

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 8 May 2024

#### MEMBERS

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Joe McCracken

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Lee Tarlamis

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Georgie Crozier

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Richard Welch

**WITNESSES**

Dr James Thyer; and

Xavier Rimmer, Parliamentary Budget Officer, Parliamentary Budget Office.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Please ensure your mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

Before I start I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are on today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I particularly welcome any elders and community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the community.

I welcome members of the public watching via the broadcast today and would like to welcome Xavier Rimmer and Dr James Thyer to our panel with us today. Before I continue I would like to introduce the panel. My name is Trung Luu; I am the Chair. To my left are my Deputy Chair Mr Ryan Batchelor, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region; Mr Joe McCracken, Member for Western Victoria; and Ms Moira Deeming, Member for Western Metropolitan Region. To my right are Dr Renee Heath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region; Mr Aiv Puglielli, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; and Ms Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria. Hopefully other members will join us via Zoom. I will introduce them as they pop up.

Before I continue I just want to read some information to the witnesses here with us today. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information provided during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcript will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. To support the Hansard record, please state your full name and any organisations you are appearing on behalf of.

**Xavier RIMMER:** Xavier Rimmer, Parliamentary Budget Officer of the Parliamentary Budget Office.

**James THYER:** James Thyer. I am a member of Northcote High School council; however, I am making a submission as a private individual.

**The CHAIR:** I know you have both made a submission, but I would just invite you to make a short opening statement so we will have time to ask you questions as well.

**Xavier RIMMER:** Sure. I will be very brief. Thank you to the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to make a submission and provide evidence today. I thought it would be important, given it is a relatively new function for the PBO, to just give a basic outline of what the PBO does. We are an independent body of Parliament, and we are not aligned with the government or any political party. Everything we do is guided by our Act, and one of the three objectives of our Act is to inform parliamentary and public debate and to inform policy development. Our submissions and our appearances at these committees are an ideal opportunity to help us advance that objective, and again I thank the committee for the opportunity.

As an independent office, the PBO submissions to committee inquiries do not provide recommendations about policy or assessment of the merits of policy, as that is outside of our remit by our legislation. We do provide requested information analysis and contextual information we consider important to the understanding of the requested information.

This submission obviously focuses on the funding of schools, and the funding of schools is a complex matter, including how needs and funding amounts are calculated. The responsibilities for funding are shared between the Australian and Victorian governments and the funds are distributed to schools. In this PBO submission we provide comprehensive discussion of factors, including the schooling resource standard – the model by which we determine the needs of each individual student in school; the bilateral agreement between the Australian and

Victorian governments and the respective obligations for funding of different cohorts of schools; and SRS and other funding provided to schools in the year 2021, which was the latest at the time we prepared our report.

Some notable findings were that in 2021 the Victorian government provided around \$9.6 billion in recurrent funding to schools, and the Australian government provided about \$6.1 billion to Victorian schools. Government schools are on a pathway to receiving 95 per cent of their SRS-assessed needs versus 100 per cent for non-government schools. Generally government schools have a higher assessed need funding than non-government schools, and government schools received \$16,872 per student in 2021 compared to \$13,093 for non-government schools. Obviously those figures exclude contributions made by parents.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Xavier. Dr James, are you giving an opening statement?

**James THYER:** Yes, sure. I have been a school councillor at Northcote High School for seven years now. I am very satisfied with the school, certainly its governance et cetera. But I suppose I felt like making a submission because I feel that even with the school as a reasonably well off Melbourne public high school, as a councillor I know how stretched the finances are. I think we are looking at a deficit of a million dollars this year, and I know that the principal has to spend so much time on trying to make ends meet, with buildings that are falling down and what I would call inferior buildings.

I went to two public schools myself, one in Nunawading, and I spent a year in the US at a public school there, and it was just chalk and cheese. The US school – I realised how good a public school could be with better funding. Part of the reason for making my submission is that I just know that public schools could be so much better than they are, with the funding. Even 95 per cent SRS funding – I view it as very sadly inadequate that we accept that.

