



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

North West Support School Burnie Upgrade

Presented to the Clerk of the House of Assembly in accordance with House of Assembly Sessional Order 321.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Ms Rattray (Deputy Chair)
Mr Hiscutt

House of Assembly

Ms Butler (Chair)
Ms Burnet
Mr Shelton

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Committee has the honour to report to the House of Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* and House of Assembly Sessional Order 321 on the -

North West Support School Burnie Upgrade

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve works to upgrade the North West Support School (NWSS) Burnie campus, to provide contemporary learning areas, associated support spaces, amenities and a new hydrotherapy pool for the students.
- 2.2 The NWSS operates campuses in Burnie and Devonport. The NWSS offers tailored education and therapy programs within a multi-disciplinary approach for children and young people with moderate to severe disabilities, from kindergarten through to Year 11 and 12.
- 2.3 In 2021, the Tasmanian Government committed to deliver upgrades to the NWSS Burnie and construction of a new purpose-built NWSS in Devonport, to provide modern, fit-for-purpose facilities for the NWSS community. The Tasmanian Government subsequently committed funding of \$62.15 million. Further commitments expanded the scope of the works to include hydrotherapy pools at both schools.
- 2.4 Of that funding commitment, \$14.4 million was allocated to upgrading the NWSS Burnie. Total funding for the NWSS Burnie now stands at \$15.378 million, as a result of a contribution of \$400,000 by the school itself and \$578,000 of residual School Support Program funding.
- 2.5 The existing NWSS Burnie campus is located at 36 Thorne Street, Acton. The site was formerly occupied by Acton Primary School, which closed in 2009. Following its closure, the site was redeveloped and reopened as an education hub, with the NWSS Burnie campus completed in April 2017. The campus is co-located with other DECYP services, including the Burnie Child and Family Learning Centre.
- 2.6 The NWSS Burnie campus occupies a former primary school site. It has not been built specifically for the purposes of delivering the education needs of students with disability.
- 2.7 The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) undertook extensive consultation for this project to determine community and stakeholder priorities for the upgrade. Feedback received focused on providing high-quality, contemporary learning and support for students and staff. This feedback has assisted in defining the scope of works to include larger, contemporary general learning areas (GLAs), improved external access from GLAs, more breakout spaces, more flexible/multi-purpose spaces, additional professional support spaces, and improved amenities.

- 2.8 The proposed works will include the following elements:
- redevelopment/upgrade works to increase the number of GLAs from 10 to a total of 12 GLAs;
 - improved access from internal learning areas to external play spaces including minor landscaping
 - upgrade of existing kitchen cabinetry to facilitate improved safety and provide alternative safe breakout spaces for students;
 - new undercover structures and walkways to improve all weather access for student drop-off and pick-up;
 - upgrade of existing spaces to provide breakout/regulation spaces, staff offices, meeting rooms, amenities, support rooms, and storage; and
 - a new accessible hydrotherapy pool and associated change and toilet facilities with internal access, storage and plant and equipment spaces along with separate external access to facilitate community use.
- 2.10 The new hydrotherapy pool will made available for community use outside of school hours (so as not to impact upon student use) and managed in liaison with the Department of Health. Separate external access to the pool has also been incorporated into the design to ensure no impact on the school's operations.

3 PROJECT COSTS

3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is \$12.65 million.

3.2 The following information taken from the DECYP submission provides detail on the funding for the capital program at both North West Support School (NWSS) campuses, the funding breakdown for the NWSS Burnie Redevelopment, and the cost estimate for the work as at the time of making the submission:

The 2024-25 Tasmanian State Budget committed \$62.15 million in the Capital Investment Program (CIP) for the NWSS. The CIP program budget for the NWSS is broken down across the Burnie and Devonport projects as follows:

	CIP FUNDING \$,000
Devonport New Campus	47,750
Burnie Redevelopment	14,400
Total NWSS CIP funding	62,150

The NWSS Burnie Campus Redevelopment total funding is broken down below:

Available Budget	\$,000
2024-2025 State Budget CIP	14,400
School Contribution	400
Residual Funding from previous Support School Program	578
Total Project Budget	15,378

The following table details the cost estimates for the project:

Description	Cost Estimate (\$,000)
Construction Cost (inc. site infrastructure upgrades)	9,665
Market Conditions and Escalation	2,115
Construction Contingency	1,178
Consultant Services	946
Statutory Fees / Insurances	212
Furniture/Equipment/IT	429

Tasmanian Government Art Scheme	80
DECYP Project Management	369
School Administration Support	60
Design Contingency	145
General Project and Post Occupancy Contingency	179
Total	15,378

...

The total budget estimate is summarised above and demonstrates sufficient market and escalation allowances, as well as a construction contingency to manage unforeseen circumstances that may arise during construction.

A staged construction program has been developed to minimise school operational impacts during construction and is anticipated to be undertaken over 18 months. Site infrastructure service upgrades are included in the construction cost.

The available budget for Burnie [NWSS Burnie Campus], based on current Quantity Surveyor (QS) advice, is summarised below and includes allowances for:

- \$2.115 million Market Loading and escalation
- \$1.178 million Construction Contingency
- \$324,000 Design, general and post occupancy contingencies.¹

¹ North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, pp. 16-17

4 EVIDENCE

4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday, 1 July 2026 with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to Function Room, Cradle Coast Authority, Burnie, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Kane Salter, Deputy Secretary Business Operations and Support, Department for Education, Children and Young People;
- Todd Williams, Director Facility Services, Department for Education, Children and Young People;
- Sarah Jane Murphy, Principal, North West Support School, Department for Education, Children and Young People; and
- David Gillies, Director 6ty° Architects.

The following Committee Members were present:

- Ms Jen Butler MP (Chair);
- Hon Tania Rattray MLC (Deputy Chair);
- Ms Helen Burnet MP;
- Hon Casey Hiscutt MLC; and
- Mr Mark Shelton MP.

Overview

4.2 The DECYP submission provided an overview of the NWSS and the proposed works at the NWSS Burnie:

The NWSS operates from two separate campus facilities. One located in Burnie and the other in Devonport. The catchment area for students attending the Burnie campus extends from Rocky Cape, Yolla, Ridgley through to Ulverstone and the outlying rural areas.²

...

Contemporary pedagogy at NWSS is a contextualised application of the system wide DECYP Pedagogical Framework and is defined by highly individualised, student-centred learning that responds to the complex cognitive, sensory, physical and emotional needs of students from kindergarten to Year 12.

Educational opportunities are aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), Working Towards Foundation Level Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, and Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) requirements. Learning is authentic, functional, and connected to real-world contexts, with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy across a broad and balanced curriculum, alongside targeted learning that supports communication, independence, wellbeing, and the development of essential life skills.

² North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, p. 5

NWSS supports students with autism, intellectual disability, physical and neurological conditions, and complex sensory and medical needs.

Learning environments intentionally uphold every student's fundamental right to communicate by ensuring access through their preferred communication methods, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems. Communication access is embedded across all learning contexts, enabling students to engage meaningfully and participate as active learners.

