

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 8 May 2024

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WITNESS

Professor Joanna Barbousas, Dean, School of Education, La Trobe University.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to our Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Welcome to Professor Joanna Barbousas, Dean of the School of Education, from La Trobe University, who has joined us for this session.

Professor, before I continue, I would like to read some information out to you. 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 you provide 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.

For your information, my name is Trung Luu. I am the Chair of the committee. To my left is the Deputy Chair Mr Ryan Batchelor. Mr Aiv Puglielli and Ms Melina Bath are to my right, and to my left is Mr Joe McCracken and Mrs Moira Deeming. Also on Zoom is Dr Renee Heath, who will be joining us as well.

Thank you so much for coming in. It is great to have someone who is the head of a school of education giving us some insights in relation to what we are inquiring into, so it is fantastic to have you here. I know you have made a submission. I invite you to make a short opening statement so that we have time later on to ask you some questions. There are sure to be a few questions that we would like to throw at you. Before you do, can you please state your full name and the organisation you are presenting on behalf of for the record.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Okay. Thank you. My name is Professor Joanna Barbousas. I am the Dean of the School of Education at La Trobe University. I would like to start, firstly, as the Dean of the School of Education at La Trobe with over 27 years experience as a teacher and an academic in Victoria and in New South Wales, by saying I really appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee. Education is a real passion for me.

I take the La Trobe University submission as read, but I would like to briefly outline our key messages. As you know, La Trobe is one of the major providers of initial teacher education across Victoria, with close-knit networks with schools and TAFEs across the state. With campuses all over regional Victoria, we have a keen interest in improving regional and rural education outcomes across schools and to work with schools and governments to increase aspiration and participation in higher education in regional Victoria. This is in line with the aspirations of the Australian Universities Accord. This is why we have set up regional higher education pathways programs at our Albury–Wodonga and Shepparton campuses, with plans to expand further in Mildura and Bendigo depending on the availability of further funding. Currently supported through philanthropy, these interventions at year 11 and year 12 are having a remarkable impact on the prospect of further study for regional Victorian schools. For teacher education particularly, we have pathways through our teacher education diploma programs and our associate degree, which has really increased the diversity of people coming into teaching and with great support to allow them to succeed.

In terms of training the future teaching workforce across Australia, we have worked very hard to embed close links with employment pathways, the culmination of which has been our nationally award-winning Nexus program into teaching programs. Essentially it is an employment-based pathway program, which we believe has the potential to further expand in Victoria and nationally. Currently it is funded through the high achieving teachers program through the Commonwealth government and is significantly supported by the Victorian government as well. Our initial teacher education programs, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are underpinned by robust research. In fact the School of Education at La Trobe established the science of language and reading lab, our SOLAR lab, which is gaining lots of momentum across the country and internationally. In fact over 11,000 parents and teachers across the country and significantly in Victoria have benefited from our evidence-based short courses and approaches to reading instruction. These approaches have been embedded into all our teaching degrees. We would welcome the opportunity to offer our courses to a wider range of

teachers and educators across the state. I will leave it there but can elaborate further on these points or any issues raised from our submission.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Professor. I would like to invite my Deputy Chair to start off.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Professor, thanks very much for coming.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Thank you.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Based on your considerable experience, expertise, research and practice, what is the best way to teach kids reading?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I have esteemed professors who have dedicated their work to this approach. I was always perplexed as a secondary teacher at receiving young people into my visual arts subject with the inability to have proficient reading. As a frustrated secondary teacher many, many moons ago, I always thought there must be a better way. In my investigation and research as an academic reading different ways of thinking about reading instruction in an explicit way, and then as a Dean of the School of Education at La Trobe, the opportunity to implement significant change in a teaching degree with my esteemed colleagues has really provided further guarantee that we are on the right track – that reading instruction really is not a natural disposition; it is something that is and has to be taught, and it really is about a structured literacy approach that gets the best out of every learner not just some learners.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What do you think the barriers are to the adoption of a structured explicit literacy instruction approach in our schools?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I think there has been a kind of advocacy of an approach that people could take their own way of thinking about reading through a balanced literacy whole-language approach. If somebody can come to me with robust research – I am happy to be debunked on this – there is no robust research to say that a whole-language balanced literacy approach can give you the same kinds of outcomes as an explicit approach to reading. And so –