I made the submission mainly because the school I have found for my kids – it is great for kids; it is fine for kids that are academically inclined. But I think the school is most stretched for kids that are not academically inclined, and it just does not have the resources to follow up on those kids. I was one of the people that went and listened to David Gonski 10 years ago and I thought, ‘Fantastic,’ and this is what he is about: he is about bringing up those kids and allowing every child to reach their potential. I am just really sad that we have not got anywhere near what he says in terms of following up those kids that do need a lot more help.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will quickly start. Xavier, I will throw a quick question at you. You mentioned the SRS contribution from both state and federal and the models basically with the non-government schools, the federals doing 80 and the states doing 20. With state schools at the moment, according to your submission, 75 were state contributions and there is a 5 per cent gap. Can you just explain more and expand on where is that 5 per cent gap and why is that 5 per cent gap there?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Yes, so the state government has got a transition pathway over time to achieving 75 per cent of SRS funding needs for government schools. I think in Victoria that is going to be achieved by 2028. It is currently around 70.5 per cent from the state government. I can only speak to quite literally where that 75 and the 5 per cent gap comes from, which is the bilateral agreement between the Australian government and the state government. Under that agreement the state government has agreed with the federal government to provide 20 per cent of funding towards non-government schools and 75 per cent towards government schools. The federal government agrees to pay 20 per cent towards government schools, leaving a 5 per cent funding gap as against the SRS funding assessment. I do not have insight into the driving motivation for that gap. I just know that that is where it comes from. I would also note, though, that the state does provide some funding outside of the SRS to schools. I am just having a quick look for the figures. In 2021 the state government provided nearly \$600 million in output funding other than SRS funding to state government schools. But what is included in the SRS, in contributions to the SRS, is quite explicitly set out in that bilateral agreement.

**The CHAIR:** I note also in your submission that capital funding is not included in the SRS contribution, correct?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Correct. Yes.

**The CHAIR:** So would that 5 per cent be equivalent to that capital funding?

**Xavier RIMMER:** I think because of the nature of what the SRS seeks to determine, the answer is probably no. I could imagine an argument being made for that case, but the SRS funding is to apportion the amount of operational funding required for students based on their circumstances and their needs – various disadvantage characteristics and the location. So effectively no, and I think the other thing about capital being outside of the recurrent funding like that is that capital tends to be quite lumpy – large investments in capital might happen one year and not another, so making that part of the target is perhaps not sensible.

**The CHAIR:** With the distribution of SRS contributions to all the state schools, are they evenly spread out or can the government select which ones – from your findings, are they all evenly distributed?

**Xavier RIMMER:** We did not have individual school data in preparing our submission, but what we know of the system is that schools are to receive the funding that they are allocated as having a need for. There is one caveat to that – there is a small amount of funding that is provided in kind across schools. That can be things like setting the syllabus and so forth, and examination, which is probably appropriate, you would imagine. But as far as I am aware schools receive the funding that their SRS dictates.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will pass over. I have questions, but I think time is up. I will come back if we have got time later on. Deputy Chair.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Mr Rimmer, and thanks, Dr Thyer, for coming. Page 5 of your submission says that the Commonwealth provided no capital funding to Victorian government schools in 2021. That is correct?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Yes.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** So while the state is providing \$2.17 billion in capital funding, there is nothing coming from the Commonwealth. Do you have that figure for prior years?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Not to hand. I can certainly –

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Is it something that you would be able provide on notice? One of the things that I am trying to understand is – Dr Thyer mentioned the issues with cracks in the walls of the buildings. The state is obviously on a pathway to meet its obligations on the recurrent side, and that is particularly important, but obviously the capital side is important too. What has the Commonwealth done or not done since the establishment of the funding of this framework, with the National School Reform Agreement – in 2013 I think it came into effect.

**Xavier RIMMER:** Yes, look, I can take that on notice, and we can look at that data.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** That would be great because it strikes me that some of the issues that the state is clearly trying to deal with that the schools are confronting might be helped by the Commonwealth adding some more money into the system from the capital side. Whilst it appears to be lumpy, it is pretty consistent expenditure. You mentioned that there is more money that the state puts into the system than in the SRS. What sort of funding is that – the \$600 million that is on top of the SRS?