High staff-to-student ratios, embedded therapy, and structured yet flexible learning experiences ensure students are supported to actively engage, build capability and achieve their personal best within safe, inclusive and future-focused learning environments.

The redevelopment of the NWSS Burnie campus will enhance learning and operations by providing modern facilities that support inclusive and flexible education. New general learning areas (GLAs) and alternative learning spaces will allow personalised and small-group programs, while specialist facilities such as therapy rooms, the extended gymnasium, active learning areas, and a hydrotherapy pool will enable on-site delivery of wellbeing and allied health programs. Improved staff workspaces, meeting rooms, and a central leadership hub strengthen collaboration and coordination, and enhanced accessibility and clear zoning promote safety, dignity, and efficient day-to-day operations.³

4.3 The Committee asked the witnesses to provide some background information on the NWSS Burnie campus, including students the school supports, enrolment numbers, and the scope of learning the school can provide:

CHAIR - ... Just if you could provide us with a little bit of background, for the record, around the scope of the support school, i.e. the year groups and cohort that would be able to utilise the school?

Ms MURPHY - Yes, absolutely. At North West Support School, we cater for students from kinder through to year 12. All students who come into a support school need to go through a nomination process with a committee. Families can choose to nominate their young person for a place in a support school. There are a set of criteria around entry into a support school, being a severe intellectual disability, and that may include other disabilities, like physical disabilities or autism.

At the Burnie campus, we've got 67 students who are enrolled in our school. We currently have 10 classrooms that we are running at the school. We had eight classes when we moved to the site in 2017, and we've got an additional two spaces for classes in the new build. Obviously, there is a commitment to 12 GLAs which will allow us to spread some of our class groupings.

We have 23 teachers that work at the Burnie campus, 53 teacher assistants and then we have about 15 specialists who work across both sites, including occupational therapy, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, school health nurses, ed support specialists, vision services.

All of our students in our school have an individual education program. They are delivered by the teachers who support setting up planning documentation to allow our young people to access the Australian curriculum, with a big focus on supporting independence and building communication.

³ North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, pp. 4-5

CHAIR - ...In follow-up to that, around your enrolment demand: you have 67 students currently. Has that increased or decreased over the last four years? And do you have any idea of the expected demand in the future?

Ms MURPHY - It's stayed fairly stable over those four years because we actually, when the nomination process happens, they go to a committee. At the committee, all of the applications are gone through by committee members who then ascertain whether or not those young people meet the criteria for placement in a support school. There is then subsequent conversation around space and capacity within the support school to be able to accommodate for any of those students.⁴

Determining the Scope of the Works

4.4 The redevelopment of the NWSS Burnie campus was a 2021 State Government Election commitment. After this commitment, DECYP undertook a consultation process to develop a master plan to determine the school community's priorities and inform the scope of the redevelopment works:

Community and stakeholder consultation has assisted in defining the scope of works to include contemporary learning areas, associated support spaces, and amenities.⁵

...

DECYP undertakes extensive community engagement for all major capital works projects and initiated community consultation for this project in 2023. Through this consultation feedback was received on the infrastructure needs of NWSS in order to provide high-quality contemporary learning and support for students and staff.

A community engagement outcomes report (Attachment 2) was prepared following the consultation process and published through DECYP's consultation platform, school communication channels, and DECYP's website.

The project working group (PWG) comprising representatives from the school, school association committee, DECYP and the design consultant team, have met fortnightly to progress the design and project.

Staff have been consulted during the design phase and feedback incorporated into the design.

Consultation outcomes directly informed the development of a site master plan reflecting key community priorities for teaching, learning, student wellbeing, and site functionality.

In response, the PWG developed a concept design that enables priority works in line with the agreed scope to be delivered within the approved budget.

The concept plan (Attachment 1) for the proposed works was shared with the broader school community in May 2026, and the consultation process was promoted via the school's communication channels, the DECYP website and social media. As part of the community consultation process, staff and parents/carers had the opportunity to provide any additional feedback on the design proposal.

To date there has been a small number of submissions seeking further information and a significant number providing positive feedback on the proposed concept plan. The

⁴ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 8-9

⁵ *North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, p. 3

consultation period is open until 12 June 2026. The results of the consultation process were not available at the time of writing and will be shared with the committee at the hearing.⁶

4.5 The Committee asked the witnesses to outline how the consultation process had been conducted and received:

Mr SHELTON - ...Ms Murphy: are you happy with the consultation and the work and the collaboration that you've seen coming through this whole process with the Department and with the architects?...

Ms MURPHY - ...I would actually say the consultation has probably been more extensive than what I even imagined that it would be. We have our project working groups. We've then had multiple workshops that all of our staff have been involved in over a period of time. Our school association's been involved in workshopping. We've had our Devonport team having input to Burnie, our Burnie team having input to Devonport. So, I would actually say we've probably had more extensive input than what I even thought we would have the opportunity to do.

We've been really fortunate with 6ty° in that everything that's come to the table has then transpired into the next lot of plans, even down to really small details about where we want labels placed on student bag lockers and all of those things. I think every time we come back to consult, we add more information. That gets taken away and it comes back in to be representative in the plans. And I think in the document that Todd shared on the most recent consultation, there was quite a bit of staff input towards the consultation as well. We're really happy with the opportunities we've been given to have a voice in this project.⁷

...

Ms BURNET -...I'm just wondering in relation to your staffing, what's the gender mix? Is it mainly women?

Ms MURPHY - Yes, it is.

Ms BURNET - Have they had input into design? I mean, how much has there been -

Ms MURPHY - All of our staff have been involved. Within our workshops, we've had teachers involved, teacher assistants, admin, our grounds people have been involved. Anyone that works in the school, we've had representation from all groups.⁸

Options Assessment

4.6 The Committee asked the witnesses about advice DECYP had provided to the Government on the options to deliver on its election commitment. In particular, the Committee was interested in advice about consolidating the NWSS into a single,

⁶ North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, pp. 6-7

⁷ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 4-5

⁸ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 27

new campus at Penguin versus upgrading the NWSS Burnie campus and building a new NWSS Devonport campus (the specific election commitment):

Ms RATTRAY - ...I want to ask around that overarching question: it says in the executive summary of the Community Engagement Outcomes Report - North West Support School that in 2021, there was a commitment to provide upgrades to the Devonport campus and the Burnie campus, but there was also advice received to consider another option to deliver this commitment consolidating two campuses. So, can we have, for the public record, some information relating to how we've arrived back to the two campuses and not proceeded with the one campus for a north-west community, similar to what other communities, like a northern community and a southern community, already have?

Mr SALTER - I'm happy to go first. I'm not sure if we should be just doing a direct comparison with north and south. I mean, there are two existing sites at the moment. As you referred to, the government had an election commitment for a new site at Devonport and to upgrade Burnie. As can occur with projects as they're progressed, if there are other options to consider, then -

Ms RATTRAY - 'Received advice', it says here. What sort of advice did that look like?

