundabout by traffic lights. Anyone who is using that major intersection of Lee Point Road and Vanderlin Drive would understand the need for some peak hour traffic lights. Has that come into consideration in the works program?

**Mr CHANDLER:** They have been considered, but it would be interesting to see how – I believe we may have a roundabout here in the city that might end up having with lights on it. Madam Chair, can I just ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is not about removing the roundabout by the way, it is peak hour lights.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 8.8**

**Mr CHANDLER:** I have an answer to Question on Notice No 8.8. The question was, 'Can the minister please provide individual breakdown of assaults at Darwin, Casuarina and Palmerston interchanges on the particular routes mentioned? They are routes 4, 8, 9 and 10.

Location specific data collected for this financial year, so far, of incidents involving violence and aggression reports are a total of 354 incidents involving violence or aggression recorded for the entire bus passenger network. The breakdown between interchanges and routes is as follows: Casuarina Bus Interchange, 142; Darwin Bus Interchange, 8; Palmerston Bus Interchange, 41; Cavenagh Street bus stop, 33; buses running between Darwin and Casuarina, 54; buses running between Darwin and Palmerston, 25; and buses running between Casuarina and Palmerston, 23.

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**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you minister. I understand we have no more questions on ...

**Mr WOOD:** I have a quick question; just tell me yes or no. Do you have an upgrade of the service road at Coolalinga near the Stavri Complex shops on minor works? If you do not know I will put the question on notice.

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is actually in planning at the moment.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay, so that concludes all questions pertaining to the Department of Transport. On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who provided the minister advice today. Thank you very much. We will now move onto outputs relating to the Department of Infrastructure. We will have a five-minute break.

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The committee suspended.

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## DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE

**Madam CHAIR:** Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this afternoon and, if you wish, to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Infrastructure.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I start, I have an answer to a question on notice.

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### Answer to Question on Notice No 8.9

**Mr CHANDLER:** Madam Chair, I have an answer to Question on Notice No 8.9. The question was, 'Can the minister please provide the estimated total income from taxi licences?'

The answer is the income from taxi licences from 1 July 2015 to 31 March 2016 is \$2.48m across the Territory.

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**Mr CHANDLER:** Madam Chair, good afternoon. I want to introduce officials from the Department of Infrastructure – the builders – who are here today. Mr David McHugh, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Infrastructure, is sitting to my right. Mr Bob Pemble, Executive Director Civil Services is also sitting to my right. Mr John Harrison, Executive Director Building Services is to my left, along with Executive Director Corporate Services, Ms Monica Birkner.

You will be happy to note this is not long, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** That is very good because I am timing you.

**Mr CHANDLER:** The 2015-16 year to date has been very productive for the Department of Infrastructure, delivering a \$1.6bn infrastructure program.

Infrastructure investment is a key priority of this government, providing housing, and improved school and health facilities across the Territory. There has been a strong focus on enhancing services in remote communities to stimulate regional development. Rebuilding has occurred in affected communities post-cyclones Lam and Nathan, with \$19m being delivered to upgrade the Milingimbi school, rebuild Ramingining School, construct temporary accommodation and commence early works on the cyclone shelter at Waruwi.

More than \$530m has been allocated to construct more roads across the Territory, with over \$80m being invested to ensure our roads are maintained to a safe standard for the community. As of 30 April 2016 over 1000 contracts were awarded to Territory companies. The department has continued to focus strongly on increasing employment opportunities for Indigenous Territorians through the nominated provisional sum on construction projects over \$500 000.

Since the policy implementation in October 2014, over 280 tenders have been awarded addressing this policy. This initiative has seen more than 800 Indigenous people employed on government construction contracts since October 2014, compared to only 40 before.