**Xavier RIMMER:** A lot of that relates to things like payroll tax that schools are obliged – or that the department pays on their behalf. There are other things like depreciation, and there are some things – there is a school bus program for rural and regional Victorian schools. I would also note that that arrangement is common across all bilateral agreements between states and the Australian government.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Dr Thyer, in your experience, what are the biggest challenges facing government secondary schools at the moment?

**James THYER:** As we have talked about, there are the capital issues, yet we have got cracking walls. In terms of the capital, we had to lobby extremely hard. We have got some good funding for a remake of our STEM centre from the state government. We got almost \$20 million, but that was for facilities that had probably last been altered 30 or 40 years ago.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** So you have got a lot of catch-up to do.

**James THYER:** Exactly. It is all real catch-up work to do. Yes, so we had to lobby extremely hard to get that. It was not something that is a given. It really depends on the parent population to lobby the local member to get that funding. That was a big project. Sorry, the question was about the biggest need?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Challenges.

**James THYER:** Challenges. So yes, we have got 1800, 1900 kids. We have got no grounds at all other than the buildings. We have got no ovals.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Is there an oval out the back, did you say?

**James THYER:** There is an oval out the back that is owned by the council. It has got one set of goalposts. I do not know why only one set of goalposts.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Maybe people like kicking with the breeze.

**James THYER:** Yes, that is right. It is as if it is to make sure we do not have any ownership of it. We have got no sporting facilities. We have got six outdoor table tennis tables – that is it – and one hall with a basketball court in it that is very dilapidated. That is perhaps the physical side. From the teaching side, the tightest things are, as I mentioned – the kids that are very academically inclined, the school has no problems with that at all – it is the kids that are not. I think there is a new state government program that does allocate one person per year level as a special needs teacher. That only started at the end of last year, but we have got 300 kids per year level and so one person to cover 300 kids. Personally, I have got one kid who sailed through and there are others that do not. Their learning difficulties really have not been picked up because of that lack of time for teachers – things where that lack of time for teachers comes in. Also, for instance, when teachers are sick the replacement teachers are often – what are they called – CRTs. They do not really know where the kids are at, so they just sort of come in for a childminding type of thing as opposed to actually being able to come on board at the right level – where the kids are at – so there is lost time there.

There are also difficulties with the time in lieu for things like excursions and camps. It is a great difficulty for the school to have the money to have teachers away on camps – to make up. I think that is an issue with proper conditions for teachers in terms of actually getting paid proper overtime et cetera for going on camps, so that severely dented our budget for a while until we were able to reach an agreement on that.

It is just the tightness of the teaching situation. I know I have talked to teachers that have left Northcote High and have gone to the private system, and they have said, ‘Oh, look, I can’t believe what we had to – I’ve suddenly got time.’ That is their comment: ‘I’ve suddenly got time to do teaching stuff instead of that huge pressure of marking’ and the burden that they had when they were at the public school.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back to you, Ryan. Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here today – lots of questions and only a few minutes. If I can direct it to the PBO, Mr Rimmer, in your submission it says:

Victorian government schools will be funded below their total needs-based funding unless this gap is closed – whether it comes from Australian or state. We are talking about state in this particular inquiry. Has the PBO done any research as to what funding increase annually to get to 2028 – if that funding was not 75 per cent but it was 80 per cent?

**Xavier RIMMER:** No, we have not, because that is –

**Melina BATH:** Not in the agreement?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Well, I guess that is a question of policy. So if a member of Parliament came to us with a request saying ‘How much would it cost to do that?’ and ‘Here’s the transition path’, we would do that assessment for them. Otherwise, that would be us designing a policy solution, which we are not supposed to do.

**Melina BATH:** Sure. I might put that up as a recommendation – take that on notice. Thank you. You also, in your submission, talk about additional income from fees, from parent contributions, and although they only represent a small portion of the total income of state government-funded schools – I will not quote it outright, but I believe there is a figure of somewhere around \$100,000 to \$110,000 over a 13-year period that the average parent contributes to the education of their child in a state school in Melbourne, in the metropolitan area. Has the PBO done any work on that? You have got listed here parent contributions. Have you done any work on what that average parent contribution is?