Mr SALTER - Well, when there was advice to consider that we had a new school at Penguin and whether there was merit in considering one site compared to the election commitment, importantly, the government and the Department, as we go through these, place heavy emphasis on community consultation. So that process was undertaken to get the voice of the community, rather than simply assume the option that was being considered was a better option than others, per the report. And I think I've read those stats, again, but there wasn't overwhelming support to go to one site, so taking on board the election commitment and the community voice, that wasn't proceeded with. Hence, we're now here at the committee with the Burnie site today and the Devonport site tomorrow.⁹

...

CHAIR - ... it states in the document, on page 3, the government received advice that it could consider another option to deliver this commitment, consolidating the two campuses into a new single support school on the former Penguin Primary School site. Who was that advice from?

Mr SALTER - That advice was from the Department.

...

CHAIR - Do you know anything about that advice from a Department perspective? Do you know why that advice was given and what the foundation was behind that advice?

Mr SALTER - I can say - at the summary summary level, and again Sarah Jane or Todd to add - there was a vacant or unused site at Penguin which had potential to be repurposed in the same way that we're redoing the Burnie site, the location had some potential in terms of being located relatively close to the two school sites. Hence that was put to government as an option should community support that as an option. Sarah Jane will say better than me. Being on one

⁹ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 5

site can have benefits. But I just emphasise that we put it to community and community responded.

Mr WILLIAMS - If I may add, too, whilst we receive government funding to deliver commitments, our role is to assess how we best get that outcome. It's appropriate for us not just to be tunnel-visioned in delivering an outcome. It is appropriate to open up and assess options and consider those options, and that's what we did in this instance.

CHAIR - I agree. Do we know what ballpark figure the cost would have been, instead of doing the two sites? What the economies of scale would have been for consolidating those two into the one greenfield? Was there ever any costing done of that one site, the Penguin site?

Mr SALTER - Given it's been a while ago, I would have to go back and check whether we got any reliable figure for the site. I would suggest that any figure would have been extremely high level. But I'd have to go back and check the advice at that time.

...

Ms MURPHY - I don't believe there were costings done at the time. My understanding was it was purely a geographical discussion.¹⁰

4.7 DECYP subsequently provided further information about the advice it had provided to Government regarding the option of consolidating the NWSS on one site at Penguin:

Initial advice was provided by DECYP to the previous Minister for Education in late 2021 which outlined a potential option to consolidate NWSS' separate campuses at Burnie and Devonport into a single consolidated site utilising the vacant former Penguin Primary School facilities. This advice identified:

-The Penguin site was larger than the existing NWSS campuses, and the existing infrastructure was in overall good condition and could be retrofitted for use as a support school.

-Consolidation of the NWSS campuses would reduce duplication of resources and infrastructure and provide potential student benefits as a result of co-location with Penguin District School.

-Savings resulting from reduced duplication of staff were costed at around \$80,000 per annum, as well as additional (uncosted) savings from reduced utility and maintenance costs associated with operating multiple sites (and two hydrotherapy pools).

-Travel distance modelling showed that more than 100 of the 137 current NWSS students would experience an increase in travel distance to attend NWSS at Penguin. More than 40 of these students would experience an increase of 20 kilometres or more.

-Approximately 75 per cent of NWSS students accessed the Devonport campus by bus.

-The Department was requested by the NWSS Association to provide information on the potential to provide more (direct) bus routes and services to overcome the increase in travel distances for students. No estimates were developed on the cost to provide these additional bus services, though it was noted this was likely to be a significant additional recurrent cost and would be a greater level of service than was being provided for the other two support schools in the State. A possible funding source for these additional services were the potential capital and operational cost savings.

¹⁰ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 7-8

- Some School Association members had already expressed opposition to the Penguin option.
- There was potential for community division and opposition to the Penguin option.

A Minute was subsequently provided to the previous Minister for Education. This Minute contained:

- Advice that unanimous support had been received from the NWSS Association for the Penguin option (subject to significant additional bus services being provided to existing students through a transition period).
- Advice that there remained an inherent risk of opposition from the broader school community in Devonport and Burnie but that this would be tested through consultation.
- Advice that detailed building and infrastructure assessments and quantity surveyor cost estimates were required to determine the cost to deliver the Penguin option, and that these would be undertaken later in 2023, together with cost estimates for the additional student bus services. It was noted that due to high construction cost escalations, it was likely that further funding in addition to the funding already committed in the 2021 election commitment would be required.
- The proposed consultation process and related communication in 2023 to test the Penguin option with the school and broader community and seek feedback.

The previous Minister approved this Minute and DECYP commenced the consultation process with the school and broader community on the Penguin option as an alternative to the original election commitment.

...

As per above, no capital or detailed operational cost estimates (including additional bus services) were developed for the Penguin option prior to the school and community consultation process undertaken in 2023. Based on the outcome of the consultation process, the previous Minister announced that the Penguin option would not be pursued and that the Government would honour its original 2021 election commitment. Following this decision, the Department did not progress any cost estimates for Penguin. ¹¹

- 4.8 The Committee also sought to understand the consultation feedback DECYP had received regarding the option of consolidation versus the election commitment, and how this had influenced the decision to proceed with an upgrade of the NWSS Burnie and a new NWSS in Devonport:

Ms RATTRAY - The figures that have been provided are: 47 per cent of respondents of the 136 ... submissions were opposed to the Penguin site, and 39 per cent of the submissions were in favour of the Penguin option. Not a lot of difference there. Is that your assessment, or am I looking at it somewhat differently?

Mr SALTER - I'll go to Sarah Jane in a second, but when you have one-in-two saying that they're not in support, I would say that is a significant number of families. So, you know, families being part of the responses, it needed overwhelming support to be able to take that option further. That overwhelming support was not there, so we took on the voice of community to proceed with the election commitment and the two sites. Sarah Jane will -

¹¹ DECYP Response to Questions on Notice-NWSS Burnie and Devonport, pp 3-4

Ms RATTRAY - I'm just interested in the overwhelming support. When it was 47 per cent no to Penguin and 39 per cent yes to Penguin, I don't see that as overwhelming, but I'm happy to have it explained.

Mr SALTER - For clarification, I said there wasn't overwhelming support to go to one site. If the response had come back with something like, you know, 90 per cent of respondents wanted to progress consideration of the one site, then I would say that was overwhelming. When you've got 50 per cent who do not support the option, I would say that is a very significant voice from community; that you'd be, you know, going against the voice of one in two to proceed to one site.

Ms RATTRAY - Would it be fair to say that there was some emphasis placed on the fact that it was a 2021 Tasmanian government election commitment? Would that have factored into the assessment as well?

Ms MURPHY - For Devonport families, the election commitment came as a new school for Devonport, and at the time of that, we had 67 families at the school. So, if you look at those statistics around the families that were present at the school, we need to fulfil what the election commitment was - and it was a new school for us at Devonport.

Mr HISCUTT - Just to follow up on that a little bit more, do you have a breakdown of those 136 submissions - those that came from staff for and against the move, those that came from the community for and against? Sorry if I've missed it in this document we've just received. I think it doesn't make that differentiation. It does in the new one that you sent through, the one that was just in response to the concept plan. It actually differentiates those responses - but not for the move to Penguin documentation. Or if you don't, could you provide that?

