



# ***EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair  
Mr JP Lister MP  
Mr MA Boothman MP  
Mr DJ Brown MP  
Mr N Dametto MP  
Mr JA Sullivan MP

**Staff present:**

Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary  
Ms H Koorockin—Committee Support Officer

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) (HELPING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL COSTS) AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Monday, 23 October 2023**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2023

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### **The committee met at 10.02 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare this public briefing open. I am Kim Richards, member for Redlands and chair of the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this country to have two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I am very blessed to live on Quandamooka country.

Welcome everyone and thank you for supporting the committee's work here today. With me today I have James Lister, deputy chair and member for Southern Downs; Mark Boothman, member for Theodore; Nick Dametto, member for Hinchinbrook; Jimmy Sullivan, member for Stafford; and Don Brown, member for Capalaba.

Today's hearing forms part of the committee's consideration of the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. Dr Amy MacMahon, the member for South Brisbane, introduced this private member's bill in the Legislative Assembly on 11 October 2023 and the bill was then referred to this committee for its consideration. This meeting of the committee is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

### **MacMAHON, Dr Amy, Member for South Brisbane, Parliament of Queensland**

**CHAIR:** Welcome to the member for South Brisbane. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Dr MacMahon:** Thank you to the chair and committee members for the opportunity to take part in today's briefing and for your consideration of the bill. I would also like to acknowledge that we are on the land of the Yagara and Turrbal people, the first educators, who have been teaching and learning on this country for over 60,000 years and ongoing.

The helping families with school costs bill aims to address the ongoing underfunding of Queensland state schools. Over a decade ago the Gonski review set out a path to ensure that educational outcomes were not dictated by income or background. The centrepiece of the Gonski model was a schooling resources standard, the SRS, an estimate of how much total government funding schools need to meet students' educational needs. The SRS is made up of a base amount for all primary and secondary students and six needs-based loadings for student priority cohorts and disadvantaged schools. The SRS is the minimum funding required for state schools and other schools.

Under current funding arrangements for state schools, the federal government contributes 20 per cent of the SRS with an expectation that states will contribute the remaining 80 per cent. However, Queensland falls well below this. The bilateral agreement states that the Queensland government contributes just 69.26 per cent of the SRS. This alone results in a shortfall of funding of over \$1.2 billion every year. In addition to this, the Queensland government deducts from its SRS contribution capital depreciation, costs of direct school transport and funding for the curriculum authority. This results in a further underfunding of around \$470 million annually. Altogether, this means state schools in Queensland are underfunded by around \$1.7 billion annually, and these figures are from the Australian Education Union.

In part, as a result of this underfunding, schools have no choice but to try to raise funds from families. State schools charge families school levies, subject levies and for laptops, software, textbooks, stationery and uniforms. With the committee's permission, I seek leave to table an invoice that was shared with me by a parent of a child at a state school—the school has been redacted—itemising school costs in excess of \$2,000 in 2022.

**CHAIR:** That is so tabled.

**Dr MacMahon:** Earlier this year I conducted a survey on school costs. Over 700 Queensland families responded to the survey saying that they were spending hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars every year on basic things their kids need to go to school. In a cost-of-living crisis we know there are a lot of families who are really struggling with these costs. Of those families who responded to the survey, nearly half said they had had to ask for help to cover school costs. Of these, over 40 per cent had gone on a payment plan with their child's school. Others had borrowed money from family or friends or gone into debt.

One parent said, 'My parents help me out even though I work full time in health care. It's hard as a single parent.' Another said, 'It is a constant juggling act to make sure that my children have clothes and shoes that fit, the right resources and that they don't miss out on activities such as swimming lessons, excursions and school camps.' There were single mothers who talked about having to ask for help from abusive ex-partners and others who said that they had skipped meals to cover these costs. My office regularly hears from parents who need help covering school costs for their kids. For the past three years we have been running a grants program to help families struggling to cover school costs and we struggle to meet demand from our office budget.

It is not just students and families who are being set up to fail but teachers as well. Underfunding means that schools are not able to hire the staff they need, leading to long hours, overwork and burnout for teachers. The EU have said that teachers spend on average nearly \$1,000 a year out of their own pockets on classroom resources. We know that as a result of the huge pressure on teachers, thousands are leaving the sector.

In a few months time the state and federal governments will be renegotiating their school funding bilateral agreements, and this is Queensland's chance to do the right thing by Queensland kids. Not only can we afford to fully fund schools, but we cannot afford not to. We risk Queensland kids continuing to slip behind in educational outcomes and kids missing out on opportunities in sport, culture and music, with lifelong repercussions for employment, income and health. We also risk a huge drain on the Queensland economy.