Of special mention, the Northern Territory Open Education Centre is achieving results in training and employment. During the build, 75 Indigenous employees worked on-site and 24 of those completed a Certificate II in Construction and Carpentry, with seven commencing apprenticeships. The Tiger Brennan

Drive project has also achieved an excellent employment retention rate of 94% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

In 2015-16, the department has managed \$177m for targeted repairs and maintenance works, with \$86m going towards Territory roads and \$92m to maintaining schools, hospitals and police facilities. Significant projects delivered and in progress during the 2015-16 year include:

- \$40m for the Royal Darwin Hospital to upgrade the front entrance, inside lobby, emergency waiting area, outpatients area, centre core and mechanical system, and works are under way
- \$33m for Henbury School, which is on track to be completed in August 2016, and this construction is 85% complete
- \$21.35m for the Palmerston Special School, and this facility will accommodate up to 84 students from preschool to middle school, maximising learning opportunities for high-needs children
- continued construction of the \$88m Tiger Brennan Drive duplication project, where 22 000 commuters will enjoy a reduction in congestion, improving traffic flow from Palmerston to Darwin once all work is complete. Local industry participation is at 97% for the life of the project
- Palmerston roads upgrades are tracking well with over \$57m allocated in Budget 2015-16. Government is upgrading key arterials to keep pace with the residential and strategic commercial developments like the Palmerston Regional Hospital and Gateway shopping centre
- Works are under way on the \$40m construction of new bridges on the Roper Highway at the Roper River and Wilton River crossings. This infrastructure will improve the roads and provide access for local businesses during flooding
- The Boosting our Economy package for government schools is being managed by the department and, to date, 54 tenders have been released to the local market, valued at over \$46m. This injection is providing a stimulus to local small- to medium-sized businesses and supporting our trades. A total of 41 projects have been awarded, which include a new administration block at Stuart Park Primary School, repairs and maintenance at Umbakumba School, roofing at Nakara Primary School, fire system upgrades at Gray Primary School and air conditioning upgrades and maintenance at Bees Creek school and Bakewell Primary School.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge our local construction industry. Government and industry working collaboratively is critical to delivering the Territory infrastructure program, which will benefit all Territorians. I also thank the hard-working departmental staff for their valuable expertise and commitment to achieving the delivery of such a significant infrastructure program.

This government is committed to developing the north, and this is demonstrated with the significant investment in roads and infrastructure assets across the Territory. The Department of Infrastructure is well placed to successfully manage the 2016-17 budgeted infrastructure program.

Madam Chair, I welcome questions the Estimates Committee may have for me.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. With your permission, and with 22 minutes remaining, would you agree to me throwing it open to the half a dozen questions the members have?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I am always okay for you, Madam Chair.

**Ms FYLES:** Minister, if you go to the output appropriation on page 227, in the column dealing with the Northern Territory government appropriation, Capital and Federal Appropriation, you can see there has been an almost \$5m reduction in the NTG appropriation for the agency. Are you able to explain that here today?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, I am advised that additional funding was not there this year. Often that comes from other internal departments that might provide additional works for the department to do, and that did not follow through this year.

**Ms FYLES:** For example, the Department of Education did not have projects that your department took upon it, therefore creating revenue?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will ask my CE to provide further advice.

**Mr McHUGH:** Member for Nightcliff, we do a lot of work for organisations like the Port Authority or Power and Water, which are not appropriated departments. We do not get any additional money for appropriated departments, but for Land Development Corporation – or if we are doing work for Commonwealth departments – we are entitled to revenue to undertake those works.

**Ms FYLES:** We have not seen that this ...

**Mr McHUGH:** We did not get as much as what was estimated.

**Ms FYLES:** Thank you, minister and chief executive. Minister, have you provided the agency with additional resources to handle the Boosting our Territory Economy roll-out of increased infrastructure projects?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Not so much as additional resources other than the fact we have made a commitment where we need to employ outside consultants because of the pressures within an agency. We are doing that.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you able to give us an approximate idea of how many outside consultants are being employed?

**Mr McHUGH:** We have detailed lists of all our consultants for the whole of the period. Are you talking about just the BOE consultants?

**Ms FYLES:** I asked a question of the minister in terms of – had he provided additional resources to the agency for that roll-out? He has referred it saying it has been dealt with by consultancies.

