FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into services for people with autism spectrum disorder

Melbourne — 7 November 2016

<u>Members</u>

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<u>Witnesses</u>

Mr Peter Bush, principal, and

Ms Britt Holmberg, Autism Connect and inclusion coordinator, Kalianna School Bendigo.

The CHAIR — Can I welcome this afternoon to our public hearing Mr Peter Bush, principal, and Ms Britt Holmberg, Autism Connect and inclusion staff member, from Kalianna School Bendigo. Thank you both for attending today. All evidence at this hearing taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and is subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and other relevant legislation. Any comments you make outside the hearing will not be afforded such privilege. It is a contempt of Parliament to provide false evidence. A recording of the proceedings will commence today, and you will be sent a proof copy of the transcript and be able to make factual or grammatical corrections if necessary. We are going to invite you to make a presentation to the committee of around 15 minutes.

Mr BUSH — Thank you, Maree, and committee members for inviting us to come along today after your visit to our school. We are happy to assist you in your inquiry into autism services for people in Victoria. I am currently principal of Kalianna special school in Bendigo, and we cater for students that have a mild intellectual disability. That means they have a diagnosis of cognitive ability between 50 and 70 IQ.

Two hundred and sixty-five students attend our school. They travel long distances to our school from Wedderburn and Kyneton. It is approximately 50 kilometres for some of our students to get to school. After your visit we did go back and have a look at how many students were on the spectrum, and 91 of our 265 students are on the spectrum. It is a significant number. Over the last three years we have had an increase in enrolments from 170 students to 265 today, and next year it will be slightly bigger.

Ms McLEISH — Do you know if the ratio has changed?

Mr BUSH — Over the years?

Ms McLEISH — Yes. You are talking about 91 out of 265.

Mr BUSH — No, I would have to go back and have a look at our numbers from the start. I think there is definitely an increase in families getting a diagnosis of children on the spectrum, but to be eligible for our school they have to have an intellectual disability.

The CHAIR — That is it?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

The CHAIR — That is good, because we like short presentations.

Mr BUSH — I did not realise I had 15 minutes.

The CHAIR — Because we visited the school and heard a lot from you previously, Peter and Britt, we do have a lot of information around the school. I guess the questions that we wanted to ask today are probably more broad and not so specific to Kalianna — from my perspective anyway. I am going to ask you a very direct question: do you think Victoria needs more schools like Kalianna?

Mr BUSH — Can you ask that question again?

The CHAIR — I guess Kalianna is what we used to call a special school, and it caters for kids with a certain intellectual ability. There have been some discussions with and presentations to the committee about the need for more autism-specific schools as well as more schools that cater for students who perhaps have comorbidities of autism and intellectual disability. So I guess what I am asking is: given that your enrolments are increasing and given that you have a high percentage of students on the spectrum, do you think that there is a need for more schools like Kalianna?

Mr BUSH — It is probably venturing into me giving a personal opinion, but what I would say is that the Autism Connect program that we run through the region is definitely something that is skilling up mainstream schools. As principal of Kalianna I hope that a success criteria for that would be fewer referrals of students to our school. I do not want to see our school continue to grow the way that it has, because logistically there is the space, the training of staff and ensuring the PBS framework is instilled and really grounded in all our staff. But the Autism Connect program that Britt heads up, definitely.

The CHAIR — Can we just talk a little bit about that. We have visited a couple of mainstream schools that have some brilliant integration programs, including Moomba Park over at Fawkner, which has a fantastic integration model. They work with Autism Connect as well. We are happy to hear how Autism Connect is working with Kalianna, because we have seen it working very well at that school.

Ms HOLMBERG — Through Autism Connect we support about 10 schools at the moment. We have been operating Autism Connect for the past three years, and I have been coordinator of the program for this year and last year. The sort of support we provide to schools within our region consists of really focusing on those whole-school approaches to schools and involving the coordination of leadership teams to make sure that those practices I help implement are effective.

A lot of the initiatives that we focus on through Autism Connect include implementation of PBS frameworks — positive behaviour support; making sure that whole-school practices are happening, such as visual supports and clear structures and routines; having whole-school reward systems; and ensuring that we provide schools with professional development centred around what autism is, what it looks like for students and how we can effectively support those students in our classrooms through the use of visuals and reward systems. Often that will include the coordination of the zones of regulation as well.

Often we have staff visit our school for a tour and to complete observations so they can see those practices happening in our school and observe how visuals are used and how those different strategies are happening for our students, which has been really effective for teachers. We have received really great feedback around teachers being able to see that in practice. I think the most important thing and what has been really great for the schools within our region is having the leadership teams definitely involved in all the supports that we provide.

Mr BUSH — I think the important thing about Autism Connect is that for every school that is referred to us we go and work out goals that we want to achieve. It may be just the one visit, or it may be over 12 months. I think that is really important, and that is why it is getting positive feedback.