**Xavier RIMMER:** No, and that is something we could potentially look at. Off the top of my head it is something that would, I think, be very difficult to measure in formal contributions. But no, we have not.

**Melina BATH:** You would have to get the parameters right as to what those particular contributions look like.

**Xavier RIMMER:** Yes, and access to that information might be difficult.

**Melina BATH:** Okay. In relation to Dr Thyer, I just want to go back to some of your comments. What impact does that have on student wellbeing – emotional wellbeing – and staff wellbeing, living and working in those sorts of conditions that you have outlined from your experience?

**James THYER:** I mean, I think our school is adequate. We have got a roof and walls and windows, but really the majority of classrooms are portables.

**Melina BATH:** How old are those portables?

**James THYER:** There are only one or two that are ancient ones, like from when I went to school.

**Melina BATH:** So there are still that are some that are, dare I say, from the 70s?

**James THYER:** Yes, that is right. The majority of the portables are sort of double storey. They do have difficulty with disabled access. To have disabled access they have to do the timetabling so that those kids can be in the lower floors of them.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. I appreciate that. If could go back, I am jumping back to Mr Rimmer. With the bilateral agreements signed back in I think it was 2017 or 2019 between the state and federal governments –

**Xavier RIMMER:** 2019.

**Melina BATH:** What was the discussion? Has your PBO looked at the reason why there would be a funding gap? Is it that that they just could not agree on who was going to take that last portion of 100 per cent SRS?

**Xavier RIMMER:** Look, our assessment of the bilateral agreement comes from us reading the bilateral agreement. We have not done any assessment of why the gap is there, and the bilateral agreement is not particularly verbose on that topic.

**Melina BATH:** So in effect they just agreed that they would go so far and not the full way, both state and federal, for government schools.

**Xavier RIMMER:** Yes, and our analysis has sort of taken the SRS model and the bilateral agreement as the fundamental basis of the analysis and we have looked at the implications of those rather than the drivers that established –

**Melina BATH:** Behind that, sure. Thank you. I think my time is up.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bath. We will come back if we have got more time. Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for coming in and speaking to us today. I might begin with you, James. In your excellent submission you pose a series of questions. A lot of the submission speaks to the disparity that exists in funding between public schools and their private counterparts. You go into quite a lot of detail as to your views on these matters. One of the questions that you put, which I think is really quite poignant, I might be a bit cheeky and actually put it back to you. We will consider it in our time. Why is

government funding being given to schools that do not need it when other schools that clearly fall below the school resource standard are not being given enough? Do you have a view as to why that is?

**James THYER:** I wish I knew the answer, but I suppose I do point out a comment that was made by Dan Tehan last year, the past federal minister for education. It was in comment to the PISA rankings and how we are going backwards and backwards and yet school funding has gone up and up and up so therefore it is not a matter of funding that is the issue. Whereas I would say that a million dollars given to, say, Scotch College would probably be used to enhance their rowing facility, whereas a million dollars given to a school like Northcote High or Lalor College as a public school would probably go into reducing teacher load and the kind of things that I have been talking about, so it would have a direct effect and measurable effect on educational outcomes. If you are throwing money at schools that are using it for grandiose sporting facilities and auditoriums et cetera, of course you are not going to get bang for your buck in terms of educational outcomes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** So in your view, is it politics? Is that the why?

**James THYER:** Yes, I mean, I think it is politics. I think the independent schools and the religious schools have a sort of inordinate influence for politicians. Sorry to put motives to what you are doing. They have to sort of play to these organisations that are pushing for more and more funding, whereas we should be celebrating public education because public education is open to all. It is open to all religions. It is open to secular people. We do not sort of impose our viewpoint or require teachers – we do not say to them you cannot be gay, you cannot be transgender, et cetera. Public education is open to all, and it should be celebrated so much more than it is in Australia.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Absolutely. I appreciate that the schooling resource standard that we are talking about is intended as a minimum –

**James THYER:** Yes, that is right.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** so just meeting that minimum for our public schools. You have actually sort of gone to what was the second question in your submission, which I might put to Xavier. The question was: where is the bang for buck when money is given to private schools who greatly exceed the schooling resource standard and do not actually need the money for their teaching purposes?