**Mr McHUGH:** That is correct.

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will just clarify that. What happened earlier – the CE was not here when we were talking in the Education output. I made reference to the fact you guys had to work your butts off to roll that program out, and the reasons we did that.

As far as additional resources went, the department certainly put in an exceptional effort during that period and I take my hat off to them for that. As I explained ...

**Ms FYLES:** There were no additional consultancies then?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Not to my knowledge, except if there was a need for consultants we certainly are outsourcing them.

**Ms FYLES:** The way the agency handled the additional resources required for the Boosting our Economy roll-out was to either work very hard or have additional consultancies; there were no additional staff put on? Okay, thank you minister. I might come back to consultancy questions because I, and the member for Nelson, have a number of questions around the Palmerston hospital.

Minister, what proportion of that project delivery has been outsourced to local business?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Can you just clarify the question again? I have two pieces of information here and I want to give you the right one.

**Ms FYLES:** I was just talking about the Palmerston hospital project, but I was also going to ask a question more generally from the agency so I do not mind. Whichever one you want to answer first ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Okay, sorry; I thought it was for the stimulus package into education.

**Ms FYLES:** No, sorry, I prefixed with the Palmerston hospital. I will step back. In terms of Output 6.2, Project Delivery, across the Territory what proportion of project delivery, design, etcetera has been outsourced to local Territory businesses?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Consultancy and outsourced services cost as a percentage of adjusted professional services expenditure, as at 31 March 2016, is 76%.

**Ms FYLES:** In terms of meeting with local industry, there has been a lot of concern around design and construct packages being put out under the Boosting our Economy package. What proportion of the boosting the Territory economy work has been done on a design and construct basis?

**Mr McHUGH:** Almost all of it. That is because it is more appropriate to have the contractors and the design consultants working together with our team to finalise the actual scope of work.

**Ms FYLES:** Do you have a figure on what percentage would be local?

**Mr McHUGH:** It would be 100% in terms of design and consultants.

**Ms FYLES:** Okay. Minister, are you responsible for monitoring the local content performance of the Lendlease Palmerston hospital contract?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Do you mean personally, as the minister?

**Ms FYLES:** As the minister – or your agency. Are they responsible for monitoring the local content performance of the Lendlease Palmerston hospital contract?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Yes, that is correct.

**Ms FYLES:** The Northern Territory government has awarded the head contract for the Palmerston hospital to the Lendlease company despite having local options to choose from. Why was that?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will get the CE to add to this. I will start by saying there was a quite a lot of in-depth review undertaken by the procurement board over this one. At the end of the day, they were worlds apart when it came to the pricing, the experience and the fact they the winning bidder, which is Lendlease, just came off the back of building other hospitals in Queensland. They were, if you like, skilled up – capacity was up – and they were ready to go.

Secondly, as they are head contractors, they were looking to partner up with local businesses, and the vast majority of any works that will go into that hospital will be locally procured.

**Ms FYLES:** When you were contracting Lendlease to do the project, what requirements did you place on them to have local content?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I think it was stipulated that there would be local content remembering. I have to be very careful here. If we are talking about a Northern Territory government project, something that is fully funded by the Northern Territory government, we probably have more influence on how you can draft up a particular tender document on how much we can push locally.

When you are dealing with a project that involves both Australian government and Northern Territory government money, the reality is you cannot lock up the borders of the Northern Territory, as much as we want to support local businesses – and we work damn hard in that area.

I know that the Department of Infrastructure has done some amazing work in that area, as has the Department of Business.

**Ms FYLES:** Minister, in that contract are there requirements on local content or not?

**Mr CHANDLER:** I will get the CE to answer the question.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you saying because it is a joint federal and Territory government funded project that it erases that?

**Mr CHANDLER:** No. We still have input into what goes into that contract. I want to put on the record that when you are dealing with both federal money as well as the Territory money, the Australian government looks as Australia as part of any project it delivers or provides money for. I want to put it on the record that often a government might be accused of not supporting locals on a certain project, or an interstate company might be used for a particular project, and sometimes there is good reason for that. It might include infrastructure in a building where there is no local business or capacity.