The helping families with school costs bill outlines just one model that Queensland could use to ensure that our state schools are fully funded and ensure that no kid misses out and that families are not having to go into debt to cover basic needs for their kids.

**Mr LISTER:** Things that I hear from parents in my neck of the woods about students are that they are concerned about vaping, attendance, student behaviour and so forth. How do you envisage that this bill would assist in improving those things?

**Dr MacMahon:** There is a report from the Australia Institute that talks about the ongoing benefits of fully funding schools, and one of those is that kids are more likely to finish school if schools are properly funded. If schools had the staff they needed, if they were fully funded to be providing basic needs for their kids, it is much more likely that kids would be able to stay in school and then they would be able to come into contact with the other programs that the Queensland government offers at the moment such as mental health support in schools and GP support. At the moment because schools are really scrambling to just get up to that basic level, they often do not have the capacity to be providing that additional support to kids.

We would anticipate that with full funding more kids are likely to stay in school, they are likely to finish school and those additional programs that the Queensland government offers are actually going to provide the support they are designed to provide instead of just scrambling to meet kids' needs. I would imagine for issues around vaping, for example, there would be more capacity for kids to have contact with the school GP if they are staying in school and that they have the broader support around them for their learning.

**Mr LISTER:** In the context of my electorate, we struggle to recruit doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to deliver those services even though they are funded from the government. What is the solution for my schools in that respect?

**Dr MacMahon:** This is probably a question that goes beyond the scope of the bill. It is about providing the kind of education pathways and good incomes for those allied health workers so they see schools as a viable alternative for them to go into and similarly for teachers. We have all this data on teachers leaving the sector because they are under immense pressure at the moment. If schools had those resources they need, there would be a lot less pressure on those staff and Education Queensland would be sought after employment for teachers and for allied health workers. To go to your question, I would say that free uni and TAFE for allied healthcare workers and making sure they are well paid so they can do the work they need to do in schools would help.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Thank you for coming in today and presenting something that you are obviously very passionate about. I have one quick question. In the white paper and on page 5 of the bill itself you talk about sporting programs and events. What would that include? In my electorate we have equestrian, which is obviously quite expensive, and we have some rowing facilities et cetera. What does the bill encompass?

**Dr MacMahon:** The final details of what additional cultural, sporting and music programs would be funded would be determined by a report from the director-general. They would be getting data from schools each year that they would be putting in a report to the minister to suggest, 'This is the additional funding that schools should be given to fund those extracurricular activities.' It is likely that something like equestrian might not make it in there. The final detail of that is something that would be determined by the minister. We would anticipate it would look similar to the FairPlay program that is currently running, which is about \$150 a year for sports. That is a model that schools could be replicating to say, 'We are going to allocate that to each student and use that money to engage in extracurricular activities.' The bill is open as to the details of that, and the exact funding amount is something that will be determined by the minister and the chief executive.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** When it comes to the sporting facilities in schools, as part of this bill would you expect a review into those sporting facilities? As an, example, Upper Coomera State College has a six-lane 400-metre relay track. It technically should be eight lanes but they were unable to do that due to the space they have. Would that be something that would also be included? If you are going to have all these sporting facilities in these schools which are properly run and funded, you will have to have the infrastructure in place. Is that something the bill will look into?

**Dr MacMahon:** Infrastructure is beyond the scope of this bill, but it could be something that the chief executive recommends in the report to the minister each year to say, 'These schools need sporting upgrades.' Under the model that we have suggested it is not necessary that schools be running those programs. Kids could be taking part in programs outside of the school, as many kids do already. Schools could continue to run the programs that they offer at their school and with their own facilities, or kids could have the option of going elsewhere. That is something that could end up in the report to the minister each year around an audit of the kinds of facilities schools might need.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Under the guise of equality of opportunity, if the chief executive officer suggests that a particular activity—to use your words, sporting, cultural or music—is approved for a school, does that mean that every student at that school gets access, or is it only those who excel in a particular activity?

**Dr MacMahon:** The idea would be that every kid would be able to get access to extracurricular activities.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** So if a particular school does rowing, every kid in that school is going to have access to everything that goes with that?

**Dr MacMahon:** I guess it would be up to the individual family to decide what their kids want to take part in but, yes, if there are plenty of kids who want to take part in rowing and the school has the capacity to do that. At the moment a lot of schools probably have restrictions on all kinds of extracurricular activities. The main barrier that we are trying to address is cost. If your family cannot afford that, that should not be a barrier anymore—you would be able to get access to those extracurricular activities.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Your suggestion though is that every family would have the choice to pursue music, sporting and cultural activities if that school provides it?