Ryan BATCHELOR: And what – sorry, you finish.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Just to answer your question, I think the challenges have been that it has been a smorgasbord of approaches rather than an explicit evidence-based ‘This is what actually gets the most out of reading opportunities for young people’. Essentially in Victoria, schools have an autonomy to take an approach they wish to undertake. What I would challenge the system on is that a more targeted way supported through the government and the department would actually provide autonomous schools the ability to make really strong decisions about researched approaches to reading.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So what do you think policymakers need to do and what you think parents need to do?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I think parents need to keep challenging schools and challenging principals on the work and the decisions made for curriculum design in schools. There are many jurisdictions now declaring strongly that they are taking – New South Wales, ACT – explicit teaching approaches. I think in Victoria there is a lot of momentum now in thinking about explicit approaches and specifically structured literacy in ways that perhaps we have not done before, so I am very pleased to see that.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much for being here. Can I call you Joanna? Is that okay?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: You can indeed.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much. I was a bit the same way. I got into teaching year 7, and the kids would come in and not only not be able to read but not do their tables. Numeracy is my passion. Can we just explore a little bit more – your submission talks about the widening gap, which is part of our terms of reference,

between regional and metropolitan, and you do say that Victoria devolves responsibility to individual schools around teaching literacy, so where is there a good model – say, a school that is piloting your program – and what results are we seeing there?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I will answer it broadly. In the way that we have launched the SOLAR Lab and the SOLAR short courses, one school who gets a big guernsey for very real reasons is Churchill Primary.

Melina BATH: I would love to get them in here – take that on notice – because we have heard this before.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Jacquie Burrows is a bit of an inspiration for a dean like me and really went out on a limb to essentially take a very different approach in her school, with incredible outcomes. We are seeing a swell of schools who are working with the SOLAR team very strongly and repeats of our short courses, so some people have started with the introduction and are then moving on to the intermediate. What we are currently working towards is framing momentum schools, so schools who are actually wanting to make transformational change, particularly in reading instruction, and we have probably got around 30 to 40 schools who will say, ‘We only do this approach.’ I think we can do more.

Melina BATH: Okay, and if we go to Churchill as an example, a case study, previously they were in a disadvantaged area. They are not in a high socio-economic area. They are undergoing change in the environment for working families et cetera. It would be seen as a disadvantaged school and probably would not be achieving super well if we used other benchmarks, like NAPLAN or the like – and we have heard varying degrees of commentary around NAPLAN – but are they seeing good results?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Absolutely. I do not have the data in front of me, but I do know from my conversations with the principal and the members of the school that because of the changes and the targeted approach significant increases appeared in NAPLAN but also in a whole range of other measures.

Melina BATH: This is phonics, is it? Is that a dirty word, or is it a good word? Explain it to us.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: We made it pretty clear in our submission. Phonics is not a pedagogy. Phonics is a very important part of structured literacy –

Melina BATH: Explicit teaching.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: yes – but the bigger piece is the implementation of proficient knowledge acquisition. So phonics, yes, is very important, but it is the ongoing work around language development, sophisticated language development and proficiency in undertaking not only reading but also spelling and writing.

Melina BATH: When Victorian schools have the responsibility or can make up their own minds in regard to balanced literacy and the other aspects, why do you think they have chosen that way? I am just trying to tease it out. Is it because this explicit way was not seen to be individualised enough? I want to understand that, because we are going to have to make recommendations to government, so I just want it committed to here.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Before the launch of our SOLAR Lab, I think many of the conversations I would have with principals and lead teachers were, ‘We don’t have these resources available to us through the department or through other resources.’