**Xavier RIMMER:** That, a little bit, goes to assessing a policy after the fact. It is not something we have done. I guess on a functional basis though, to slightly turn the question to how the determination of the funding is that it should go to schools that have significant resourcing – the way the SRS works at a base level is that there is a reference school and every school gets that amount of funding. There are loadings applied to those fundings for various forms of disadvantage and there is a discount applied for non-government schools for their ability to contribute resourcing. There is a cap on how much that discount can reduce the funding by, and that can be one of the reasons why you can see schools with some element of difference in the funding arrangements.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. I think that is my time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Dr Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you so much for both of your submissions. I have got some questions for you, Dr Thyer. You said about kids that the kids that are not academically inclined really struggle. When you say that, what makes you think that they are not academically inclined? Is it poor literacy skills or is it just – can you explain what that child looks like?

**James THYER:** Yes. Sorry, I probably used the wrong expression. It is kids that do need extra help, as you say. It is kids that want to learn, but that don't have issues identified until quite late in the piece, because I suppose there are just so many kids – that is, to me, what they look like. It is just the inability of teachers to have time to follow up on issues that are there.

**Renee HEATH:** Right. That is interesting. So what is the pathway for these kids that are not thriving at school? Do they just continue to rock up and get further and further behind?

**James THYER:** I think it is having the extra teaching resources to really follow up and do remedial work with them and to ensure they do get that extra help.

**Renee HEATH:** Remedial.

**James THYER:** Yes.

**Renee HEATH:** What would remedial work be?

**James THYER:** I think it could be extra classes –

**Renee HEATH:** Tutoring.

**James THYER:** Yes, tutoring. Extra emphasis or extra attention paid to them, as opposed to just letting them fall behind within a classroom setting.

**Renee HEATH:** Yes. There is a fairly strong body of evidence that suggests that if kids are not taught how to read properly, how to decode words – the first few years they are really meant to spend learning to read and then it flips and then they are reading to learn.

**James THYER:** Yes.

**Renee HEATH:** Do you think that a lot of these kids that at first you mentioned are not academically inclined – and I know that is not the term you would like to use, but here in the spirit I am saying it – do you think that if we had a stronger foundation of phonics and a strong foundation of learning to read and confident literacy and numeracy skills, could that change what it would look like at, for instance, Northcote Primary School now?

**James THYER:** Yes. That is exactly right. I think literacy is probably at the heart of it.

**Renee HEATH:** Yes, okay. So if we were to, for instance, have a recommendation, if we were really to invest and make sure that there were kids that had a strong foundation in primary school, that could potentially help some of these issues that you are facing at Northcote?

**James THYER:** Yes, I think literacy is the key.

**Renee HEATH:** All right, awesome. You mentioned about how some of the teachers that have gone to the private sector have all of a sudden said, ‘Oh, wow. I’ve got time.’ How much time would be spent on teaching in a school like yours versus other things like dealing with maybe social issues or –

**James THYER:** Sorry, as a non-teacher, just as an observer from council, I would not be able to answer that.

**Renee HEATH:** Thanks so much. Lovely.

**The CHAIR:** Mr McCracken.

**Joe McCracken:** Good morning, and thank you for your submissions. I want to go to you first, Dr Thyer. You talked a bit before about, and I found the word interesting, inferior facilities, and you made a comparison with the United States. Can you talk a bit more about the comparison that you have witnessed yourself?

**James THYER:** Yes, okay, sure. Sorry to bring up ancient history, because it was 40 years ago, but at the school I went to there, there were no portables. We had computing facilities that were better than when I went to Monash Uni. We had small class sizes. We had brilliant auditoriums and extensive playing fields.

