

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria**

Melbourne – Wednesday 12 June 2024

#### **MEMBERS**

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Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

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**WITNESSES**

Tina King, President, Victorian Branch, Australian Principals Federation; and

Colin Axup, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the state education system. We welcome representatives from the Australian Principals Federation and the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

All evidence you give today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Acting Chair of today's proceedings and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. We are joined down the end by Michael Galea, who is a Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan; Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria; Joe McCracken, Member for Western Victoria; Rachel Payne, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan; Richard Welch, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan; and online Aiv Puglielli, also a Member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

For the Hansard record, if you could each please state your name and the organisation you appear on behalf of.

**Tina KING:** Tina King, Victorian Branch President of the Australian Principals Federation.

**Colin AXUP:** Colin Axup, President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you both for coming today. The way this usually works is we will invite you to make an opening statement and then we will get into asking a series of questions. I am in your hands as to if you want to make an opening statement and who goes first.

**Colin AXUP:** We were informed that you did not want us to make an opening statement, that you had read our submissions and that you would launch straight into interrogating us, Mr Batchelor.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** There you go. Well, that just means we get more time to ask you questions.

**Tina KING:** So we can do it on the spot.

**Colin AXUP:** Yes, that is right. Although as good principals we can wing it if needs be.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** I am sure you can. We will just get started then. It might be worth just at the top – we have heard a lot in the committee about the challenges that schools are having with staffing at the moment, particularly with recruitment and retention of teachers. I am wondering if you have some reflections for the committee on the current state of the teacher recruitment and retention marketplace, so to speak, for want of a better term, and strategies that you think would be most effective in dealing with the current teacher shortages.

**Tina KING:** May I go first? Look, I come with the industrial hat and the industrial arm, and certainly we applaud the department's teacher recruitment incentives in terms of attracting people to the job but also retaining people in the job. However, what we are hearing on the ground from our respective membership bases is that the financial incentives in particular have been quite divisive in schools. They are not rewarding people who have been in the role for an extensive period of time – committed, highly efficient and engaging practitioners – and for the graduates that are coming through they are establishing a climate where they are coming in with high expectations and demanding and requesting those financial incentives in addition to, 'Okay, what is my sign-on bonus, and what leadership opportunities do I have?' So we are really concerned

about the mindset that is being created. We have a classification structure and pay scale as part of the EBA. So what does that actually do to the pay scale and the classification structure?

We understand that in a time of great need and extenuating circumstances something needs to be done to attract people, but these are short-term measures that are going to present long-term problems. We have the issue around retention that, from our perspective, we are finding it is a little bit neglected in the conversation, because in attracting we have got to keep the teachers we are getting. It is not just teachers – principal class as well. I mean, we have a crisis in leadership. People are walking away from the job because of the challenges, the demands and the competing expectations. So what are we doing to address those issues – and we can explore those little bit later – that are leading to that exodus where principals are either reclassifying or they are bringing forward retirement dates? It is very complex and multilayered. We are concerned with what the incentives are doing, because they may attract, but are they retaining? And what are they doing to school culture for those already in schools, and how are we rewarding those people?

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Sure. Thanks very much.

**Colin AXUP:** Look, I think it would be fair to say that staffing is the number one game in town at the moment. We also acknowledge the fact that it depends on what school and where, so it is not a simple ‘This is happening in every part of the state in every school.’ We recognise that and the department recognises that. There are some good programs in place to try and attract more people into the teaching profession. The question is ultimately whether, one, that is enough to get the numbers we need and whether there is more to do. Is it about attracting just the numbers? We often talk about ‘Numbers are not quality’, and I think that is a really important consideration as well. It is really difficult. As Tina said, for a principal the reality at the moment is a shortage of teachers, and not having enough teachers and the impact also of not having enough casual replacement teachers, or CRTs – if we start using acronyms, I apologise – puts pressure invariably on the principal class in a school. It is about, from our perspective, how sustainable that pressure is on the principal class in the long run.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** What do you think government can do? What do you think we can recommend to government to do to relieve some of the pressure on principals? What sorts of workload pressures that you have do you think could be divested into some other place, and who and where and what?

**Colin AXUP:** I think there are a couple of bits to that. One is I think we have to actually ask the right question. I know you are supposed to be asking the questions, but I am going to pose a question to you: are our schools fit for purpose? Is the model of our schools actually right for the 21st century? I would argue that once you understand the nature of the organisation you have got, you then staff that organisation or that business or whatever you want to call it. We are trying to staff a system that fundamentally has not changed in decades, so I would pose the question: is that the right thing? Should we be looking at the nature of what a school looks like?