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, that is right. The details of this could be determined by the chief executive. It might be that every kid gets access to one extracurricular activity per semester, for example; or there is an allocation of funding and then families decide how they allocate that funding.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Have you done any analysis on what it would cost the state to provide every student with access to sporting, cultural and musical activities?

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes. Based on the data that we have from the Parliamentary Library, from schools and from the survey, we have determined how much out-of-pocket expenses families are paying at the moment and how much they are paying for extracurricular activities. For all of those out-of-pocket expenses, we have estimated it would be an additional \$1.2 billion each year to cover those costs for extracurricular activities.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** And those are just students who are currently doing those events—not if you were to open it up to every student at the school.

**Dr MacMahon:** No, we have averaged that out. If every kid got an allocation of funding, it would be \$1.2 billion a year—not just those kids who are currently taking part in extracurricular activities. The idea is that cost would no longer be a barrier for any Queensland kid who wants to take part in those activities.

**Mr BROWN:** How much is it to do rowing at Brisbane state high?

**Dr MacMahon:** I would have to take that on notice but I could let you know. I am going to the Brisbane state high P&C meeting tonight so I can get back to you.

**Mr BROWN:** It is \$600. Would that be free under your bill?

**Dr MacMahon:** As I have said, that is up to the minister and the chief executive. What we have proposed is that there would be an allocation per student. Maybe each student gets an allocation of \$150 or \$200 a semester and then—

**Mr BROWN:** There would still be an out-of-pocket cost though?

**Dr MacMahon:** There might be, yes, but it would be much less than it is at the moment. There would be plenty of activities that kids would still be able to access.

**Mr BROWN:** With Brisbane state high, the rowing program is only against private schools. Do you think the taxpayer from Capalaba should be picking up the tab for rowing at Brisbane state high?

**Dr MacMahon:** As I have said, that would be determined by the minister in the end. Maybe that is something that the chief executive recommends would continue to come from families, while making sure there is an allocation for every kid to be able to take part in something.

**Mr BROWN:** But this bill is designed to get all out-of-pocket costs.

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes. The bill says that the chief executive would provide a report to the minister each year itemising what they recommend would be funded.

**Mr BROWN:** So if the chief executive and the minister came down with a proposal saying that rowing at Brisbane state high should not be funded, would the program then collapse?

**Dr MacMahon:** No, I do not think so because kids would still be able to get access to all sorts of other activities. Remember that it is a pretty small proportion of kids who take part in rowing; it is pretty gruelling. There are lots of other activities that kids could be taking part in that schools could offer. There are other kinds of sports.

**Mr BROWN:** But if the minister and the DG say that should be funded, should there then be access for all high schools across Queensland to have rowing programs because Brisbane state high has it?

**Dr MacMahon:** I think probably it would be that they would say, 'Okay, it is \$600 to do rowing. Every kid gets access to \$600 for extracurricular activities,' and the child and the family decide based on what is offered at the school or what is offered in the broader community.

**Mr BROWN:** So the bill really does not tackle all out-of-pocket costs. You are just saying that the minister and the DG still get to decide what the allocation of funding is and what parents can use it for.

**Dr MacMahon:** I guess the questions have zeroed in on extracurricular activities. There is also uniforms, stationery, laptops, other expenses—all the things that are itemised here that are covered. Extracurricular activities are just one part of that. We know that there are lots of kids who miss out on these activities. We know there are lots of families who say that they just cannot afford for their kids to go on school camp, to go on an excursion, to take part in music. What we are trying to do is lower the barrier for families to be able to get access to this. The details of it would need to be determined by the minister and in subsequent legislation. Maybe we do determine that every Queensland kid should get access to rowing and that every school gets upgraded for rowing sheds, or we determine similar to the FairPlay program, 'Here's an allocation,' and it is up to families and the schools to decide.

**Mr BROWN:** Moving on, many language studies offer kids a chance to go overseas for short and long stays. Is that included in your bill to pay for those costs?

**Dr MacMahon:** Again, that would be determined. Maybe there is an allocation for travel or camps that every kid gets access to. Of course there are always going to be things above and beyond what could be publicly funded. What we are saying is that the base majority of costs for out-of-pocket expenses should be covered by the state. Of course there will be things on top of that that families will need to contribute to or P&Cs are fundraising for. What we are saying is free up that capacity for families and P&Cs and schools to make those decisions.

**Mr BROWN:** Let us say there is an allocation for three students at a particular high school to go to Latin America to help with their Spanish. If this bill came in, wouldn't there be an expectation after your words that 'every kid should have access' for everyone in that language class who is studying Latin to be able to go overseas?