...

Mr HISCUTT - I guess I'm wondering whether - Because that doesn't give you a breakdown of those 80 responses that were parents community. That might have been 90 per cent supported it and 10 didn't, but then all the others might be different. Not that I suspect that is the case, but if we could get a breakdown.

Mr SALTER - So a breakdown in terms of in favour and not in favour?

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, by each of those cohorts.

...

Mr SALTER - Yes. If we could take that on notice.¹²

4.9 DECYP subsequently provided a breakdown of the responses from its consultation relating to consolidating the NWSS into a single campus at Penguin:

Through the consultation process undertaken in 2023 by the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) on the option to consolidate the two North West Support School (NWSS) campuses into a single site at Penguin, the primary mechanism for feedback was an online survey form. 103 unique survey responses were received during the consultation period.

-Of these, 53 were opposed to the Penguin option, 41 were in favour of the Penguin option, and nine were considered neutral.

¹² Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 6-7

-Of the 53 survey responses opposed to Penguin, 50 were from parents/carers or community members, and three were from NWSS/DECYP staff.

-Of the 41 survey responses in favour of Penguin, 23 were NWSS/DECYP staff, 14 were parents/carers or community members and four were service providers.

-Of the nine neutral survey responses, five were from NWSS staff, three were from community members and one was a service provider.

In addition to the online survey form, DECYP received 29 emails providing feedback on the Penguin option.

-Of the 29 emails, 19 were from NWSS/DECYP staff, seven were from parents/carers or community, and three were from service providers.

-Of the 29 emails, 12 were in favour of Penguin, nine were neutral and eight were opposed.

From the consultation process, it was clear a greater number of respondents were opposed to the consolidated Penguin option and that those opposed were overwhelmingly parents/carers and community members. Of those in favour of the Penguin option, the majority were NWSS/DECYP staff and service providers.

The primary reasons provided by those opposed to the Penguin option were the additional distances and travel times to get to and from the school and the perceived impacts this would have on students and their families. Of the submissions received in favour of the Penguin option, the bringing together of the school onto a single campus co-located with Penguin District School and the operational and learning benefits of this for students and staff were cited as the primary reasons.¹³

Student Capacity after Upgrade

4.10 The Committee understood the number of GLAs would increase from 10 to 12 with the upgrade works. The Committee sought to understand the impact the additional GLAs would have on student numbers. The witnesses noted the difficulty with predicting demand, but also noted that student numbers had been stable primarily due to limited capacity to take additional students:

Ms BURNET - Getting back to the Chair's question around capacity, what do you see as the largest number of students likely in the new model?

Ms MURPHY - It's hard to put a number on it because it's so dependent on the cohort of students. If you were to average our classrooms out, currently on average you would have six students per classroom. Depending on individual student's needs, you may have a few more, you may have a few less, but our average is around about six in the space.

Ms BURNET - Is that dependent on their physical disability for the most part or autism? How does it work?

Ms MURPHY - Yeah, that can - it depends, based around their disability. I shared this morning that about 65 per cent of the student population at North West Support School have an autism spectrum disorder and then about 12 per cent have a physical disability. So, depending on what their needs are, will depend upon which spaces that they're working with and how we configure our class groups.¹⁴

¹³ DECYP Response to Questions on Notice-NWSS Burnie and Devonport, pp 2-3

¹⁴ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 9

...

Mr SHELTON - A quick question about the capacity: you mentioned that there's an extra couple of GLAs in the building, and you've talked about half a dozen per room. Initially, I would imagine that if you used all the space with the cohort you have there, it would make it easier, but it is about building capacity for the future and having that space to be able to deal with what might be coming your way. My question is really: most schools have an idea of what's happening within their community about the need coming forward. Has there been any work done in that area? I understand the committee does the dealing and that sort of thing, but do you have an idea of where it's heading in the future?

Ms MURPHY - It's actually really difficult to ascertain that, because parents get to choose where their child is educated. The support school is one option. Even if we looked at the statistics of disability and the rate of disability on the north-west coast, we can't ascertain where parents will actually choose to have their young people. For the majority, if you consider Northern Support School, Southern and North West Support School, we only have 400 students between us, roughly, that are accessing support schools. I'm sure Kane might be able to give you the numbers on how many students are in schools in Tasmania. Our portion of young people with disabilities, the majority of them are in their local area school. It is hard to get a statistic on how many will come into the support school, but if we look at the averages, our numbers have stayed fairly stable, based on the environment that we have, because we don't have provision for additional.¹⁵

Hydrotherapy Pool

- 4.11 The upgrade includes construction of a hydrotherapy pool. The Committee asked the witnesses to explain the benefits for students of having access to a hydrotherapy pool:

CHAIR - ... Would you be able to talk us through the current - well, I suppose it's a spa arrangement, and what a new hydrotherapy pool would provide, insofar as therapeutic care for the students.

Ms MURPHY - Previously, prior to COVID, we were able to have the hydrotherapy pool at the hospital and then we would take a core group of students who had active hydrotherapy programs to the hospital. After COVID, that facility closed and we have the small hydrotherapy spa that you saw this morning in your walk-around. That is timetabled back-to-back for each of our young participants. So, if you can envisage, there's changing, there's hoisting, there's into the spa, undertaking the program, hoisting, changing. Each of those sessions takes about an hour, and if you look at how many hours we have in a school day, with taking out our breaks, we're not able to get - we can get five students through in a day into that spa.

Hydrotherapy and access to a pool is absolutely beneficial for all of our young people, particularly those with physical disabilities, but it can also be fabulous for regulation and for young people that need access to water as part of their regulation. The hydrotherapy spa will allow, instead of having one person in the water, we can have all of those five young people that would have - we can have them in at once into the pool, allowing more students over the course of the week to have access to hydrotherapy than what we can offer now. We really have to prioritise the timetabling of the hydrotherapy spa.¹⁶

¹⁵ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 11

¹⁶ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 11

...

Mr HISCUTT - ... the spa is currently used for regulation. Can you define that,...? Like, what that means in this context?

Ms MURPHY - Yes. So, for young people that have autism that find it difficult to regulate their sensory system, they often find water to be very calming and a really lovely space to actually regulate, ready to then engage in learning activities.¹⁷

- 4.12 The Committee was aware that the Government had committed to providing community access to the NWSS Burnie campus hydrotherapy pool which would be managed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Health. The Committee sought further detail from the witnesses on this arrangement:

CHAIR - ... when we were going through our witness statement, I asked a question around who will be responsible, whether it be the Department of Health, the Department of Education, for the ongoing costs and maintenance of the hydrotherapy pool. Would you be able to speak to that conversation that we had, and the uncertainty still around whether an MOU has been established, or who will have responsibility around that hydrotherapy pool?