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** So you think a different administrative structure governing schools, or at a departmental regional level, a cluster model – what are you thinking of?

**Colin AXUP:** I am talking about the actual role of a school. It is a whole different conversation, but it is about: what is the expectation of our communities of a school, and then how do you staff that expectation? And with the complexity of the nature of education, because it is more than just education, you will have heard – and I have seen the list of the kinds of people who have been speaking to you – it is not just the three Rs anymore. It is literally not the three Rs anymore. With the complexity of running a school and the expectations of what is being delivered in the school, the question then becomes: are we staffing them correctly? So talking about ‘Are we going to get enough?’ – I do not think that is necessarily the right question.

**Tina KING:** I think the other element is to look at the needs of children. Today’s children are very different in terms of what their requirements are, how to engage them and how to motivate them, say, from 20 years ago, and we know that that in itself presents a problem, particularly when there are over 65,000 kids in the government system and yet the individual complexities and needs are so diverse. So teachers have to deal with a wide range. You may have 25 bodies in your classroom, but you may have 25 different individual learning plans. That is very challenging.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thank you very much for being here. I notice, I think it was in your submission, Colin, that you talk about faddism.

**Colin AXUP:** Yes, fads.

**Melina BATH:** Off the back of that, there was one example. I was in Parliament when this came in, and it was in 2017. It was about swimming and water safety; that was one example. Schools were required and are required – I do not think it was rescinded, so still are required – to demonstrate that students, when they get to the end of year 6, are capable or at a standard of the Victorian water safety certificate. I know in regional Victoria that caused a world of pain because of buses, pools, tyranny of distance, staffing – just as an example. I will say we all agree that children should learn to swim – I do not think that is in argument – but the policy was thrown in there. Yet we heard today from the Association for Children with a Disability that schools are not required to demonstrate that students can read when they leave, in effect. I am just providing this as a policy fad and a requirement, a very specific requirement – whether it is met or not is another thing. But where is the requirement from the education department that students can read?

**Colin AXUP:** The submission was from both us and our primary counterparts, and unfortunately our primary counterparts cannot be here. But fortunately Tina is a primary principal –

**Tina KING:** That is called handballing!

**Colin AXUP:** so when we get to the primary school stuff I will handball across. However –

**Melina BATH:** I think Tina is up for the challenge. I just want that discussion.

**Colin AXUP:** No, no. I understand. Maybe to put that in context, I think sometimes the concern that principals will have and schools will have is it is about what schools are asked to do – what is next. Now, you could look at the metrics of how a school is judged – you could look through an annual report, you could look at the annual implementation plan and the targets they set – and the targets they set, regardless of whether they are a primary or a secondary school, will have academic targets. I think it is a little too binary just to say, ‘There’s no requirement to say this child can read,’ because I am not a literacy expert, but what does that mean? I mean, reading at different levels is still reading. The question is: are we expecting a minimum standard at the end of that process? I would argue that every school’s aim is to produce a young person at the end of their 12 to 13 years of schooling who can basically go into society and function not only effectively but function effectively and help themselves get a better life.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Tina, do you want to speak to it? I am playing devil’s advocate here, you know, because I want to pinpoint what is important in education.

**Tina KING:** I guess there are benchmarks, and if you take reading, there are benchmarks that students should achieve by the end of prep, year 1, year 2. So there are expectations in terms of where children should be based on age and development. The challenge is: what happens when a child does not reach the benchmark? You know, they may be six months behind in prep; they can be 12 months behind by the time they get to grade 2. So it follows on. It is how we are meeting those individualised needs to ensure minimum growth for each child. The department expects 12 months minimum growth. Now, that is for all children. But we know because of the complexities and needs of particular children they require more time, more investment, more targeted approaches, and the challenge we have is that that is not necessarily available. One classroom teacher cannot meet 25 different needs, particularly –

**Melina BATH:** And so the supports et cetera, et cetera – sorry, not wanting to cut you off. And can I put on record my thanks. I speak to quite a few principals in Eastern Victoria Region, and you know, there is a weight on their shoulders. Not only are they often taking classes – you can see there is burnout; they are doing multiple, multiple roles and hats. So my thankyou to all principals in our system.