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, I think there could be an allocation of a certain amount of funding for kids to be able to take part in travel. Maybe there are costs above and beyond what the chief executive recommends and the P&C could be doing fundraising or families could be contributing to that as well. It is really about eliminating the current barriers that exist for a lot of families where they look at that and they say, 'There's no chance for my kid to be able to take part in that.' This means that there are opportunities there. You have zeroed in on a few examples that are above and beyond what most schools offer. Most schools are not offering overseas programs to the majority of kids. Most kids do not—

**Mr BROWN:** Most schools do not offer ballet but if this bill comes into effect they are going to look down the road and say, 'There are kids down there getting free overseas trips because the DG and the minister decides. Why can't we have it?'

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, why not?

**Mr BROWN:** Have you allocated then the costs for the minister and the DG to say, 'If we want to create an equitable outcome across all schools, we're going to have to open up every single language student to go overseas?'

**Dr MacMahon:** If that is something that the minister and the DG decide, then that would be amazing but at the moment we have—

**Mr BROWN:** The minister and the DG decide on funding now. You are saying this bill will change and then you say that the DG and the minister again will decide and there will still be out-of-pocket costs. Which one is it?

**Dr MacMahon:** There are only out-of-pocket costs for the kind of very expensive exceptional things that you have talked about. For the majority of activities that kids are taking part in, those costs would be covered—for example, school excursions. There are kids at the moment whose families could not afford \$20 for them to be able to go to an excursion at GoMA, for example. That should not be a barrier in place for them. We have left the bill fairly open for the minister and the DG to make detailed decisions around funding, but what we have said is that for the vast majority of costs and the vast majority of what parents and families are currently paying, the state should shoulder that. We have provided one model by which that could be done. There are different models by which this could be done, but recognising that at the moment cost is a barrier for a lot of kids.

**Mr BROWN:** So it would still be up to the DG and the minister to decide where funding goes at schools.

**Dr MacMahon:** That is right, but what we have said is that at the moment those things that are not funded and that are not listed in the act should be funded.

**Mr BROWN:** But on the decision of the minister and the DG.

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, but explicitly mentioning those things in the act. At the moment what is considered free in state schools in the act is very narrow. It does not include additional resources and it does not include these extra out-of-pocket expenses. That would be explicitly in the act and there would be a requirement that the minister and the DG would be making those determinations. It would be up to schools to also to come to them and say, 'This is what we'd like funded,' and for them to be making a decision about what they can afford across the state.

**Mr BROWN:** That is here. Your 56A says—

... other education or cultural information or instruction provided by a person other than a staff member of the student's school—

**Dr MacMahon:** But what is specified in the act about what the state funds is very narrow. It is pretty much just for instruction and facilities. Anything additional—resources, laptops, software—is borne by the families.

**Mr BROWN:** After the bill?

**Dr MacMahon:** Currently.

**Mr BROWN:** But what I am saying is that if this bill passed it is up to the state to then fund those extracurricular activities.

**Dr MacMahon:** That is right.

**CHAIR:** In terms of the technology aspect of it, have you done modelling on what that looks like and what the parameters look like? Across my 11 state schools, they are all using very different types of technology and software. Have you modelled the cost of that?

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes. That is included within the additional \$1.2 billion a year and that is factoring in a cost of a laptop or an iPad of about \$800. That is based on the feedback we have from families and schools about how much is currently recommended for spending on a piece of electronic equipment for their kids. We know that a lot of families can afford this at the moment but there are a lot of families who cannot afford those costs. They are then having to go back to the school which often have old, outdated technologies that these kids have to use. What we are saying is that every kid should be able to get access to a fresh laptop at the beginning of primary school, at the beginning of high school.

**Mr Dametto:** Thank you for the bill that you have introduced and for addressing the committee today. The committee appreciates being able to ask some questions and get a bit more of an understanding of the reasoning behind the bill. Do the Greens place a value on education in Queensland?

**Dr MacMahon:** Do the Greens place a value on education? Yes.

**Mr Dametto:** That is excellent. Do you place a monetary value on that education?

**Dr MacMahon:** The figures that we have used in here are based on the Schooling Resource Standard. That has been determined federally about an allocation of funding per primary school and high school student. That is considered the minimum amount of funding required for a child at a state school or a private school.

**Mr Dametto:** Do you believe that the parents of Queensland children should place value on their education as well?

**Dr MacMahon:** Absolutely, as all Queensland families already do.

**Mr Dametto:** In saying that, do you think there should be a monetary value attached to the education that parents want to provide for their children?