The CHAIR — Does your school get specific funding for Autism Connect?

Mr BUSH — Yes. The last two years and next year we are getting funding. We are getting the equivalent of a two-day full-time teacher.

The CHAIR — So there are different funding models then within the education department for Autism Connect.

Ms McLEISH — It is from DET?

Mr BUSH — No, the Autism Connect program is an initiative run by the north-western region, our region, and there are six hub schools. The funding depends on the size of the area that we have to service.

The CHAIR — So there are different funding arrangements.

Ms McLEISH — But through DET not DHHS?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

The CHAIR — Given that the autism school we visited has the same Autism Connect but they were concerned about their funding arrangements beyond December, is it a different funding model?

Mr BUSH — Yes, and we can confirm that the funding is going to continue next year for Autism Connect.

The CHAIR — Excellent.

Ms McLEISH — Thanks for coming down and being available again today. Peter, if I recall correctly, were you the chair of the principals of special schools — —?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

Ms McLEISH — I just wanted to make sure we got that on the record. Would you like to confirm what your title is?

Mr BUSH — I am president of the Principals Association of Specialist Schools.

Ms McLEISH — And that has how many schools involved?

Mr BUSH — Eighty-one schools.

Ms McLEISH — Across Victoria?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

Ms McLEISH — Terrific. I just wanted to make sure we got that on the record. Have you visited the Northern School for Autism?

Mr BUSH — No, I have not.

Ms McLEISH — Not you, Britt, either? That is a school that has specifically been built around autism, and I think that is a pretty interesting model too.

The CHAIR — I think there is a different intellectual disability percentage.

Ms McLEISH — Yes, it was primarily on autism and you are in intellectual disability first?

Mr BUSH — Yes, and they have a different enrolment criteria for the autism schools than for us.

Ms McLEISH — It is probably still worth a visit. I just wanted to ask about your Autism Connect that has been going for three years, and you said you have got 10 schools. How far and wide are those 10 schools?

Ms HOLMBERG — At the moment I support schools from Echuca to Romsey and have in the past supported schools to Maryborough, so that is as far as I have travelled to support schools in our region.

Ms McLEISH — How far is that in distances?

Ms HOLMBERG — Over an hour.

Ms McLEISH — That is not far — not in my electorate. Okay, an hour away. How do the schools link in to you? Do you go out there or do they come to you because they hear about your reputation?

Ms HOLMBERG — How the referral comes about is first of all they put in a support request, which goes to the region office in Coburg. They do a phone consult to make sure that our service is going to be suitable for their school and the type of support that they are requesting. After that has gone through they will, with the support request, refer it on to the hub school that is closest. So if that is me, I will receive that support, or if it is another one of the six hub schools, then they will receive that support.

Ms McLEISH — That is within your region, the six hub schools?

Ms HOLMBERG — Within our region, yes. The request for support has some detailed information about the school, who they are requesting the support for — so the students or if it is whole school support. Sometimes that will come through as just an individual student or as a whole school, so it just depends on what services and support the school needs. After I receive that support, within the week I will make a phone call or send an email to touch base with the school, just introduce myself, and I will set a time to go and visit them to complete some observations and to meet with leadership teams. Then we develop a service agreement, which has some goals outlining what we would like to achieve from this support request, and we will usually outline the time frame of what that would look like, and it will go from there. As Peter said, it might be six months, it might be a year.

Ms McLEISH — A single visit or the 6 or 12 months, it depends.

Ms HOLMBERG — Yes. My experience of running the program for Kalianna has been that it is multiple visits, not just a singular visit.

Mr BUSH — And the region triage the incoming calls, so we do not get the initial call, the regional staff do.

Ms McLEISH — So the region and then the region refers to the hub and then you do the contact. The schools that have made those approaches — I mean they have obviously done it for a reason — do they have lots of students or a few students and they are not sure, or is it lots and they think, 'Gee, we need to get a good handle on how we manage this'?

Ms HOLMBERG — Historically what happens with a support request is it will start off as one or two students and then the realisation is, after you have met with the leadership teams, they think, 'That support would be great for our whole school', and it usually gets rolled out throughout the whole school. Why that happens also is because the most effective strategy is going to be whole-school approaches, such as a positive behaviour support framework, making sure the resources are consistent from classroom to classroom. Leadership teams will see that it will be effective to involve their whole staff. So it might just be a couple of students that they flag that they need to have some really serious support and help with and some advice. Then the realisation comes that these students will move from this teacher to that teacher, so we would like to train our whole staff in best practice around working with children with ASD.

Ms McLEISH — Are they funded students usually?

Ms HOLMBERG — The requirements of Autism Connect is that they do not have to be funded students and they do not have to have an autism diagnosis.