**Tina KING:** Thank you for acknowledging that, because principals get forgotten in the national debate –

**Melina BATH:** In the scheme of things. You know, we have spoken to principals, and the school culture is ordained or flows through that leadership, and it is very important to support them. How do we need to support principals (1) not to leave, (2) to survive and (3) to flourish in schools?

**Colin AXUP:** How long do you have?

**Melina BATH:** Yes. Sorry. About 30 seconds, probably. Thank you.

**Colin AXUP:** Look, I think once we recognise the problem, it is about what actions we are taking. As long as we recognise that it is not sustainable and we actually need to do something and it is not just about staffing, then I think we will get somewhere. We know that there is the administrative and compliance review that has just started, and we will be up-front – we have great hopes for that, because it is about actually identifying what is occurring within a school. It is a bit like: when was the last time that we actually looked at all the administrative and compliance that has built up over the years?

**Melina BATH:** The stuff.

**Colin AXUP:** Yes, the stuff, if you like. And it just builds. Schools are very good at being given things to do. There is not often a lot of taking away, and maybe that is the question.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** All right. Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. Good afternoon. Looking at both of your submissions, you are clearly both absolutely advocates for fully funding our public schools. With regard to the schooling resource standard funding, what is your position on the 4 per cent capital depreciation and non-schools costs that are removed from that funding?

**Tina KING:** Look, the issue of school funding is obviously a very topical item of debate at the moment. But let us take the school budget at the moment. There are complexities around the school budget that principals receive, and the complexities come through lack of transparency around the budget, because the money that you get coming in is not actuals. It is averages, but they are paying actuals. Everything tends to be in the core component within that budget. So it is really hard to delve in and work out how much money you are getting to implement the Victorian government schools agreement and all the new provisions in there. Sometimes you get targeted initiatives, like the swimming in schools program. That is a separate line item, and you know how much you have there. I know there is work being done as a result of the VAGO report around the school budget and subsequent review, and hopefully that information is spending. But in terms of the SRS funding, the shortfalls will go a long way. If we can fund our schools 100 per cent of the SRS, they will go a long way to supporting teachers to do the job that they need to do with reduced class sizes. I know there is research that says class size does not matter, but can we have recent data, please? The complexities and needs of kids are very different – and do not tell me that a class of 20, a teacher before 20 kids, is not going to have greater impact and effect on meeting the needs of those kids versus a class of 25 or 32 in some cases. So when we talk supports that can come from increased funding, decreasing those teacher ratios would be the number one priority. The second priority would be to ensure the skill sets and expertise of teachers are enhanced to meet those needs and demands of their students.

**Colin AXUP:** I will not comment about accounting and accounting practices. Our simple position is: fund schools to 100 per cent of the SRS, what it sets out, and that gives us the resources then to run a quality school.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. I appreciate both the comments that you have just made, and I appreciate that it may not be the place you want to get into, accounting, here today.

**Tina KING:** We are principals, not accountants.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I get that. But when we are talking about full funding of schools at 100 per cent, is it your view that that 100 per cent should not account for things like capital depreciation? That could be a separate line item. Do you have a preference for that, so that that 100 per cent is going actually to the classroom rather than other things?

**Colin AXUP:** As a history teacher – no, I understand the question. I think it is really important that our role is not to get involved in the politics of how accounting models are used. Our role is to look at it and go, ‘We know that if we get the 100 per cent resources, and that is the actual 100 per cent, then that gives us a better chance of providing a better education.’

**Tina KING:** We want to maximise the funding that goes directly to the schools. That is critical here. What we do know is through equity provision and funding we have schools that based on their SFOE, their school family occupation index and so on, are funded. But what we are hearing is those middle-tier schools that receive the minimum SFOE, which is roughly I think \$16,000 the last time I looked at it, are really struggling to

meet the demands and expectations of their respective communities in terms of appropriate class sizes, program provision and things. So we have some inequity there in terms of how we are funding our schools depending on their context and location.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. I might pass back to the Chair.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Mr McCracken.

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you both for your contributions so far. It has been an interesting discussion. I noticed in both of your contributions that you spoke about – and in different ways I might add – new graduates coming into the system not being particularly well equipped to deal with a contemporary classroom for a number of different reasons. I am a big advocate for – I think you, Colin, might have said it – an intern model, an apprenticeship-style model, that sort of thing. I am a big advocate for that. Can you guys tell me why you support that?