**Dr MacMahon:** In Queensland we say that we have a free education system but we do not. This bill is just one model by which we address that. I can see what you are getting at: that if families are paying money out of pocket, it might mean they have more investment in their school or they have some skin in the game, I guess, but we would not say the same thing about health care, would we—that if you are paying, you have a greater investment in your health. For schools, somehow we say, 'You'll get this base amount for free but then you should pay for everything else on top of that, including essential things that your kids need to go to school.' Families and carers can still be very invested in their kids' education even if they are not paying out of pocket. People get involved in the P&C, or they volunteer at their kids' school, or they go to parent-teacher interviews and keep engaged with what their kids are up to. That does not necessarily require that they would be paying money out of pocket for their kids. There is always the capacity for families to be contributing more to the P&C for fundraising for things for their kids' schools, for example. What we are saying is that, for the essentials that a child needs for a good education, those costs should be covered by the state.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Excellent. Do you believe that children who go to a private school should be getting the same education as children who go to a public school?

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, absolutely. If you look at the funding breakdown currently and if you look at the written feedback that I provided the committee the other day, there is a table that has the SRS funding for private schools and state schools at the moment. You can see that state schools are well below the SRS and in many cases private schools are funded beyond that. This bill does not engage with private schools at all. Rather, we want to make sure that state schools are properly funded and sufficiently funded. Families will make a decision about where they want to send their kids. We have seen a steady decline in the proportion of kids who go to state schools. That should not be the case. A state school should be the first and best option for any family. There will always be families who decide to send their kids to private schools or independent schools or Catholic schools for various reasons, but this bill does not engage with that.

**Mr DAMETTO:** It does not engage with it, but it does create a situation where if the private schools where people are willing to pay to send their children and if the children who are going to the public schools get exactly the same as what you would get at a private school can you see how that would see a demise in the value attached to a private school?

**Dr MacMahon:** At the moment the state schools are funded below private schools, and that is not right. It is not right that state schools should be behind to such an extent that it means that families decide to go to private schools. People decide to send their kids to private schools for all sorts of reasons. What we are saying is make our state schools fully funded. Make them the best and first option for any family.

**Mr DAMETTO:** A friend of mine grew up in Bulgaria. It was a communist state at the time, and I believe it may still be. He said, 'Nick, when I grew up in Bulgaria communism reigned and socialism reigned.' The fact was that when he went to school everyone played soccer because it was fully funded but with terrible soccer fields. When they had archery, everyone had archery gear but it was all terrible gear. Do you think by fully funding this and there only being a small bucket of funding or a limited bucket of funding to fund everything that every child wants to do at the school would diminish the quality of not only the education but the quality of the equipment provided to students?

**Dr MacMahon:** I do not think so. We know at the moment that schools are underfunded. This is not an ideological argument; it is just a fact: schools are funded below the minimum that is considered what is needed for an education in this country. Queensland schools are well below that and it means that schools are not able to hire the additional staff that they need. They are not able to hire additional teachers or administrative staff. It means they cannot invest in the resources that they need and they are trying to stretch a limited budget to cover all sorts of things. I do not see how the quality of state schools could decline if we were funding schools to that minimum and then providing that additional funding for out-of-pocket expenses. It would mean that schools would have the resources that they need. It would mean they would be able to hire additional teachers. It would mean that they would be able to retain good teachers who would not be getting burnt out. Queensland is a far cry from the countries that you are talking about. A lot of our schools are doing the best they can and have incredible facilities and offer incredible education, largely off the back of teachers and administrative staff who are willing to really work themselves to the bone and P&Cs that are willing to fundraise to fund essentials. This could only lift the quality of state education in Queensland.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Do you acknowledge though that with the chief executive officer and the minister being able to basically say what is and what is not in the allocation of funding to do these things it may result in a shortfall of funding?

**Dr MacMahon:** May result in a shortfall of funding?

**Mr DAMETTO:** Yes, to be able to achieve all of the things that you want to do at the level that you want to deliver them at.

**Dr MacMahon:** It would cover the basics that families are currently paying. It would cover the out-of-pocket expenses for resources, for the laptops that we have already talked about, for subject levies and for those things and then in addition to that making sure every family gets access to some funding for extracurricular activities as well. Maybe not everything can be funded, but it means that no family would be thinking, 'My kid is going to miss out on some extracurricular activities because we can't afford it.' There would be an allocation of funding per child to make sure that they can get access to those programs. There might always be things that are well above and beyond what the general public would consider acceptable for state school funding, but this would be a huge leap on top of what we already have which is families who are going into debt and stretching themselves to the limit to cover those basic costs for their kids at school.

**Mr DAMETTO:** When putting the bill together and doing your research, was there anything that indicated why the state government was not paying the out-of-pocket expenses already?