Melina BATH: Right – the explicit teaching lessons and the like, Joanna.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: That is right, yes. So there was a kind of advocating for a balanced literacy whole-language approach in Victoria. I think in the discussion around autonomy, many principals are actually making decisions now to take a more explicit approach. I have been having quite a few conversations with the department currently around how we as a university, who have gone out on a limb and declared that we are taking this approach, are more than happy to work with the department and the government to really look at some examples of how to roll this out in a more sophisticated way across the schools.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thanks, Chair. I have got others but thank you.

The CHAIR: There will be time. We will come back to you. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming in today. Professor, I would just like to start with one of your recommendations that you have submitted, number 6, which is to set a target for all Victorian early childhood education and care settings and primary and secondary schools to have access to a multidisciplinary allied health team comprising a psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist and physio, working with the school to support the student cohort. Why in your view is that important?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: There are many reports now through the Grattan Institute and others around the complexity and the future of a school context. It is a complex space. It always has been, but it is becoming more and more complex, and the needs of young people I think are quite different to 20, 30, let alone 50 years ago. It is important because I think it will allow for the key professionals to do the expert work needed for any kind of school community. It will then allow for teachers to actually teach and to take up a more expert approach to teaching where other allied health professionals could work with the needs of students for their other areas, rather than saying, 'Schools are complex; teachers need to do more.' Teachers need to do more in wellbeing and in a whole range of areas which are important, but you also need the professional expertise to allow for teaching to be as important.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In the absence of these allied health teams being made available as recommended, what is currently happening?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I am not across the specifics in each school.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Of course.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: But I do know that there are targeted decisions that schools make around how they use their resources to bring in support and expertise. We hear a lot that health and wellbeing is a real issue for young people in schools and for teachers to deal with these issues that evolve. Just on that, I think one of our programs, our Nexus program, is very much around looking at employment-based pathways for schools of need. There are a lot of interesting discussions happening at the moment. Nexus is a bit of a signature piece for La Trobe, and we are having a lot of impact in really bringing in high-quality teachers in schools that need them most. Also, we are working within the university around Nexus for allied health and thinking about what that would look like for schools of need, but that is a work in progress.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you. Earlier today we heard instances of the difficulties that parents are facing in supports being provided to their children who are autistic. One of your other recommendations is to improve access to evidence-based, inclusive and supportive early education for autistic children in both specialist and inclusive settings. You have put an example of a state rollout of the Alert program. Could you talk a bit more about that program?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Yes, I probably will give you a little bit more. I will have to take that on notice –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, that is fine.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: because it does come through our Olga Tennison autism centre – OTARC – where we have a research centre that is working very closely with our education academics to look at evidence approaches to early intervention and also to upskill teachers – current teachers and our pre-service teachers – to understand neurodiversity in a much more comprehensive way.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I will take that on notice and give you more information.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That would be great. And if there are aspects in there around supports you would like to see for students who are autistic, that would be fantastic.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Absolutely.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Yes, thanks very much for your time. I am interested to hear more about the high-impact teaching practice and what that looks like in a classroom.

Joanna Barbousas: That is where you really have to look at the framework around explicit teaching and what it means. Often there is a kind of myth that needs to be busted on what explicit teaching is: it is not the ‘sage on the stage’, it is actually a really structured approach to understanding how a young person or a person is learning. It is about modelling, it is about chunking, setting the scene and really positioning the teacher, not as a guide but actually setting the opportunity for impact and for modelling and checking for understanding. All of those things are actions, and explicit teaching is about planning the learning for an impactful approach to reading instruction, for example, or in maths, conceptual learning and development. So it is not just about the teacher talk, it is how the impact of learning is designed in a way that, really, the teacher understands the cognitive load issues that come out of new concepts that are being developed – so how that learning is designed to move from working memory to a long-term memory. All of that is part of the focus on that kind of learning approach.

Joe McCracken: I know a lot of schools have a lot of different approaches and there is no one correct or universally accepted way of teaching practice. Given that there are a number of different schools in a number of different environments with a lot of different factors that contribute to the context of a school, what do you see the place of high-impact teaching practice being in the Victorian system, and how might you see that come about to benefit outcomes?