**Colin AXUP:** I think from the pure process of preparing young teachers for the profession it is a combination of – and also part of the attraction is we have to have different models because different models will suit different people. We talk about differentiating for students, I think we should talk about differentiating for teacher qualification as well. The intern model has been used in the past; it is not a new idea. The whole idea of spending time in a school means they are learning on the job. They can actually see what is actually happening. They are mentored by an experienced teacher. And the argument is that by spending more time in the school as part of their qualification process you get a better outcome.

One of our concerns has been: over time have the ITE programs actually been providing classroom-ready teachers? Anecdotally, we have any number of principals who will turn around to you and say, ‘No. We get a graduate and then we have to put an enormous amount of resources, time and energy from experienced staff, which means that you have to give them time to spend the mentoring time, which takes them away from classrooms and it becomes kind of a vicious cycle.’ We have always mentored graduates, regardless. That has always been a part of the gig. I would say that the Career Start program that the department is rolling out is, if you like, codifying that mentoring process. Great idea. As I said, it is codifying what schools are already kind of doing where they can anyway and it is adding a little more emphasis, if you like, to that process.

**Tina KING:** We are hearing from principals and certainly teachers, graduates themselves, that once they land in the classroom they feel that their limited practical experience has not put them in good stead to face the challenges, particularly behavioural challenges, that they are presented with. Similarly to VPA and VASSP, we are strong advocates of at least 12 months of studentship: learning, seeing, observing. You need the theory; there is no doubt about that. You need the theory about how kids learn and all that aspect, but you also need the practical on-the-ground training. So an internship, we feel, would be better placing those individuals coming in, and maybe we will keep them for longer if they are feeling –

**Joe McCracken:** That was going to lead in to my next question as well. If you get people who have experience of what teaching might be like before they obtain a graduate position and go on, it might actually weed some of the people out of the system that may not necessarily be best suited so you get the people who actually might be natural-born, gifted teachers into the system. They know they love it and they want to get their teeth stuck into it – that sort of thing. There are those who go into the system who you probably would not describe like that.

**Tina KING:** I think people know that teaching is not all about 9 until 3:30 and holidays.

**Joe McCracken:** It is not about the holidays and the pay.

**Tina KING:** Absolutely not. If they do not know that by now – one of the things that is really hurting the profession is lack of respect from within and outside. I think there is a lack of understanding of what the role of the teacher and the role of a school leader entail and the complexities that come with those roles. Parents and other stakeholders had insight of that during COVID when the classroom was online and they got to see that. We saw a huge uplift in terms of accolades and acknowledgements – ‘Thank you for the work that you are doing.’ But as we have come out of that phase, we have seen a dip again and teachers are saying, ‘We feel disrespected. We feel undervalued.’ You go to a dinner party, and when you say you are teacher it is like, ‘Oh, you poor thing.’

**Joe McCracken:** Or you are scoffed at or whatever.

**Tina King:** Exactly. Teachers are questioning themselves as to their worth when there are all these statements being made that can be negative. I know there have been campaigns, from federal Minister Clare and certainly our department here, to lift the profile and the stance of teachers in our respective communities. One of the other elements that is missing is that partnership that we used to have between home and school. At the moment schools are expected to do –

**Joe McCracken:** Well, that was going to lead on to my next point.

**Tina King:** Sorry, I am pre-empting your questions.

**Joe McCracken:** Sometimes I get the sense, and this is probably a bit of a generalisation here, that, as you say, home as a broad entity outsources a lot of that parenting to schools so schools have become this sort of – I think you said it, Colin – ‘a bit of doing everything’. What do you pick and choose to do and what do you do? This is a broad philosophical question: what is the purpose of a school? Because I do not think that there is a shared understanding across the state about what the purpose of a school actually is.

**Colin Axup:** If I may, I agree with the question; it is why I mentioned it earlier. I think it is that conversation of: what does the community expect from a school? Now, we have seen over time the development of more and more of, if you like, the social aspect of a school and a school hub. And it also is highly dependent on where you are in the state. There is often a big difference between metropolitan schools and when you get to rural schools and regional schools as well. But, you know, you see primary schools that provide before- and after-school care, for example. When I went to primary school – granted, a long time ago – the reality was that the expectation was you went to school from 9 till 3, and that was it; that was what the school did. But over the decades those expectations have grown, I think without the community conversation about, ‘So what is the expectation?’