**Dr MacMahon:** This is what is in the act currently. It says that state education is free, but it is a very narrow band of what is actually funded by the state. Everything else is paid for out of pocket. You would probably have to go back and ask the drafters of that bill as to what they were thinking in leaving those additional costs out as well and then also looking at the bilateral agreement which provides some argument as to why Queensland is funding below that minimum amount of funding. You would have to go back and ask the people who negotiated that bilateral agreement.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** My question goes back to what the member for Capalaba said about different schools in different regions. ICSEA, which is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, is a number that the education system uses to work out how targeted funding is allocated for schools. In your bill why did you not include socio-economic advantage in it? For instance, in my region we have what we consider as middle-class and lower middle-class economic advantage and the more leafier suburbs and the higher income areas where those families can afford a lot more. Why was that not included to help those who really do need the help more than anything else?



**Dr MacMahon:** The SRS already factors in a range of criteria for additional funding for students and for schools, so there is additional funding for kids with disabilities, for example, and additional funding for—

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** That is I4S and that type of targeted funding.

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes, but I will just continue. At the moment, because we do not have that base amount of funding, those additional loadings really are not able to do the work that they would do because schools are still below the minimum. If schools were funded to that minimum, those additional loadings for socio-economic disadvantage or kids who speak English as a second language or disability would be able to do the work that they are needed to do. Schools would then be able to hire the additional staff that they need. They would not be just using that funding to kind of still provide the below the bare minimum for schools, so that is already factored into the SRS. Perhaps a recommendation from the chief executive could be that for extracurricular expenses there is also a loading for schools that are regional and remote and there is also a loading for schools that are in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, but that is already factored into the SRS for that base amount of funding and it would be allowed to do the work that it could do if schools were funded up to that minimum SRS.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Just say a school in a more leafy—

**CHAIR:** Russell Island.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Russell Island, but just say a school in a leafier suburb, just for I4S funding purposes, could be getting \$419 per student and so you have a higher ICSEA number, say an ICSEA number of 1136, and you have another school in definitely a more working-class area which is 1027 and they are only getting \$299 per student. What are your thoughts on that?

**Dr MacMahon:** I would have to take that on notice in terms of the details of that funding, but currently we know, because Queensland state schools are funded below that SRS, that those additional loadings that are worked out by the federal government are not able to do the work that they do. If you wanted to send me those figures, I could have a closer look. Essentially, that is already factored into the SRS and all we are saying is bring those schools up to the minimum and let those additional loadings do the work that they are designed to do.

**CHAIR:** In your written brief you explain that the claimed underspend of \$1.7 billion includes roughly \$470 million in capital depreciation costs which the bilateral agreement between the state and federal government allows the state to include the contribution in partial recognition of the state government's critical investment in education. I do not think that there is anybody on this side of the table who would disagree, but I have never seen more halls being delivered, new schools being built, the air conditioning of all our schools and the ongoing maintenance of that to provide equity across the sector. Given that the government is spending \$1.2 billion on capital works in 2023-24, is it reasonable to allow for capital depreciation costs when calculating the amount of funding that we provide to state schools? How big is the pot? How big is your pot and what does your modelling look like?

**Dr MacMahon:** That is a great question. In terms of the capital depreciation and those other costs, the Morrison government made a decision that states and territories would be able to factor in these additional costs into their SRS funding. Those things were never factored in to the initial calculation of those minimum funding requirements. It was never considered in the Gonski review that capital depreciation or school transport costs or funding for the curriculum authority would come out of SRS funding. At that stage when this model was developed it was always the assumption that those additional costs would be borne elsewhere by the state government in order to ensure that that base amount of funding was provided to state schools.

Because of a decision by the Morrison government, states are now able to factor that in and that means that there is that \$470 million below the minimum amount of funding that schools require. There is no question that the Queensland government is putting a huge amount of money into education already—a huge amount of funding into infrastructure, which is also separate to the SRS. Infrastructure is not considered as part of that SRS calculation. Because the states and territories are allowed to do this, it means that that funding is coming out of the minimum that is required for schools. This is not an aspirational amount of funding; this is considered the minimum amount that primary schools and high schools need to give kids a good education. Some \$470 million is no huge—

**CHAIR:** But infrastructure and amenity are absolutely at the core in addition to what our teachers and our teacher aides and our P&Cs do. If you do not have the infrastructure, where is the quality in that?

**Dr MacMahon:** No question and the Queensland government should and will continue to fund that excellent infrastructure for schools, but what we are saying is to make that infrastructure really work you also need to make sure that schools get that base amount of funding. Some \$470 million is not a huge amount of money in a state budget. There are other places that the state government could go to cover those costs. All we are saying is get Queensland up to that minimum 80 per cent. That is not an aspirational target. That is the minimum required to give kids a good education in Queensland, and of course the Queensland government is going to be continuing to fund the great infrastructure that schools are enjoying right across the state.