Ms McLEISH — So the availability of an aide within a school is probably not there because of that?

Ms HOLMBERG — That will just depend on the individual student and what is happening within the school as well.

Ms McLEISH — But if they generally have not got any funding, there would not be an aide.

Ms HOLMBERG — That is up to the individual school.

Ms McLEISH — Unless the school has got a bit of capacity.

Ms HOLMBERG — Yes, unless the school has.

Mr BUSH — The important thing that we have seen at Kalianna is that the employment of aides by themselves to support students on the spectrum or with any disability is not the best model to use. You should look at the program you are going to develop, the individual learning plan you are going to have for the student, because what we do at our school — —

If we always focus on employing more aides, they are usually the staff members that are not trained, so we are getting non-trained staff to work with students with more complex needs. That is why we need to have teachers and the leadership team implementing a whole school program so that the aides can be skilled up, but looking at just the school employing an aide to help that student is not always the answer.

The CHAIR — I think we have heard that issue before.

Ms McLEISH — What skills do I need to have as an aide?

Mr BUSH — A good sense of humour.

The CHAIR — I think there are no requirements.

Mr BUSH — There are no requirements.

Ms COUZENS — Thanks to both of you for coming here, and it was great to see the school too. It makes it easier to ask questions. I understand that the government has committed to a new school rebuild.

Mr BUSH — Yes; that is right.

Ms COUZENS — In light of that, with your expertise with ASD, what do you think are the most important things, not only environmentally but within the school programs, for example; so I suppose the structure, the important things around the structure, and the important things around the programs that are delivered? Given

that you have got the opportunity to have a whole new school, it would be interesting to hear your views on where you would see that?

Mr BUSH — Our school community has been working very hard to get a new school, and we have looked at the type of school that would best suit the needs of our students. We have focused on the programs first and how we want to teach. Now that we have got an idea of how that will work, we know what physical type of building we need. It is flexible learning spaces, so it is not an open plan like a lot of new schools that have been built — lots of flexible spaces. The important thing is having structures and routines for not just kids on the spectrum but for all of our students. They benefit from that. Visuals, the PBS rewards system that we have, the Kalianna KB rewards system. It is having those consistent practices happening right across the school that is going to make the school an exciting place, and being a new building — you saw the old building that we walked through — it is going to be exciting moving into a new building where we can, we believe, have better learning outcomes for our kids.

Ms COUZENS — Is there anything that you will change? It sounds like you have already got your program and you will stick to that; am I right in saying that?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

Ms COUZENS — So is there anything overall that is going to change because you have got the new school?

Mr BUSH — Yes. The really important thing that we are going to change is the old model of one teacher, one classroom and one teacher, one aide is not going to happen. We are going to team teach. At the moment we are looking at three teachers being in the one classroom, so a bigger number of students in each classroom, and then two or three assistants in the room as well. That will enable the two teachers and three assistants to focus on teaching. Then there will be one teacher — so again going back to that professional person — to give one-on-one instruction or it might be welfare or they might be able to go around and visit a home. So there is a teacher free to do that, and it will not be the one teacher all the time. It will be one of the three teachers; that is why we are really pushing for the team teaching model so that we can use our resources better.

Ms COUZENS — Have you actually made the decision to have that, or do you have to get permission from someone to do that, to say you are implementing that?

Mr BUSH — No, we are fortunate in Victoria with special schools in that principals have got the autonomy to make that decision.

Ms COUZENS — Good.

Mr BUSH — It is not just an idea that we have picked up. They are a universal design for learning principles and we believe that it will be a really good way to use our teachers — and again it is getting back to using trained professional staff — to be working with our more complex kids, which is really important.

Ms COUZENS — So do you see in your experience children who attend your school for a period of time and go through the programs that are offered who can actually move into mainstream school?

Mr BUSH — Yes. I see that as a success of our school if we can transition students back to mainstream. It is really difficult when parents come to the school because special schools have got a stigma. We tell parents that enrolling them at our school does not mean they have to stay there forever. We might skill their child up and then they can go back to mainstream. Or they might start off dual enrolled, so at mainstream and our school as well. There are all different models. One of the successes would be for them to go back to mainstream, especially for those students who are travelling the long distances on the bus from Wedderburn and Heathcote.

The CHAIR — Peter, would you be able to tell the committee a little bit about your relationship with La Trobe University in relation to training students and teachers?

Mr BUSH — Yes, I would be pleased to talk about our partnership with La Trobe. La Trobe has confirmed with us that it is a world-first partnership and the difference that we have with the university compared to other schools is that we are not just working with the education faculty; we are working with the rural health faculty and psychology faculty, which means speech pathology, occupational therapy and doctorate students are able to

come to our school. It is about skilling up those people so they are exposed to young people and children on the autism spectrum so that when they do see them when they are practising they will have experience.