I am a firm believer that a quality education is a partnership between the school and the family, and it is about mutual respect. We also know that if that respect is not mutual, it makes it very difficult to achieve that. But I also say the vast majority of families that schools work with are of course respectful. To the point Tina made, often our biggest challenge is how teaching and the negative side of what happens in schools become what appears in the media, and there is some really good research actually around how the media, especially the print media, looks at schools.

**Joe McCracken:** It is that noisy 5 per cent.

**Colin Axup:** Yes. Nicole Mockler, if you are looking for a book. But a conversation about the role of schools I think would go a long, long way to helping resolve some of the issues.

**Tina King:** If you take it at its simplest, which is to develop the whole child, which is socially, academically and emotionally – let us just take that – the problem we have is we need to find that balance, because if we are focusing on the social and emotional and we are neglecting the academic, then we are not doing any service, or if we are focusing on the academic and not focusing on the others. You know, we need to reclaim that balance, because there is an expectation that schools develop –

**Joe McCracken:** But going on what you were saying, you think the balance is out of whack?

**Tina King:** I think it is, because of the needs of kids. We know things like the mental health reforms and the supports that are being put in schools are an acknowledgement of where we are not just as schools but where we are as a society. Again, we need to adapt to the needs that we are presented with.

**Joe McCracken:** I think my time has run out.

**The Deputy Chair:** It sure has.

**Joe McCracken:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for joining us. A big theme of what we have spoken about already today has been the administrative burden, and I also note you have highlighted it in both of your submissions. It has been good to go through some of what those issues are, and it marries with what I have heard from principals in my electorate as well. You will be aware that an independent review into this issue is now underway, just recently announced by the minister Ben Carroll. It is going to be led by Katie Roberts-Hull. I am sure you both will have a lot to say as part of that review.

**Tina KING:** We have met with Ms Roberts-Hull.

**Colin AXUP:** We have already met her once, yes. We were quick out of the blocks.

**Michael GALEA:** Oh, fantastic. Very good to hear that that is already underway. I guess the key question I have is: what are some of the solutions to this? What solutions are you both putting forward to how we can streamline this admin without compromising on other outcomes?

**Colin AXUP:** Early days yet, I think. As I said, I think the identification process of what administrative and compliance burdens have increased in schools over time is a really important piece of work to understand. But if we look at it in just really quick terms, if you look at OH&S compliance and if you look at one area around compliance that has grown hugely over time, occupational health and safety just grows and grows and grows. And it depends on whether you have, if you like, that capacity within your school to, I would argue, effectively manage it. Principals and assistant principals – it is usually some poor assistant principal who gets given the job of managing OH&S. We are fundamentally teachers and educators. Yes, there are some people out there who get excited about OH&S compliance, which is really good, but not every school has one.

**Michael GALEA:** They are a rare breed, yes.

**Colin AXUP:** Certainly from a secondary school perspective, because we tend to be bigger and therefore our budgets are larger, we have a greater capacity then to say, 'Well, actually, I'll hire a facilities manager. If I hire them at the right level and get the right person, I'll get someone to come in who actually understands that element of compliance.' Our argument would be, for example, that we should look at: well, is that something a principal needs to make a decision on and go looking at the budget for? I also get this from our primary counterparts saying, 'Our schools are smaller, we don't have that much flexibility.' A smaller school also means, arguably, less compliance in terms of area. So the question is – and in our initial meeting I have already posed that question: should the system, instead of leaving that up to the school to make a decision, go, 'Actually, here's the support you need to do your OH&S compliance'? We already have support, for example, when we do our VRQA compliance checks regularly. We get that, but that is not an everyday or every year type of process. So the question would be looking at what additional supports could be given.

**Tina KING:** We might submit to the committee – we developed a positioning paper as a result of an education summit that we held. We had just over 60 principals in a room from all corners of the state – primary, secondary, special school, metro, rural – and we asked them: what are the enablers and barriers to you doing your job?

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** It would be really helpful if you have got something.

**Tina KING:** It is very simple.

**Colin AXUP:** It is basically five simple areas. Part of the answer too is: our principals, if you look at it compared to other states and territories, have a lot more autonomy. I say to the members of VASSP consistently: you are going to have to give up something because, over time, autonomy needs to be balanced with the reality that you cannot actually do everything. At some point we actually have to accept, to be brutally honest, what we are prepared, I say, to give up – or to lose, if you like – that complete autonomy over. You cannot have it all, so we have to be prepared to do that.