**CHAIR:** Which comes with depreciation, like any asset. Hospitals have depreciation and that is picked up within their budgets. Education facilities have depreciation of their buildings and it is picked up within those budgets. There is a balance, I guess is what I am saying.

**Dr MacMahon:** I say it should not come out of the minimum amount of funding that schools require to teach kids.

**Mr BROWN:** This might be just a personal opinion for you, but do you class differently kids out of catchment as compared to in catchment? When the DG and the minister are deciding on these things, do you think that—

**Dr MacMahon:** That is a really good question. I had not considered that, to be honest. I feel that high schools or primary schools should make sure that they are servicing the local catchment first. No kid from a local catchment should miss out. This is a challenge very much in my electorate where there are large portions of kids who are out of catchment and are coming to these really great schools, and that puts a huge amount of pressure on the school capacity and puts pressure on the school to be able to accept kids within the catchment. This bill is silent on whether kids are in catchment or out of catchment. I guess it is an ongoing decision for the minister about which schools and by what proportion are accepting kids from out of catchment. I really think that for any family your local state school should be your best and first option. There should be no barriers for you to be able to get into that local school.

**Mr BROWN:** Do you think a better model might be making sure that out-of-pocket costs are better targeted at in-catchment kids rather than out-of-catchment kids? I am worried about something like this passing and there will be more actual out-of-catchment shopping: 'The DG and the minister have decided on the these perhaps so I'm jumping ship over there because a better allocation of funding has come out of this'?

**Dr MacMahon:** I guess that is one option. I would not necessarily be endorsing that or not endorsing that. What I would envisage is that, rather than the DG and the minister going, 'This school will get X and this school will get X,' there would be an allocation of funding per student and schools and families could then decide what they do and do not fund. There are schools that already have those pressures with people saying, 'That school over there is offering these great programs and that's where I want my kid to go.' There are arguments for and against that, definitely. Making sure you have that assurance for in-catchment kids I think should be the priority.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** I want to follow up, member for South Brisbane, because I thought that answer contradicts what you said to the member for Theodore. You are suggesting that rather than the DG and the minister, on the DG's recommendation, funding a particular activity at a particular school, there should be a standard allocation per student and, going to the member for Theodore's question, that should be standard across Queensland and not based on the demographics that he described?

**Dr MacMahon:** To be clear, the bill is silent on the details of this because we have determined that those details can be worked out by the minister and by the DG. There are a whole range of suggestions and a whole range of approaches that the committee could also be considering for how we move forward. This is just one model; it is not the only model for how we could be doing this. Perhaps the DG says, 'Every school gets X and there's an additional loading for rural schools' or schools all get a uniform amount. That is a decision for the minister and the DG. There is a range of different ways we could go about this. We have left it open.

The idea with this bill is that there is subsequent legislation that gets further scrutinised by parliament down the track and we would have a further opportunity for submissions and consideration from schools. We have provided a fairly open model for how this could happen. It will be up to the minister and the DG and the committee, and parliament in the end, as to the exact model for this.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Going back to the previous questions, when it comes to excellence programs, which are certainly very popular in schools, say a school artificially inflates its student numbers because of these excellent programs—whether it be sport, academics, music—what are

your thoughts about those schools getting additional funding over another school that is missing out? Would that create a two-tier mentality where you have the elite schools and the schools that fall behind? I am curious to hear your thoughts on that matter.

**Dr MacMahon:** We already have a model like that at the moment. We do have a layer of state schools where we have these excellence programs that are attracting kids. In my electorate, we have Brisbane State High School that, as has already been mentioned, offers rowing and a range of different programs and competes against the private schools. That is under a model where the government has determined schools are able to do that; they are able to attract kids from outside of the catchment. That puts a huge amount of demand on that school. It does, in essence, create a bit of a two-tiered system. In addition to that, the other schools that are trying to compete also do not have their base amount of funding. Even these very big schools are attracting kids from right across the city. The principal has estimated that Brisbane State High School is underfunded by about \$11 million every year. They are still scrambling to fundraise, to fund their external fields for example because they do not have the sporting facilities on campus. We already have that model to some extent.

As I have already mentioned, making sure that you have that base amount of funding means that any of those additional loadings are able to do the work that they can do. If schools are given an allocation for kids to do extra curricula activities, it would mean that maybe for the first time they are able to offer programs that rival those of the other schools, which they might not have been able to offer before. I do not think this bill would completely solve questions of equity in the state education system but it would bring us a long way up from where we are at the moment.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** If you have a minister and a chief executive officer—could it be potentially exacerbated with this bill?