Joanna Barbousas: I think there probably needs to be, particularly for those who have not seen that kind of teaching, a more visible approach, opportunities to collaborate, more resources that are advocated through the government, through the systems, to say, ‘Through research, here are examples and here are resources that actually position learning in different ways.’ Because a school or teachers have not seen something in a particular way –

Joe McCracken: Yes, you do not know what you do not know.

Joanna Barbousas: Yes. You do not know what you do not know. But I think for us at La Trobe University, it is really about providing the best kinds of approaches, particularly for our preservice and graduate teachers: what do you need to know right now, not what will you know or need to know for the rest of your professional life. But the explicit approach to designing learning to be impactful is really about positioning the teacher to understand practice.

Joe McCracken: Yes. I am a big advocate for what I would call an apprenticeship model of preservice teaching, where you literally have a preservice teacher – depending on what the model might look like – but, you know, three or four days a week with a teacher learning in the environment rather than perhaps what some might term as more theoretically based. I dare say high-impact teaching could be embedded into that process as well. I guess as a broader question: do you support a more apprenticeship style model rather than the current teaching education model that exists at the moment?

Joanna Barbousas: That is a very good question, and I am glad you have asked it. One of the things that we have really shifted in our teaching degrees at La Trobe, particularly in a four-year bachelor degree, is to move to a two-by-two model. What that means is that the first two years are 80 per cent coursework content and 20 per cent in schools or engaging with professional experts, and in years 3 and 4 it is 80 per cent in schools and 20 per cent content. The whole idea is to be immersed in a school context –

Joe McCracken: Experiential learning.

Joanna Barbousas: Yes, but also at the right schools. There have been moments where I have actually noted, ‘You’re probably not well placed as a school to take our students,’ because the research is out: you can’t learn good practice from witnessing bad practice; it does not become good just because you are there. I am absolutely for more embedded approaches. It is more expensive, and it does have an influence on the way we work with our resources. But it is also –

Joe McCracken: Quality outcomes.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Yes, absolutely. Our nexus program is about completely embedding. They start as education support staff in the first year, and then they move into the profession as a paraprofessional.

Joe McCRACKEN: Yes. Thanks. I think my time is up, but I appreciate that.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Sorry.

Joe McCRACKEN: No, that is fine. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mrs Deeming.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you. I am just so excited that you are here, Joanna. Everything you are saying is fantastic. It is so funny. There are a few teachers here, and I had the same experience. As a high school teacher I did not understand why I kept on getting cohorts of children who were basically illiterate, and I did not know how to teach reading. I actually demanded that my principal get me training in phonics, because I actually could not help them. I stopped making them read out loud. It was terrible.

I think that is fantastic. What would you say to this? This is my theory. A lot of people have focused on the fact that exams and measurements are extraordinarily stressful for kids, and therefore we should change the assessment, whereas my instinct as a teacher was, 'But I want them to be able to do that. I don't see why they can't do that.' If they were educated and they were confident and if we did this high-impact teaching practice, which actually delivers results, then those results would show up on exams and there would not be so much stress. But once you get along in high school, then it is so hard to remediate those situations. I am just wondering: I know how long it took me, but how long do you think it would take to train a teacher who is already in a school? By the time I came across this problem I had already been in a school for a little while, and there were no options for me to get that unless I demanded it, which I did. But just say we wanted to bring in a policy where we were going to have this kind of instruction in all Victorian schools, how long do you think a course would take to help teachers?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Thank you for that question, and thank you for sharing your experience, because it is I think widespread, and widespread with our candidates who come into our short courses. Initially we thought, 'Should we run one for secondary teachers?' We thought there would not be an uptake. It was a significant uptake. I suppose in terms of how long, we have seen significant testimonials from people coming back to our team saying, 'I now know. I can now do this. I can now work with teams.' In terms of the intervention piece, you can have wings very quickly in terms of teacher practice changes. Where I think there would be a swell of improvement is when it is systemic and coming from the leadership team, which is what I have experienced in teams. You can have systemic change when you really lead a direction. I do not know if I have really answered your question.

The other thing that we have done in our teaching degrees is we launched our new programs last year, so we have got a whole cohort of students who are taking a much more explicit approach to not only structured literacy but also to more embedded knowledge around the brain and learning. I have heard principals say, 'Your second years are way superior than your fourth years, who have not had that up-front.' We have tried to retrofit it, but really they are seeing that change quite significantly.