Lifts are one thing. We have interstate companies that install lifts into a building ...

**Ms FYLES:** Minister, I appreciate you trying to explain the project. We are very limited for time. When you were contracting Lendlease to do the project, what requirements did the Northern Territory government put in place to ensure local contractors were supported in this project? Also, do you have the capacity to review the way Lendlease is undertaking its local content obligations? They are the points we would like answered today.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sure.

**Mr McHUGH:** Member for Nightcliff, the question you are asking relates to the contract and not the full value of the project. You are talking about the contract with Lendlease only, which is a significant portion of the overall value of the works. We are talking about \$160m to \$170m. Their contract is worth about \$18m.

Of their contract, they have to provide a whole lot of support staff here. They also have to establish all the site works, sheds and that sort of thing. All that stuff is local and is paid for out of their \$18m fee.

**Ms FYLES:** How do you know that is all local? Was it in the contract?

**Mr McHUGH:** The contract asked everybody to provide a fee for the managing contract, which ends up as a design and construct contract.

**Ms FYLES:** I guess what we are getting at here is that our local building industry is suffering. In delivering probably one of the biggest, if not the biggest, projects happening in a government at the moment, what provisions did the Northern Territory government put in place to make sure there was local content? Are you able to give me anything local that was written in that contract, any local content?

**Mr McHUGH:** Unless I go back to the general conditions of the contract I cannot answer that question, but I can take it on notice and come back to you.

**Ms FYLES:** Minister, when you awarded the head contract of the Palmerston hospital, despite having local options, what requirements did you place in that contract to ensure local content was there?

**Mr CHANDLER:** We just have to clarify one thing here; I am the Minister for Infrastructure. We are building things, but this was the Health department. We are the client.

**Ms FYLES:** When we ask the Health department questions, it always refers us off to Infrastructure because you are delivering the project.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Sure, and I am happy to answer the question. At the end of the day, you look at the results, which in this case – I will get the CEO to clarify.

**Ms FYLES:** Well, the results at the moment are that we have a building industry struggling ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** Well, if you want to let me finish, I will answer the question quite happily. Do not talk to me about wasting time. This is your day. We are trying to push through the last few minutes and get as many questions in as we can. It is not my fault, or the fault of the CE or this department.

**Ms FYLES:** But I am asking a question right now ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** We are here at this time of day ...

**Ms FYLES:** ... and so far I have not heard a satisfactory answer about local content.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Well, if you want to listen you will get the answer.

**Madam CHAIR:** It is your call, minister.

**Mr CHANDLER:** At the end of the day, there is a high percentage of local work ...

**Ms FYLES:** I appreciate all the fluff words of high percentages and sheds and support staff, but, in that contract, what is the local content?

**Mr McHUGH:** Member for Nightcliff, at the time the tender was called the standard practice for the Northern Territory for local content was 20% on our contracts. We monitor what Lendlease is doing and it has more than achieved that.

**Ms FYLES:** In the Palmerston hospital Lendlease contract, we had a 20% local content?

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes.

**Ms FYLES:** Thank you. Do you review the way Lendlease is undertaking its local content obligations?

**Mr McHUGH:** We do.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you aware of how Lendlease is assessing the local content component of tenders to ensure local contractors are being considered for the subcontractor packages?

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes, we actually sit on the tender assessment panel and, at this point in time, 100% of all contracts that have been awarded on that project have been local contractors.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you able to expand on that? So 100% of all contracts ...

**Mr CHANDLER:** How do you expand on 100%? Every contract has gone locally.

**Ms FYLES:** I was asking minister, if you would let me finish, to expand on the detail of that. I have been given a figure of 20% of the contract for Palmerston hospital being local content. The chief executive ...

**Mr McHUGH:** No, no.

**Ms FYLES:** Twenty percent was in the contract ...

**Mr McHUGH:** Of Lendlease's contract.

**Ms FYLES:** Yes. You are saying, of the subcontractor packages, 100% are local.

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you able to provide further detail about those subcontractor packages being 100% local?