Mr WILLIAMS - The overall responsibility for the asset rests with DECYP as the asset owner. The commitment that has been made is that the community will have access to the pool outside of school hours so they're not interfering with school activity. That will be done through the leadership of the Department of Health. And we'll have an agreement with the Department of Health that will look to how we manage the arrangements, including cost of that use as well, the details of which, we've only just started a conversation because we're a couple of years away from becoming operational. But the underlying approach that we have for community use, because we do encourage community use of our assets, is that it's on a basis that it doesn't impact on the school and it's on a cost-recovery basis.¹⁸

- 4.13 The Committee asked about the community benefits of having public access to the hydrotherapy pool:

Ms BURNET - We note that there are a lot of publicly accessible pools across Tasmania which have come to the end of their lives and are inaccessible or closing. Presumably, this would be quite an asset for this area around Acton?

Ms MURPHY - I believe that it's for the Burnie community, not just Acton, as there isn't an accessible hydrotherapy pool. There are other pool facilities available within Burnie. However, I believe part of the government commitment in stating that the pools in the schools would be accessible was to provide a facility for the broader community.

Mr WILLIAMS - If I just might add, you do have older young people at the school that are in years 10, 11, and 12 and in another five years, accessing a hydrotherapy pool on their old school site would be a very positive thing for them, I would think.¹⁹

¹⁷ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 15

¹⁸ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 13

¹⁹ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 14

- 4.14 The Committee recognised there had been some school community resistance to providing public access to the hydrotherapy pool. Some of these concerns related to the pool being located and designed with public access in mind, rather than what might be considered best for students. Another concern was the additional costs arising from the inclusion of public access requirements in the hydrotherapy pool design. The Committee sought further evidence from the witnesses regarding public access concerns:

CHAIR - ... There was some criticism in the consultation that the design of the hydrotherapy pool may be keeping the community in mind and it may have led to there being additional costs for the hydrotherapy pool because the design may not just be for the students; it may also be for the community. Can you speak to that criticism?

Mr WILLIAMS - Absolutely. In considering community use, we had to put it in the location that allows for community use, and that is so that it doesn't impact on school and is easily accessible. Having a hydrotherapy pool in the heart of a school is not the best place to have community use. Yes, we have considered that location on the edges of the school so that it can be more accessible for community.

CHAIR - Will the cost of the pool be more expensive because it will also be catering to community use outside of school hours?

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes, it would be.

Ms RATTRAY - ... Given that this whole project is pretty much predicated on community input, I note that from the 18 submissions received, 10 were submissions from parents and carers or community members opposing the use of the hydrotherapy pool. If my maths is correct, that's over 50 per cent. What's going to happen when they say, 'We don't want the community in the pool'?

Ms MURPHY - The community access to the pool was a government election commitment.

Ms RATTRAY - So it won't make any difference if there's not community support for accessing the pool outside of school hours?

Mr SALTER - What we're seeking to do to mitigate those concerns is, (a), that it's outside of school hours; that, as Todd has outlined, we enter into an agreement on cost recovery and maintenance so that as much as possible we mitigate something that happens that means the facility isn't available for school the next day, knowing that equipment can have issues at any point in time. It's not seeking to ignore those concerns but mitigate those in a robust MOU with the Department of Health so that there's no impact on Sarah Jane and the team in their day-to-day responsibilities.

Ms BURNET - Following on from some of this discussion, I note that there's a ramp going into the pool so it's completely accessible, which is fabulous. I also note the very out-of-date spa arrangement. You've said that a hoist had to be used because there were stairs and we were warned about the floors that are wet by nature of that space. I've also read the comments and there were concerns about the hygiene associated with various members of the public using the pool and the time when the pool would be available outside of school hours for the general public. My understanding, from what I'm hearing, is that you can mitigate all of those risks that were associated and brought up through public comment?

Ms MURPHY - We'll need to work with the Department of Health around that.

Mr WILLIAMS - We're hoping to. Outside of a major catastrophe that happens - and we can't pre-empt those, but we're mindful of having responsibility to ensure we can keep using the

school for school support and school needs. We've got to work through that with the Department of Health. That'll include cleaning and maintenance and the responsibilities that are associated with those.²⁰

...

Mr SHELTON - A quick question about the cost: I would have thought if the pool could be used after school hours and of the weekend for those in genuine need of a therapy pool - because when we say 'public access', we're talking about people with genuine need for a hydrotherapy pool -

Ms RATTRAY - Is that like a knee-replacement person?

Mr SHELTON - Yeah, seniors or rehab from the hospital. If the Health Department's got hold of it, then they could manage that. If it has to be heated through the winter time and of a weekend, if you've got somebody using it, it would be a benefit to the school to have that extra income from that to offset the costs.

Mr SALTER - I might just quickly answer that. It's being undertaken on a basis of need, not seeking any sort of profit from the utilities around cost recovery. If I could just clarify the question around the cost of the pool - and anyone correct me if I'm getting this wrong, in terms of the functionality and size of the pool, that's determined by the needs of the school. For example, it's not being made bigger for community use. The location of the hydrotherapy pool on the site has a relatively small cost in the overall budget, which isn't taking away from the core priorities of the school. I just wanted to clarify that.

Ms RATTRAY - Is the other hydrotherapy pool connected to the other two, the north and the southern site, they'll have public access as well?

Ms MURPHY - No, they don't.

Ms RATTRAY - So, do you think it's realistic to say that there will be for this one, really?

Mr SALTER - The government policy is that there will be community use and, hence, we're engaging with Department of Health to achieve that.²¹

...

Mr HISCUTT - ...I just noted from some of the comments and observations of the plan that, you know, if you were in the new GLAs on the north of the site that there is a significant distance to get to that pool, as opposed to the central location now. Do you see that as a challenge to overcome? How is that being addressed?

Ms MURPHY - That has been a big part of our consultation process after we were advised that the pools would have public access, and we needed to look at making sure that they were in a location. Regardless of how we set the school up, someone is always going to have to transition at some point. I shared this morning that we've been really intentional in the way we're designing the classroom spaces, so we've got transition corridors that are really easy for young people to navigate, unlike what they are now, where it's making your way through a whole lot of equipment and the like. So, the environment that we're constructing in the build we believe will support smoother transitions for our young people.²²

²⁰ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 13-14

²¹ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 14-15

²² Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 15

Design of the Works

- 4.15 The Committee had visited the NWSS Burnie campus earlier and been shown the identified accessibility issues across the site. The Committee asked the witnesses how the upgrade design would improve accessibility:

Mr HISCUTT - ...as part of the accessibility, it says 'wider' than the standard doorways and corridors. I was going to ask how that is affected by the current existing structure...

CHAIR - ...as a follow-up to Mr Hiscutt's question, you could talk us through some of the design principles that have been included around accessibility. One of the questions that we spoke about this morning was the complexity of this design, because it is apparently a universal design. Could you provide, for the committee's benefit, some insight into that information?...

Mr GILLIES - I think, to get universal access through any building, we need to have level services. The challenge with this site is that there's a fair bit of slope on it, and getting to certain parts of the playground requires thinking around paths that people in wheelchairs and people with disabilities can navigate. So, we've purposely designed the outside play spaces so that there's great pathways so that they can access all parts of those playgrounds.