**Tina KING:** Once we define what we want our principals to be, are they going to be educational leaders, are they going to be administrators or are they going to be managers, or are they going to be both? If they are going to be both, what are the supports that are needed to put in at the school level? We have got to look at the system, how it works. We are delighted that the department is really engaging with us on this, and it is the minister's office. We are finally feeling that, since the first report came out in 2004, relating to the privilege and



the price of the principalship, we are in a position where we are making some inroads here to get some real tangible outcomes. We have presented to the former and current ministers and key departmental staff our education summit paper that says, 'This is what principals are saying.' They want to see too more supports in terms of what is happening at the regional level – that is, the conduit between schools and central services of the department – and how they want to see realignment and more on-the-ground supports to help them in executing their roles and their responsibilities.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. It sounds like my time is up.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** It is. Ms Payne.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you for coming and presenting to us today. I think most things I wanted to query have been asked. But just going back to the administrative burdens, what we have heard throughout this inquiry, particularly from teachers – and I am sure that you are hearing this as well – is that teachers are so burdened with their workload that they are not keeping up with that reporting back to both parents and giving feedback to kids as well, and that is predominant with teachers that are casually employed; there is not that requirement from what we understand. Can you talk us through some of the impacts that is having actually on not only the children but also the relationship with parents?

**Tina KING:** It is interesting, similarly to principals, to unpack what those workload burdens are for teachers, and they will identify the administrative tasks. That comes from: you are planning a camp, and you need to do a comprehensive risk assessment, or an overseas learning experience. There is the paperwork, which is the accountability aspect. There are also the demands of individualised plans for children deemed to be in need of support, which take time. Teachers just want to get into the core of teaching, and good teaching involves good planning and good approaches. They are finding they are spending less time on being able to do that and more in the other area. Parental demands and expectations – we talked about those encroaching into the school. That cuts into time. They are saying, 'I don't have time to teach,' because schools are expected to do interschool sports. We could list a whole myriad of programs which take away from quality time in the classroom. I know a lot of schools are revisiting what they are doing by way of extracurricular activities to ensure that continuity of children with their respective teachers, primary or secondary. Then you have the problem of: are we residualising the system by not offering these extracurricular activities? Compounding that are time-in-lieu provisions and how we acquit time for teachers that is outside the 38 hours. If we are not going to pay them, how are we going to acquit it? Because we do not have the funds to pay. It is so multilayered and complex.

What I will say is teachers and principals go to school every day to do the best for every child by every child and are committed to strong partnerships with families, and that is the majority of what we see, by and large, each and every day. There are minorities that pose problems, there is no doubt about that. But to address the workload issues for teachers and principals, let us understand what we mean by that workload and let us look at what the barriers are, what they are crying out for and what the enablers are.

**Colin AXUP:** If I take the part of your question around the relationship with teachers and parents, it comes back to that community expectation aspect of it. What are the expectations around, if you like, that reporting to parents? I think, again, it is one of those things you recognise. You know, over 30 years in education you have seen the change where reporting to parents was fairly minimal. You sent home the semester report. You would contact a parent in extreme circumstances, if you like. But – and this is obviously from a secondary perspective – we have the advantage that unlike primary schools, where they encourage the parents to come into the schools, most secondary schools basically do not. That is also about young adolescents not wanting them and growing up as well, but I think it is a really important discussion to have. What is that expectation? And not only what is the expectation but what is realistic? Because if you are asking a teacher – and there is no set number of times a teacher needs to contact a parent, so if you look at our reporting requirements, our only requirement is to report twice a year. But we do more than that nowadays, because the expectation has built up.

So if you say that a teacher has to be in contact with the parents of the 25 children in their class X number of times per term and throw in a few blended families, all of a sudden that is not 25 phone calls or that is not 25 contacts but also it becomes 'What's the expectation around when Mum or Dad emails the principal?' What is the expectation on that response and so forth. That is all time-consuming, and it becomes very much a process of schools navigating that themselves and hopefully with their communities. But it is fraught. It is time-

consuming. And I understand that parents want to know everything that is happening, but we have also enabled – in a way our systems have enabled – a greater oversight too, with some of the systems that even schools use where parents can actually literally see what is happening.

**Rachel PAYNE:** I guess, just to finish, we did hear of instances where there were teacher and parent WhatsApp groups and this expectation on teachers to respond to queries outside of hours and things like that, so it is really relative.