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes, we have a list here.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you willing to table that list?

**Mr CHANDLER:** It is not long. To date, bulk evacuation and site clearing, Alan King and Sons; boundary fencing and gates, Totem Fencing; footings and columns, C and V Concrete; site survey and set-out works, Bennett and Bennett; quantity surveying services, QS Services; early works hydraulic services, Project Plumbing; tower crane, High Rise Crane and Rigging; reinforcement supply, OneSteel Darwin; site surveillance camera, Intech NT; genset fuel supply, Mini Tankers; formwork NT Proform; concrete supply, HB Concrete Darwin; reinforcement supply, OneSteel Darwin; concrete place, C and V Concretors; reinforcement fix, Reo Fast NT; concrete plumbing, Darwin Concrete and Plumbing; early works electrical, Nilson NT; site accommodation, NT Link Pty Ltd; rubbish removal, Veolia Environmental Services Darwin; civil early works storm water, Alan King and Sons; traffic control, Core Staff NT; and scaffolding, NT Scaffold.

Of the pending tray packages, mechanical is closed at the moment and under assessment; electrical work is closed and under assessment; wet and dry fire, closed and under assessment; main hydraulics closes in June 2016; block work, the same; block work supply and package one structural steel – those last four all close on 16 June, and 100% of those companies are local.

**Ms FYLES:** When the Territory government issues tenders directly it requires extensive paperwork detailing local company commitments to Indigenous employment. Are you asking the same of Lendlease?

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes. Lendlease is required to provide, under the managing contract – 10% of their workforce to be Indigenous. That is the target that was identified in the managing contractor's contract, and



the same was identified on Tiger Brennan Drive. We have achieved more than that to date on Tiger Brennan Drive and we expect to achieve significant numbers on Palmerston hospital as well.

**Ms FYLES:** Would Lendlease be asking subcontractors about their Indigenous employment numbers and training initiatives?

**Mr McHUGH:** Most definitely.

**Ms FYLES:** And you have been getting that information fed back through to you?

**Mr McHUGH:** Yes.

**Ms FYLES:** Are you able to provide figures here today, or would that be something you would have to come back with?

**Mr McHUGH:** We would have to come back on that issue.

**Ms FYLES:** Okay. In the interest of time, as I have one more question, are you able to provide details of tenders and consultancies? Could you provide any details of consultancies over \$100 000, any consultancies that were conducted by interstate companies, any that were exempt from tendering and why?

**Mr CHANDLER:** Do you want to know over \$100 000 or all of them?

**Ms FYLES:** Whatever is easier for you, minister. I am happy for you to table the document.

**Mr CHANDLER:** In the interests of time, we will table this one.

**Ms FYLES:** Thank you, minister. I appreciate that. It is a shame some of your colleagues would not be so cooperative.

In agency travel, can you let us know a breakdown of the cost of travel for international, interstate and intrastate? Was any travel undertaken by you, as minister, paid for by the agency?

**Madam CHAIR:** It is now 4 pm, minister, which means we have to conclude this session. I thank you and your officials from the Department of Transport for coming in this afternoon. I appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

**Mr CHANDLER:** Thank you. Also, Natasha, zero for me.

**Mr McHUGH:** Zero international.

**Madam CHAIR:** That concludes the Estimates Committee hearings for 2016. The Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee will be holding hearings regarding Statements of Corporate Intent for the Power and Water Corporation, Jacana Energy and Territory Generation at 8.30 am tomorrow.

I note that all answers to questions taken on notice must be given to the First Clerk Assistant by 7 July. Late answers cannot be accepted.

With the finalisation of the scrutiny of ministerial portfolios, I thank the ministers appearing before the committee and the officials who attended the hearings. I also take this opportunity to place on the public record my appreciation of the assistance provided to ministers by their agency officers.

I also thank the members of the Estimates Committee for the overall manner in which these public hearings have been conducted. Thank you also to the Legislative Assembly staff who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the whole process ran smoothly over the five days.

I now formally close the hearings of the Estimates Committee for 2016. Thank you very much.

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The committee concluded.

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