As part of that, we've also looked at door widths, types of doors that we've used, because there are challenges in the current school with sliding doors, and trying to keep control over students when doors are open, because they have an opportunity there to get out of the space that they're in while the door's open. So, door selection has been quite important in that process.

It's really giving them access to all parts of the school so they've got that equal opportunity to use any bit of the school that they need to, and then have the flexibility, once they get there, to perform the education processes that they need.²³

- 4.16 The witnesses provided additional evidence about the design of the works and the benefits for student learning:

Mr WILLIAMS - ...we had that conversation today about the classrooms, and with those classrooms come all the associated support spaces, storage spaces, amenities, so they're all in the right location. And you would have seen today that the indoor-outdoor connection is not strong, yet that's been a focus in the design. So, the classroom has all the space and amenity and connection that it needs. And that's part of contemporary design for all schools that we try to - and it shines through here in the plans that we've got today. You saw that firsthand how it's not currently doing that in the constrained way that it is with the spaces as they currently work.

Ms BURNET - I was very interested to see today the use of space, particularly for the number of staff, and the very innovative, should I say, way that you've used some of that space. There seemed to be quite a lot of almost overcrowding, if you like, or spaces that might have been used for something else were used for staff. Can you just - following on about that connection to the outside - I think each GLA has that connection to the outside in their plans - but also more of a clarity in the wayfinding and how that is beneficial?

Ms MURPHY - In the new design, all classes will have access to be able to run that indoor/outdoor program as needed, and then that outdoor play space is then also immediately connected to the larger playground. So, we're reducing transitions through the school,

²³ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 15-16

internal transitions, because, as Todd said, each classroom has been designed so that it's its own hub. Students can seamlessly move from the classroom to the outdoor area, then into the beyond play space. And we have been really intentional. On the plan, you will see the corridor is fairly straight-through so that students can enter, follow through and then come to an exit point. Whereas at the moment, the way our school is designed, it's a little bit like a rabbit warren, and navigating to get from one space to the other can be quite confusing.

...

Ms BURNET - If I may, if you could just explain the important connections for staff, as well, to collaborate.

Ms MURPHY - One of the things that we've looked at in the design, because obviously we are in a constrained space, so we've looked at opportunities to collaborate by having larger staff collaboration hubs, because we really wanted to prioritise getting those therapy spaces within the classroom spaces. So, through negotiation and our workshops and teachers, we've come to a point where we've created staff spaces that allow for open collaboration. Because, as it stands at the moment, we've got these small pockets of offices that exist throughout the school, and we've been able to bring all of our staff facilities into one area. That includes offices, it includes staff rooms, it includes their resource rooms, all of the workstations. Within each of those staff workstation spaces, you'll see at the end on the new plan, which is probably really tiny, there's actually some pods in there that allow for, if a staff member needs to work independently on a Teams call, those types of things. We've factored that into the staff workspaces as well. But the opportunity to collaborate as a full team has been really important.²⁴

...

Ms BURNET - ... how does that sort of sensitive design, how does that inform those spaces? We talked about light, but things like round windows or things that kind of soften spaces for children who may have special needs. How has that been informed? How has your design been informed?

Mr GILLIES - We teamed up with a mainland-based company who are experienced in neurodiverse design, Hames Sharley. They came down at the start of the project. They were very much involved in the briefing of the project, so they assist us in providing that sort of information.²⁵

- 4.17 The Committee also heard there would be a significant increase in support/therapy spaces. This would benefit students and their families by removing a barrier to establishing National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service agreements for students under which service providers can provide sessions within the school:

Ms RATTRAY - I heard you say this morning that you have NDIS service agreements. Is that for each of the students? They all have their individual service agreement. You also said that you're not accepting any new service agreements at the moment. Can you just give us some explanation around that?

Ms MURPHY - Yes, across all schools in Tasmania, any child who accesses the NDIS, there can be an establishment of a service agreement with an NDIS provider. That details all of the qualifications of the NDIS providers, what goals they will be working on, what the agreed ways

²⁴ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 16-17

²⁵ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, p. 27

of working are, and those service providers will often come into school because that is a really safe place for our young people to access therapy, and it means that it is not an additional transition out of the school for families as well.

However, at our Burnie campus, where you have 67 students, if everyone wanted a service agreement established for therapists coming on site, at the moment we only have three therapy spaces that are available to us to access and, as you can imagine, trying to rotate that and make that serviceable - in the new model with breakout and therapy spaces, we move from three to 17, so that will allow a greater opportunity for us to have those external NDIS providers coming in to complement our program, because our NDIS providers are also part of our team around the child, so it's really important that we can have those relationships.

...

Mr WILLIAMS - ... the additional support spaces are there to support the students, and having an increased number is what we're after with this development.²⁶

4.18 The Committee also asked the witnesses what specific energy efficiency measures were being pursued through the design:

Mr HISCUTT - We just talked about energy on 9.3.1, appropriate overhangs and new insulation and incorporating double glazing into the redeveloped building, which we've established is quite a lot of it, and there were new roofs involved; has the consideration been given to solar panels at all?

Mr SALTER - We haven't had discussions on solar panels as yet.

...

Mr HISCUTT - Do you want to talk to that at all, why? I would have thought with new infrastructure that would have been a fairly cost effective way to keep future energy prices down ...-

Mr WILLIAMS - Our focus has been delivering on the learning areas for the school, and acknowledging that there's a cost to the solar, an upfront cost. Yes, there is a repayment term, I understand that can vary from 10 to 15 years, but our focus with the budget that we have available is to deliver on the learning areas and the support areas.

Mr HISCUTT - So, there's not enough money in the budget to do it, would be the not-quite-as-polite way to say it?...

Ms BURNET - I want to follow up on that, because I think the energy component, the paragraph here in 9.3.1 says there's an opportunity to significantly reduce energy consumption, but could you just step us through how you're actually doing that, and can you also just talk, Todd, about is it always a retrofitting exercise to put solar panels on Education Department buildings?

Mr WILLIAMS - I might get David to talk more about the energy consumption of the building, then I'm happy to follow up and talk about retrofitting.

Mr GILLIES - Are we talking about the power usage of the building?

Ms BURNET - Energy efficiency in design.

²⁶ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 10-11

Mr GILLIES - Well, as part of the NCC, we've got to provide a section J report, so the whole building will be assessed for its energy efficiency. That includes insulation, double glazing and those sorts of aspects, and we will certainly be doing that report and then incorporating those features into the building.

Ms BURNET - I'm sorry, but that kind of doesn't answer a significant issue around making - you know, like building in the energy efficiency. Like, is it through insulation, double glazing? What are the things that are going to make this building a lot more energy efficient?

Mr GILLIES - Well, the external fabric of the building will be treated to provide that energy efficiency- or the seal, if you like - to control the temperature within the building.

Ms BURNET - And what about lights?

Mr GILLIES - Lights and air conditioning and the power consumption, so, that will be assessed when the electrical engineer starts to have a look at the design for the operations of the building.