Moira DEEMING: I did my first degree at La Trobe University. I did not do my teaching degree there, which I regret, but anyway. I was shocked to find in my teaching degree that what I was taught was not how to teach and how children learn. It does not really matter if they are diverse; they are all human children. There has got to be some kind of commonality there for a basis, even if you do tweak things for individual students. I know that I learned a few theories of teaching which within one year were debunked. I was really disappointed with my teaching degree, and I love your emphasis and your strong stance on the fact that we can know the truth of what is the best design for learning. I just want to thank you for that, and I hope you get heaps of support from the government.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Moira. Thank you, Professor. Perhaps now in relation to your submission, it is not only about identifying but actually providing alternative solutions to situations where there are failures in the system at the moment. I just want to ask you – at the moment with teaching there are questions in relation to the

standards or the qualifications of teachers. How long has La Trobe University been going down this path of an explicit approach in relation to graduates and your training through the university?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Sure. I suppose if I was to put hand on heart in terms of really dedicating a different approach, it would have been when I became Dean in 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic. It was then when our programs were up for accreditation and we made a concerted decision to essentially frame our programs around three key areas, which have almost revealed themselves in the teacher education expert panel recommendations. So we framed our programs around the learning sciences, impactful pedagogies and social equity. That sort of frames the program across a four-year or a two-year. So we do not have one subject in, you know, cognition. It is sort of framed across the program. And we are seeing significant changes to the efficacy and confidence of second years and even students in the postgraduate master of teaching really knowing how to use evidence to inform what they do next.

So I would say in our Nexus program particularly – this is our fourth year. I would say probably four years, because what we did do, even in our reaccreditation of our programs, was try to retrofit some of the great work that was coming out of the SOLAR Lab so that our current students were still gaining from the work that we were doing. But our new programs are absolutely embedded in the approaches.

The CHAIR: Do you know if any other university has actually gone down this path, or is La Trobe the only one at the moment?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Look, I would say that most universities will say, ‘Of course we all do that.’ I can say I have been in teacher education for a long time now. I made a concerted effort to really focus on the how of teaching, noting there are many theories. But the theories that really position what a teacher is able to do and actually implement approaches are quite different to theories that focus on sort of social, cultural, identity issues rather than practice.

The CHAIR: The reason I asked the question was leading to the next one, which is basically: to implement what you are suggesting, the model, as an approach across the state, if only La Trobe University has done it over the last four years, that will produce a number of teachers, but to upgrade all the teachers across the state I was just wondering about the time frame. If we move forward, how long do you think, in a time period or a year period, it will take the whole system to catch up?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Look, if we just focus on teacher education, it will take a long time. It has to be multipronged and it has to also be at current teachers, preservice teachers but also leaders. Principals and lead teachers are curriculum changers, and there needs to be some serious work in that space as well. So I am reluctant to say how long, but in order for it to have impact as soon as possible and particularly in areas of great need when you look at the PISA data across the declining reading and numeracy results, I think we really need to focus on some targeted approaches through our short courses, our key resources to impact change. But also teacher education is under the microscope at the moment, and all providers will need to meet the expert panel new program recommendations by the end of next year. I think if there is an opportunity to really take a multipronged approach, I think it will not take as long.

The CHAIR: One more question before I go to the panel, because we have got a bit of time left, in relation to recommendations –

Joe McCRACKEN: Has Renee spoken yet?