**Colin AXUP:** As a principal I would never expect a teacher to be on a WhatsApp group with a parent. In fact I would strongly discourage them not to.

**Tina KING:** Any social group.

**Colin AXUP:** I would say the only time we have used that was when we took a group of students overseas, and that was our way of keeping Mum, Dad and anybody else who was in the chat informed about what was happening, and you would send the happy snaps and so forth. But anything outside of that, I think –

**Rachel PAYNE:** It points to that level of expectation.

**Colin AXUP:** that should not be an expectation, and I think it comes back to that question around ‘What’s our purpose?’ And the more time a teacher spends answering emails or making phone calls to Mum or Dad, the less time they are prepping and doing the work that they need to be doing.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Mr Welch.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes. Just quickly, it has been a very wide-reaching and almost – one by one, I am like, ‘I can’t ask that now’, ‘I can’t ask that now’, so I am going to be reaching. My father was a high school principal for a long time, so I went through his experience of it in the 80s and 90s, and I guess I carry some baggage from that as well.

**Tina KING:** That is why you are not a teacher.

**Richard WELCH:** There are two questions, and probably if you can have a shortish answer to them. You were talking about the increase in challenges relating to inappropriate parent behaviours. Do you have an explanation or a diagnosis as to why?

**Colin AXUP:** I am not a psychologist or a sociologist, but my observation over time, and I will put that out there, is society has changed and expectations have changed. I think parents are in many respects much more involved and expected to be involved in the education of their child. You have the advent of social media. That element of the school that it happens from 9 to 3, for example, and then school stops – again, I know I went home from school, and the next time I saw my friends was either we were out in the street kicking the footy or I saw them the next day. Nowadays all of the connections, the social media connections, mean that school is actually much more than 9 to 3, and there is lots written about that. I think we have to acknowledge that our society is much more complex than it was even a decade ago, and schools need to manage that.

**Tina KING:** Relationships matter so much. We know from schools that have strong partnerships and relationships within the school and with their parent bodies that that develops trust. If a parent is hot under the collar about something, they tend to approach the school because they know they will be heard. But sometimes there are factors and things that happen outside of the school, which Colin just identified, that really get people hot under the collar. Principals are often compared to CEOs. When can you ever march into a CEO’s office and just blow off steam like that? It just does not happen. Yet we know in schools a minority can go straight into the principal’s office. You will never do it to a doctor, you will never do it to a CEO, you will never do it to a company executive, but principals are at the front line. Maybe it is because there is that level of comfort and trust, or maybe there is a level of frustration. But yes, they are burdened with some of that behaviour, and it can be frightening, it can be hostile. There are protective measures in terms of the community safety orders that are in place from the department and trespass orders and things. It takes a lot to do something like that, because you are fracturing a relationship. But then you can argue the relationship was fractured when that individual came

into your office and you were the subject of that attack. It takes a lot sometimes. People feeling frightened in the workplace is not good.

**Richard WELCH:** You mentioned earlier the balance between the educational and the academic and the socialisation. That balance may be skewed. That also perhaps blurs the, if you like, for want of a better phrase – previously education was transactional. You sent your kids to school to get educated. Now there is a much more relational element, and that may also be a cause of the lines being blurred and therefore the point at where they have a say. I think the socialisation aspect of it may put you in greater conflict with the home culture, potentially.

**Colin AXUP:** I agree. I think it is really important that schools have always been about an element of socialisation.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes, correct.

**Colin AXUP:** It has not always been about the three Rs. It is about young people learning to cooperate in a reasonable way with others. The relationship between schools and their communities has changed enormously, but part of that has also been around what schools are now doing. Again, mental health practitioners in schools – we brought mental health practitioners into schools, so we are now dealing with what is essentially an allied health process within schools. We had school counsellors in the past who were qualified teachers. There is a huge difference between a mental health practitioner and a welfare coordinator, if you like, who is a teacher. So once you start blurring the lines, if you like, between the front gate of the school and what is outside of that front gate, that is where the challenge comes.

**Richard WELCH:** I think a lot of things emanate from that decision. My time is up, so thank you, Chair.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** It is. That is okay; our time is up in general. Thanks so much, Tina and Colin, for coming in today. We really appreciate that you could delve into the questions. There was a lot of interest in the perspective of principals on these issues. That brings our session to a close, and we will break for lunch.

**Witnesses withdrew.**