Mr WILLIAMS - I think all those principles that you mentioned about lighting - and Sarah Jane talked about lighting but, you know, the double glazing and insulation and building fabric are all the key points about how we aim to be more efficient. The more broader solar discussion: generally, it is retrofitting solar to schools and we have been doing some of that and, just to finish, it can be challenging because you are working with old infrastructure and fitting new componentry to it. So, yes, there's an assessment of the electrical capability of the site, the switchboard of the site, the roof of the site, you know, is it an appropriate time to put solar on it? So there is -

Ms RATTRAY - It's got a new roof, so yes.

Mr SALTER - Not over the whole school.

Ms BURNET - Is it just a different pot of money?

Mr WILLIAMS - It does sound easy, but retrofitting on aged infrastructure can be challenging.

Mr SALTER - I think there is mention of different programs. The government has had a separate allocation for investment in solar panels. That has had prioritisation on how those funds have been used. But at this point in time, as Todd just said, prioritising learning infrastructure has meant the solar panels aren't being put on at this point.

Mr SHELTON - Just tying the two together with your solar panels and energy efficiency and the pool, you know, I see that down the track, as you said, Kane, there are different grants every now and again, but if you're going to have an indoor pool, it's got to be heated 24/7. I presume the temperature that it's heated to for a therapy pool is about three degrees higher than what it is in most cases. There is a fair bit of energy use, and the pool will be somewhat of a drain on the - excuse the pun - energy the school uses. If solar, if it could be at all fitted in, you don't need a battery, the pool will take all the energy that solar can produce just to keep it to that temperature and then offset the cost to the school, of course. I'd tie that together.

Mr HISCUTT - With the conversation about insulation and double glazing, with the existing walls that are not being destroyed, are we coming back through and putting new windows in?

Mr GILLIES - Budget permitting. We'll see how we go. When they do the section J assessment, they take all that into account, of it potentially not being replaced. They will work those into those calculations.²⁷

Undertaking Construction Work in a Sensitive School Environment

4.19 The Committee recognised there would be significant disruption within the school during construction, and sought to understand how the works would be managed to ensure school operations could continue while accommodating the specific needs of students:

Ms RATTRAY - ...I'd just be interested to have on the public record how it's planned to deal with the disruption of the build, given that there are some sensitivities around the school as it works and as it functions now - if we can have some understanding of that on the public record. We talked a little bit about it this morning onsite, but those conversations are best put on this record.

Mr WILLIAMS - ...It is front and centre how we continue to operate and be safe in a school in doing redevelopment; it's a major focus of what we do.

...

...It is going to be a disruption. Our staging plan will be developed around keeping the school safe and operational. We will be looking at the opportunities that we have outside of school and term breaks to do that. Part of our procurement process when we go to tender is we ask the contractors to put in their program, what their program looks like and that will be part of our assessment as well. I'm not sure if Sarah Jane and David - we're starting to work through what that looks like, but I think those principles of being safe and continuing to be operational and working around the school where we have to, they will absolutely occur, and we've got to get into that to that detail; but it's front and centre.

Ms MURPHY - And taking into account the learnings from Northern Support School and Southern Support School during their works and using that to inform the staging plan.

Mr GILLIES - So, we've started looking at a holistic staging plan of how the school might operate whilst various pieces of building work are happening, down to the point of the types of hoardings that we are going to use as well, just to provide materials that aren't going to injure students as they transition past these temporary walls. We've started thinking about spaces, materials that might be used in those sorts of situations.²⁸

Project Cost

4.20 The Committee closely scrutinised the project cost, and noted significant contingencies and allowances for escalation and market conditions had been included in the project cost estimate. The Committee sought to explore these matters further with the witnesses:

Mr SHELTON - ...so, the quantity surveyor is saying - just to get this right, the quantity surveyor is saying at this point in time the construction cost is around 9.6, top line?

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes.

²⁷ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 19-21

²⁸ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 17-18

Mr SHELTON - So, 9.6, and so he's saying that in 18 months over the build time that there could be a possibility of escalation and market conditions that could cost another 20 per cent; is that what the quantity surveyor is saying?

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes, that's the advice that we're getting from the quantity surveyor.

Mr SHELTON - ... what happens to that 2 mil if it's not spent?

Mr WILLIAMS - It will be spent. It will be part of the project. I'm sure Sarah Jane has a very long list of things that she'd like to do.

Mr SHELTON - So the project would expand to cater for the underspend; is that what you're saying?

Mr WILLIAMS - I'm saying that the project would work within the budget allocation to deliver an outcome for the North West Support School. Whilst costs have gone up and down over time -

Mr SHELTON - We expect them to go up.

Mr WILLIAMS - We do need to take the advice of the quantity surveyors, and people have differing views on quantity surveying expertise -

Mr SHELTON - I can accept that.

Mr WILLIAMS - But we do need it as protection.

... Because if it's taken away and reused somewhere else, in six months' time when we're getting tender results, we could be in trouble and then can't deliver an outcome that we need to deliver. So, it's deliberately in there as a buffer and what happens as we - because the quantity surveyor is basing it on a high level, you know, as the diagrams develop into the detail, there will be a shift from our contingencies into the construction value as we get closer, and in six months' time, there will be more information on the market as well.

Mr SHELTON - I understand that, but at this point in time there's - the quantity surveyor is saying it's just under 10 mil, 9.665 for the construction costs. There's 2.1 for market escalation and so, yes, if it goes up, you've got the money there to cater for that 10 mil spend -

Mr WILLIAMS - Based on the advice, yes.

Mr SHELTON - But then there's also a construction contingency of 1.1.

CHAIR - And a design contingency.

Mr SHELTON - So actually there's 33 per cent contingencies in this 9 mil; so, have we designed it to only spend 9 mil?

..

Mr HISCUTT - That's what it looks like, that's the information you provided, is that you're going to spend - if things don't go well, we'll spend more.

Mr SHELTON - So I take it - and what you're saying is that at the end of the day, the construction cost and the ability to spend the money, there will be \$15 million spent on the job. ...

...

Mr SALTER - So, as we go through this project and others and you go from concept to detailed design, the appropriate - from a project management perspective, you build in contingencies and then, as Todd said, as detail firms up, then costs might hold, or you might move some out of design contingency into the construction cost. As you're building, there might be unexpected things that can occur with infrastructure. So, you want to maintain those contingencies, as advised by experts, and that's just standard project management. It would be poor project management if we were going into the projects with no contingencies and that we had scoped work too high, and then some of these risks eventuated, and I think you might have used the words: would we be expanding the project; I wouldn't use those words. What would happen if some of those didn't realise, Sarah Jane and the team have worked really hard on the scope that's manageable within the allocation, with the contingencies as advised by the quantity surveyor. If, in a really positive outcome, some of those funds are available, there are existing priorities that they can go to which will add further value on top of what's already there for the school. It's not a case of, okay, we will start to come up with some new things. There's hard work that's gone into the prioritisation to date.

Mr WILLIAMS - I might just add in, we could put all those three top lines, construction market conditions and contingency - we could put them all under construction, and we've had a number of different iterations of trying to present the budget in a way to be open and transparent around what we're trying to do; but they could all be subcategories of construction, knowing that that's the budget and the figures as we currently stand as we continue to work through the detail.