**Dr MacMahon:** I do not think it could be exacerbated because it would mean all schools would get more funding than they currently get. It means they would be able to bring on additional staff. They would be able to bring on additional music or sports teachers and offer great programs as well whereas at the moment a lot of state schools are scrambling to do the basics. I do not think this would exacerbate the issues any further. We are still going to have issues of inequity in all different parts of Queensland. What we are saying is to eliminate as much as you can out of the education system.

**Mr DAMETTO:** I want to get this clear in my mind in terms of tying value to things. For example, looking at the invoice that was sent through to you about the cost of school for a year 7 students, there are a number of resources like the iPad and the school uniforms. If we create a system where these things are free, what stops people taking advantage of that? What I am trying to get at is that there is value attached to these things if you pay for them. If the student decides they are not going to look after their iPad, do they simply get another iPad? What if the student does not look after their school uniform, because mum and dad are not saying, 'I've paid for those uniforms so where's your blouse, where's your hat, where's your PE shirt?' If essentially there is an endless bucket of funding for this sort of thing, how do you create value around those things so that people are looking after them and not taking advantage of that system?

**Dr MacMahon:** That is a great question. This is a broader philosophical question about whether or not we value the things that we do or do not pay for. I think there is a lot of examples in society where there are things that we do not pay for but we still make sure they are well maintained, like local parks. People respect local parks and the playgrounds are not automatically disassembled because people say, 'Well, I'm not paying for this.'

**Mr DAMETTO:** I would disagree with that because the local parks that people have not paid for have people destroying them in my electorate so that is probably a bad example.

**Dr MacMahon:** To say that a student will not respect their iPad because they know they are going to get an additional one, kids already respect their belongings as much as a kid can. They are looking after their backpacks, they are looking after their shoes. Sure, there are some exceptions to that—

**Mr DAMETTO:** I am sorry, but do you have a child?

**Dr MacMahon:** I do not have any children.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Try to find your child's lunchbox!

**Dr MacMahon:** Sure, something cheap like that. This is kind of a broader philosophical question. What is an example of something that you can get? Pensioners can get glasses and they are not going, 'I'm going to get another pair of glasses so I'm going to run over this pair once a month.' They are respecting the things that they get. In all facets of life, we are able to get access to things for free from the state. As a society, we respect that because we respect each other.

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I think the problem here though is, at the moment, there are families that are not able to get access to these basic things and there are families that are going into financial stress in order to pay for those things. That is the kind of flip side of this in saying that no family should have to go into debt to pay for school costs. No parent should have to lie awake at night thinking, 'How am I going to get my kid to school camp this year because I just can't afford it?' No-one should go on a payment plan with their kid's school, knowing that they have to pay off those costs. Each time they get their income they are deciding, 'Do I pay an electricity bill? Do I put food on the table? Do I pay off this bill to my kid's school?' That should not be the case. We are saying: let's alleviate those pressures for families as much as possible.

Maybe it is the case that there is an allocation of two school uniforms per year, for example, and anything you need on top of that you would have to pay for. Every kid would know that at the beginning of the year they are able to get a uniform that fits and they do not have to go into school wearing tatty shoes. I think most kids will respect their belongings as much as a child can. Obviously there is wear and tear, but the assumption that because you are not paying for it you are automatically going to not respect it or not maintain it—I do not think that is the case for the majority of people.

**Mr DAMETTO:** I appreciate your rose-coloured lens on that.

**CHAIR:** I think it is interesting that, ultimately, what you are saying to us is that the bill is empowering the minister and the director-general to make the same decisions that they have the ability to make here and now.

**Dr MacMahon:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** And they do make balanced decisions. When you talk about school camps, there is still the potential for a shortfall. You might allocate every Queensland kid \$100 towards their school camp. I certainly know from past experience that the trip to Canberra costs well more than \$100. Somebody in that position will still have that very same problem. I am not sure exactly, in totality, what it would alleviate or what it actually changes in terms of the mechanics of decision-making. However, thank you for appearing before us today.

**Dr MacMahon:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Two questions have been taken on notice. The information on those will be available in the transcript. Rob will assist with that information. Could we have your answers to the questions on notice by Monday, 6 November 2023 at the close of business?

**Mr BROWN:** I answered one of those.

**CHAIR:** That is very helpful, member for Capalaba. The time for this briefing has now expired. Thank you, member for South Brisbane, for the information you have provided today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters and parliamentary broadcast staff for their assistance. A transcript of these proceedings will be available in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 10.58 am.**