The CHAIR: Renee is no longer here. In relation to recommendations, should government be focusing on primary school, where the structures start at the beginning, or do we do – because if we have to start upskilling all the teachers, we cannot just do across the board. I think the feasibility would not be there straightaway for enough staff to upskill people. Where should we be starting, with the primary school or the middle school?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Look, I think there focusing on early intervention and early primary is probably the low-hanging fruit – and upskilling teachers in that space. I think having targeted tier 2 interventions for secondary teachers at the same time would really benefit as well, but early intervention is essentially the low-hanging fruit – but without ignoring those who are in the system already.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Any more questions?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes. Thanks. I do not know whether there is any or whether you have come across it, but I am interested in whether there is any relationship in the literature or any other pieces of evidence about relationships between instructional methods and behaviours and behavioural management in classrooms, in particular about whether students having clarity about what they are supposed to be learning helps them learn. Have you got anything on that front?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I do not have any data in front of me, but I can tell you – and I will go back to Jacquie Burrows. She will say and have incredible evidence of more structured approaches to learning having dissolved classroom management issues – not completely dissolved, but when students have a greater understanding of expectations – and as a teacher I was very clear on that. Designing an environment of learning actually is about designing pedagogy for classroom management, so classroom management is a pedagogy. You design it in order for learning to be optimised. I do not have the research in front of me but there are some great research findings around that kind of hypothesis, because the more you design and understand the instruction, the more opportunity to be efficacious and confident to do and progress in an environment.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If you have got any of that research that you would be able to provide to the committee on notice, that would be very helpful.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I would be able to do that for you.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you so much. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Ms Bath?

Melina BATH: Thank you so much, Joanna. In relation to your new model – La Trobe University's new model of 80–20 in the last two years, have you considered doing some longitudinal studies? What we have heard, and part of our terms of reference are about teacher retention and that many new teachers are not staying in the education system very long. Will this model give them that confidence and the skills, the toolkits to actually stay in? I have got a couple more questions, so –

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Sure. I will be quick.

Melina BATH: You are most kind. Thank you.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: The answer is yes. One thing that I was very clear about when we launched our new programs and accredited our new programs was to start a longitudinal impact study of all our teaching students. We currently are in the middle of our ITE longitudinal study, and we are gaining some really interesting data around confidence-building and retention. Our retention as a university with very high low SES is very high compared to other ITE providers. What we are finding with the new programs is we have very strong retention through the first two years, which is when you probably find people moving out of a teaching degree. So yes, we will have some strong longitudinal data around the actual quality of the program that we have designed.

Melina BATH: Good. Thank you. That is interesting. We would love to keep tracking that. In relation to resources, teachers are time poor, and you are providing these explicit instructive teaching resources. If that was to be rolled out across the state, for example, hypothetically speaking, can you provide a context around not costs – but is it difficult? How could a government go, 'Okay, this is a good idea. We'll take it and run with it,' without breaking the budget – which is contentious at the moment anyway.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I think we have to be really careful to not reinvent the wheel. There are already very strong programs, particularly around reading instruction. I think what we want to do is to not bamboozle schools and teachers about what to use and what not to use. Our SOLAR short courses are a fantastic resource and are very well priced, but there are lots of resources out there. You do not need to necessarily create new things, but you do need to advocate for some over others.

Melina BATH: Teachers often do use Dr Google, particularly if you are teaching outside your subject area because your school is short of teachers in that area. So off you go on Sunday night and learn the subject before you go and teach it – not always, but until you build up a bank. The other thing is you quoted PISA. What is

your professional opinion on it? We stand up in Parliament and we make speeches. Is it a valuable test? Should we pooh-pooh it? What is your discussion on that?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: I think it is really important to look at all data that is presented and then also critically look at the way the data has been assembled. We cannot look at it and say, 'It doesn't matter because we don't look good.' It does matter, but it actually has to be in line with other data that is available to us. I think to see Australia, as a First World country with the economy it has, having those kinds of measures is problematic.

Melina BATH: And therefore evidence-based positivity and outcomes. Just finally from me – thanks, Chair, for your indulgence – in terms of SOLAR, is there any way you could provide us with a little package of what that looks like?

Joanna BARBOUSAS: We will be able to do that.

Melina BATH: Just so we can all have a greater understanding about it.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Sure. I can do that.

Melina BATH: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Thank you, Professor, for your submission and your input today. It has been a valuable resource for us to look at and to ponder for our recommendations. We much appreciate your time, especially coming from the Dean of the School of Education. Thank you very much for your time.

Joanna BARBOUSAS: Thank you for the opportunity.

Witness withdrew.