STATEMENT ON UNFLUED GAS HEATERS IN NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Government will replace all unflued gas heaters in NSW public schools.

A timetable for the phase-out will be released later this year.

This follows the release of an expert study commissioned by the Government into the use of low emission unflued gas heaters in NSW public schools.

The study was conducted by respiratory specialists at the independent Woolcock Institute, and presented as a report to Government.

The report says that while the use of unflued heaters is associated with a small risk of increased wheezing and coughing in some students, there is no measurable reduction in a child’s breathing capacity.

The report shows that having flued gas heaters at school, rather than unflued, makes a 0.5% difference to the likelihood a child would report overnight wheezing.

Based on this evidence, there is no cause for alarm.

The report’s authors recommend alternative sources of heating should be investigated. The Government has agreed to this.

There are many exposures and events in everyday life that cause wheezing and coughing in children. These include perfumes and fly sprays; exercise, laughing, crying and coughing; colds and other viruses; and pollens, moulds, pets and house dust.

The report recommends a thorough, considered approach to identifying alternative heating options for NSW public schools. It is important that a broad range of options for heating are considered.

For each option a comprehensive health risk assessment and environmental impact assessment will be required.

This will extend to the manufacture and installation of the heater, its effectiveness, and the generation of power or fuel.

In line with this, the Education Department is currently investigating alternatives to unflued gas heating and has engaged consultants to start the health risk assessments.

When this is complete the process of replacing heaters can commence, beginning with those that are used the most.
The Department halted installation of all unflued gas heaters in NSW public schools and TAFE institutes two months ago, pending the outcome of the Woolcock Institute report.

The Government has already committed $15 million to replace unflued gas heaters in priority public schools where it is often too cold to allow necessary ventilation.

Key stakeholders, including parents and teachers, are working to determine the criteria for the selection of these priority schools.