CHAIR - Mr Shelton, did you have a follow-up question to that?

Mr SHELTON - Only a statement to say that I don't get the top line, then. If that's a quantity surveyor, and they are the experts in the field, then they have said at today's cost this is what it would cost - if I was going to build a house, at the end of the day, I would like it to be closer than that. It's a 33 per cent contingency in this build and what happens afterwards, look, I'm not interested in giving the money back into the Treasury, but, and more into what Sarah Jane would like, as you've mentioned, Kane, in other issues that could be dealt with; but it's just the variation is huge. I know the market is pretty awful at the moment to try to guess, but that's what a quantity surveyor does. If that top figure is right, then -

Mr WILLIAMS - If you track building costs and construction costs over the last 10 years, particularly the last five years, there have been some dramatic increases.

Mr HISCUTT - That's what the role of the - I guess just following on from that, the definition of contingency is there only if you need it. It's not part of the construction cost and it feels like, from what we're hearing, that this is going to be built into the construction cost. I guess to answer the question, if we spend less than that, we're going to find things - to prioritise things to do, which is okay; but the counterpoint to that is if the budget goes over, we're going to find elements to cut to bring it back to the budget.

Mr SALTER - If I can add to it in a general sense first: for all our projects, we need to manage those within the allocation that's provided. Often it will be in terms of looking through those priorities. If you have to draw on those contingencies and still have a shortfall, then we need to look at scope.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess the second question was: how confident are you with the price that's presented for this - the dollar value presented for this?

Mr SALTER - At this stage of the design process, between the architects and the quantity surveyor and with the contingencies, we're comfortable that the scope can be delivered. As we get to further design stages, we can continue to get QS updates, so that before we go to tender, we've got the latest information in front of us on what we expect.

Mr WILLIAMS - I think, absolutely we're confident with the figures that we've been provided. I think also, too, the point that we talked about with staging needs to come in too, there is a bit of an unknown element of cost in that. Whilst we've allowed for it, we've got to have that flexibility in our budget to do it, I suppose, as well.²⁹

4.21 The Committee also asked the witnesses to explain the rationale for charging DECYP project management costs back to the project:

Mr SHELTON - ... the DECYP project management. The \$369,000, the justification for that. Where's that come from? I mean, I would imagine that you two are paid full-time by DECYP, by the Department, so where does the \$369,000 come from? Only from the point that the school's done a really good job at \$400,000, and here the Department is taking basically that amount of money to manage the project when you're actually paid full-time to do it anyway. Isn't that double dipping?

...

Mr SALTER - No. I mean, what I would absolutely say is there is no double-dipping, so absolutely rule that out. There's a component of the project management staff in the facilities team that their salary is supported by projects that we know are in the forward Estimates. So, therefore, part of the capital allocation is drawn down to support those project managers, because they're not funded through the recurrent appropriation. So, absolutely, there is no double-dipping.

... So, those costs there, that's not Todd's cost or my cost. It's the specific project managers that liaise with principal Sarah Jane, liaison with the architect, and are a key connection in delivery of the project from the beginning to the end, including post-construction being completed.

Mr WILLIAMS - I'd also like to add that I acknowledge that it's a significant cost, and it is through, you know, the life of the project, which is a considerable amount of years. It is the support that we provide to the principal and the team acknowledging all the work that the principal has to do in a busy day-to-day running of a school as well as contributing to a significant project investment. So, we're very mindful, as a team, that we have to provide them the support for that. We're very grateful for the investment that the government's been making in our schools.

It doesn't come with an increase in recurrent funding for us to run the projects. It's not unusual in the private sector when they do an investment that they capitalise their project investment into it as well. So, it's a contemporary model of ensuring that we're getting good outcomes for our projects, and that includes the day-to-day on-the-ground support of working with the school staff.

Mr HISCUTT - ... Are we not taking operational expense out of capital expense in that regard, to do that? Or you would argue that it's part of this capital project that they are -

Mr SALTER - Because it's part of the capital project.

Mr HISCUTT - So, the people doing that wouldn't be employed by DECYP if this job wasn't on the go?

Mr SALTER - If you took it to the nth degree and we had no capital program, we'd have a component of those project managers - we wouldn't have a funding source for them.³⁰

²⁹ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 25-27

³⁰ Transcript of Evidence, 1 July 2026, Department for Education, Children and Young People, pp. 28-29

Does the Project Meet the Requirements of the Public Works Committee Act?

4.22 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks an assurance that each project meets the criteria detailed in Clause 15(2) of the Public Works Committee Act 1914. Broadly, and in simple terms, these relate to the purpose of the works, the need for and advisability of undertaking the works, and whether the works are a good use of public funds and provide value for money to the community. The Department's submission addressed these matters:

Do the proposed works meet an identified need/needs, or solve a recognised problem?

Yes, the design addresses the issues raised in consultation with the school and community including the need for more flexible/multi-purpose spaces, larger classrooms and breakout spaces, more professional support spaces, improved external access and improved amenities.

Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs, or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?

Yes, a whole of site master plan was developed and costed with the school and community priorities. The PWG considered priorities, staging and buildability of the works and agreed the proposed design and staging effectively addresses the highest priority needs. The design identified the most workable solution to meet the school's education requirements. The process includes reports from the project Quantity Surveyor to ensure the cost plan meets the budget and the project is deliverable.

Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

Yes, the proposed works respond to the briefing requirements expressed through the Education Brief. The design solution has the support of educational experts, school leaders, staff, the school association, and the community.

Do the proposed works provide value for money?

Yes, the proposed works address priority areas of NWSS Burnie. Costs are minimised by retaining building structure and the use of modest, suitable new materials. Testing of options settled on the design which meets priority needs while remaining within the allocated budget.

Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?

Yes, the proposed works offer a cost-effective solution to meet the highest priority needs to assist NWSS Burnie to deliver quality contemporary educational experiences and to support the learning journey of the students and improve education outcomes. DECYP considers this to be a good use of public funds.³¹

³¹ *North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, pp. 19-20.

5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

5.1 The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- *North West Support School Burnie Campus -Major Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works;
- North West Support School Burnie Upgrade - Detailed Design Drawings;
- Department for Education, Children and Young People: Community Engagement Outcomes Report – North West Support School;
- Department for Education, Children and Young People: North West Support School Burnie Concept Plan – Consultation Support Report; and
- DECYP Response to Questions on Notice-NWSS Burnie and Devonport.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed, the proposed works will provide a contemporary learning environment for students and staff, which will support quality learning outcomes, wellbeing and independence for students with disability.
- 6.2 The proposed works will provide larger and contemporary general learning areas, including two additional general learning areas to meet future growth. Additional support spaces will also be available to support student access to sessions with external service providers on school grounds, providing a significant benefit to students and their families.
- 6.3 Accordingly, the Committee recommends the North West Support School Burnie Upgrade, at an estimated cost of \$15.378 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.



**Parliament House
Hobart
15 September 2026**

**Jen Butler MP
Chair**