**Joe McCracken:** It sounds like a utopia.

**James THYER:** Yes, it was. I suppose it was the equivalent of a private school, but it was public. It was in a regional town in the US, and because it was so good – the school – there were virtually no private schools around. Some of the kids were multimillionaire, billionaire types mixed with kids that were very poor, so it was



a very unifying thing for the town. There were kids of all religions, so I probably learned more about Judaism in my year in the US than I ever have in Australia, because we were all mixed in and learning together. So yes, that was the difference. It was being in a nice room, like a college-type thing, compared to what was barely adequate, with graffiti, and having classes where consequently I felt like we were just there learning, as opposed to at Nunawading High School, where 80 per cent of it seemed to be crowd control and 20 per cent was learning – whereas it was flipped the other way round in the US.

**Joe McCracken:** Yes. I mean even in the media recently you might have seen comments about ‘Bring back old-school discipline’ and those sorts of things. It almost seems like it has turned full circle.

You made a comment before about CRTs and essentially that they were child minding while the normal classroom teacher was absent. Based on your position on the school council, how regular do you think that is?

**James Thyer:** Yes. I am sorry. I just know from –

**Joe McCracken:** Is it something that comes up in discussion a lot?

**James Thyer:** Okay. It is not a school council thing, that is from my son. So say I ask how school was: ‘Oh, well, we didn’t do much in this because our regular teacher is sick.’ The replacement teacher is just not up to speed with where they are, so I can only say, ‘Just do what you need to do,’ sort of thing.

**Joe McCracken:** You carry on with –

**James Thyer:** Yes. That is fine for one or two days, but if it is a significant length of time, it is an issue.

**Joe McCracken:** As a parent, has that been an experience that your children have experienced?

**James Thyer:** Yes, throughout the time. But I am sorry, I do not have any quantitative assessment on that – just that it has happened.

**Joe McCracken:** Yes, okay. That is fair enough. The other big one that we know about in teaching is obviously – you did mention it before – time in lieu and the extra expense that is involved in that, which did not exist in the past. Can you just give a quick summary: what has been the impact?

**James Thyer:** Okay. I particularly know it in terms of parents at Northcote High. We tried to go in the Great Victorian Bike Ride, and one year we were not able to do it because we were not able to get the teachers to do it. We needed a minimum of two teachers. That is a concrete example.

**Joe McCracken:** Is that a cost issue, or is it an availability issue?

**James Thyer:** It was a mixture of availability and the ability to give those teachers the time in lieu that they would accrue because of the hours that they would be spending away. I think that it has to some extent been resolved, talking to the principal, but I know it is a pressure that has been there.

**Joe McCracken:** Yes. Well, my time is up. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thanks. We have Mrs Deeming.

**Moira Deeming:** Thank you. Thanks, both, for coming. It is very interesting, your submission. You are a school counsellor. You are a counsellor at the school, right?

**James Thyer:** I sit on the school council.

**Moira Deeming:** Okay, so you are not a counsellor, you are a member of the school council.

**James Thyer:** I am not a counsellor of students.

**Moira Deeming:** Right, got you. Okay, well, as you are a father of students in that particular environment, I was interested in what you were saying about the impact psychologically on the kids being in a place that does not have enough outdoor space, that does not have enough capacity for physical activity – especially obviously on teenage boys – and just everyone having enough of their own space. I was going to ask

you what you thought those impacts were in terms of student mental welfare and also academic outcomes – not just that, yes, they need those facilities, but what does that do to kids, do you think?

**James THYER:** Look, our kids do have space; they can go onto the public park during breaks. But it is just a matter of not having good sporting grounds that are close. At lunchtimes –

**Moira DEEMING:** And I imagine that is not private, if you have to go out to a public –

**James THYER:** That is right, yes. We have got to share it with dog walkers.

**Moira DEEMING:** Supervision issues.

**James THYER:** There is a bit of a conflict there. We have had interactions with the council, and sometimes it has felt like the rights of the dog walkers have exceeded the rights of or the needs of 1800 kids getting out at lunchtime to muck around. Certainly with the popularity of basketball, we have got one outdoor basketball court and one outdoor netball court being shared by 1800 kids at breaks. That is what kids like to do, and that is what should be encouraged – kids doing that type of thing. We cannot. We do not even have soccer goals that we can have on the ovals. And yes, as I said before, we have got one set of goalposts for Australian Rules. I do not know why one set, but that is because we have got access to the council land. So, yes, you are right, it would be just so much better if kids could do those sorts of activities. Informal game playing, team playing, is really good socially in break times.

**Moira DEEMING:** That is right. And it is healthy for them, getting out in the fresh air.

**James THYER:** Yes.

**Moira DEEMING:** I feel very sad for those students actually, and I have noticed there is a bit of a trend in a lot of schools to be building up, up, up. I do understand that in terms of if you want to save open space, but some of them do not have open space to begin with, so building up is actually just overcrowding the school significantly, which is distressing for teachers and students.

I just wanted to hear bit more about any ideas you had or anything that you had seen in terms of improving academic outcomes, which is one of our terms of reference, that you think money could be put towards if there was money available. You said something about a program where there is one adult to a certain amount of children if they are struggling. Have you heard of any other programs that you would like funded better? Even overseas, is there anything to compare?

**James THYER:** Thank you for that question – I just think more teachers, and smaller class sizes, where the teachers have time to bring up the lower kids. I do not see any problem with the higher achieving kids there, but it is bringing up the rest, and that is where you get your biggest increases, by looking at those kids.

**Moira DEEMING:** Fantastic. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mrs Deeming. Because time is almost up, I will quickly make a comment, I think. We have been to, across the state, regional and now metropolitan areas, and some of the schools out in the regions have said they are quite happy with the resources they are getting from the state government. I am just wondering: what are your opinions? With your submission you mentioned buildings, cracked structures and stuff. Do you feel the schools in the metropolitan areas – which is Northcote, here, at the moment – are competing for capital funding at all with other schools in the area?

**James THYER:** There are only two high schools in our electorate, so I do not think we are competing with that, but we are competing overall. On our master plan our next thing is a new gym, so yes, we will obviously have to compete. The parent body has to put a lot of effort into lobbying to show that this is what we really need, so it is in effect competing for what we can get.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I am mindful of time. I appreciate so much both of you gentlemen coming in, and your submissions.

Michael will also join us. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Michael, do you want to have a quick question before I –

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks, both, for joining us. I will keep them brief, both because I realise the time and I am a little bit unwell. Dr Thyer, the state and territory governments are currently negotiating with the federal government, as you know, on the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement to replace the National School Reform Agreement. The current federal offer is for an increase of 2.5 per cent. Do you think that this is adequate?

**James THYER:** Obviously we need the full 5 per cent as a bare minimum. I believe we need to meet 100 per cent. Is it by 2028 – sorry, Xavier – or 2029?

**Xavier RIMMER:** The current transition schedule is just to 95 per cent.

**James THYER:** Okay. I think that is the Gonski – Gonski was 100 per cent by 2029. So to me, that is the bare minimum for what Gonski described when he visited public schools – that the buildings are tired and that is what is needed.

**Michael GALEA:** But the full amount from the federal government is absolutely necessary?

**James THYER:** I would say, yes.

**Michael GALEA:** And, Mr Rimmer, I realise you cannot give a policy view, but if that full amount was to be forthcoming from the federal government, what sort of impact would you see that having?

**Xavier RIMMER:** I mean, from the extent to which we have done assessment of this, we would see that as having a dollar-figure impact. We would only go as far as that. We do not look at the impacts on educational outcomes beyond that. It is sort of outside our expertise and remit. I do not have what that 5 per cent figure would be to hand, but I can take that on notice and provide that.

**Michael GALEA:** That would be great. Thank you. I have gone over time. I will leave it there. Thanks, both.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Michael. Again, gentlemen, thank you so much for your time and for coming in. Definitely your submissions were valuable, especially with all of the figures you have done, Xavier. We definitely require that. I understand with your submission that due to the SRS I think both governments, state and federal, meet the requirements. Basically, we need to unpack to see what is best to distribute those funds to kids in the schools, between the private and public schools, by your recommendation. So thank you for your submission.

**Witnesses withdrew.**