Our goal is that in 10 years time our school will be delivering only programs that are evidence based, and it is one of our goals with this partnership with La Trobe Uni to ensure that. Also, it is not only just about us. Our leadership team at Kalianna has a real passion to improve the delivery of special education in our area, in our region, and we think that that will help.

The CHAIR — Yes, and I think having the health faculty involved is going to be really beneficial, given what we have just heard from the Department of Health and Human Services about the difficulties that people with ASD have in the health system. I think it is a fantastic initiative. I am sure it will be enormously successful and perhaps even rolled out further afield. I have a question relating to children living in out-of-home care. When we visited the school you mentioned you had about 20 students with ASD, or were they just students with disabilities?

Mr BUSH — No. We would have to check, but I think there are about five or six students that are on the spectrum.

The CHAIR — Five or six who have autism who are in out-of-home care, and they have a diagnosis of ASD. So how do you work with those students given that they are in the system and do not have parental or family support?

Mr BUSH — We have regular SSG meetings.

The CHAIR — SSG being?

Mr BUSH — Student support group meetings. And that is getting all the key people in the room depending on the needs of the student. There is one student that we meet every fortnight because of the complex needs of the student, and then there are students we might meet only once a term. We look at each student individually, but we work with DHHS staff, the residential unit staff and any other specialists on our staff to ensure that the practices that we are doing at school are the same that are happening in the resi unit, or vice versa; if something is successful at the resi unit, we make sure that we are implementing that.

The CHAIR — Does that work, Peter? I understand that every child with ASD needs different approaches. Is that sort of sharing of information working? Is that helping those students?

Mr BUSH — Definitely, it helps them, because it ensures that there is consistency. If there is no consistency with their home environment and the school environment, that is when trouble can occur with these students.

The CHAIR — Do you think within the residential system and in out-of-home care that the staff generally are not trained to deal with kids with ASD? Do you find that that is really hard for you as teaching staff when you have got that family residential situation where there are no trained staff skilled up to help?

Mr BUSH — Yes. It can be difficult depending on the experience of some of the staff, yes.

The CHAIR — Do you think there is a better model?

Mr BUSH — No, I do not.

The CHAIR — I am just thinking about it. Would it be essential that, for example, a child with ASD who is in residential care should be looked after by staff who are trained in disability, not necessarily trained in youth work or social work?

Mr BUSH — I think the important thing is ensuring that there are routines and structures in place. So long as people, with whatever qualifications they have, are consistent and the strategies they are putting in place are informed by evidence, then there will be success.

The CHAIR — That works if there is consistency with staff, but the staff turnover is pretty high in those situations.

I have one more question. In terms of behaviours of concern — and you may have sat through some questions we asked the department around use of restraint and seclusion, which I refer to as abuse — I just wonder if you can talk us through what strategies your school, Kalianna, uses to address those behaviours when they are concerning?

Mr BUSH — Yes. Do you mean when a student is showing extreme behaviours of concern?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr BUSH — What we do at our school is we call a code black, so that means we do a PA announcement and all staff and students know that they are to remain in whatever room they are in until we call off that code black. The leadership team respond, whoever is available — we have all got radios. We respond to ensure that everyone is safe. There is no use of restraint at all.

If a student is in a classroom, we will evacuate the other students and, as bad as it sounds, we allow that student, if they are out of control and showing those extreme behaviours, to completely destroy the classroom, which can be hard to watch because there is property damage, but it is important that we do not go in there and put any of us in danger. The only time we would go into that room and assist that student is if they were doing something that was life threatening to themselves. That is what we would do in that case.

Then if it continues and if it is likely to continue — because we know the students — for more than a few minutes, we will call the police, so we will remain in a code black until the police arrive and then take the student away. But now, more times than not, we are able to calm the student down. If a student is showing those types of behaviours, we have a behaviour plan and we have strategies for how to calm the student down. Then, more importantly, while the student is calming down we ascertain what strategies and which key people it is important for that student to be around. Then we have a debrief after the incident has occurred to review our plan, to review the procedures, and also to ensure that the student is safe and calm and that the staff have got the supports that they need.

The CHAIR — And the family are informed?

Mr BUSH — Yes. The moment we call a code black, we will call the family to let them know, because they are more likely to calm the student down than the police who arrive. We only have the police come just to ensure that the student and the rest of our school population are safe.

Ms McLEISH — Just following on that, code black, is that something that other schools like yours around the world would use?

Mr BUSH — I have been at Kalianna for three years and I believe it is a colour-coded system they use in our region.

Ms McLEISH — So when you are saying you can watch a student destroy a classroom and things like that, is that what happens in other places worldwide; do you know?

Mr BUSH — No, I would not know.

Ms McLEISH — That is your specific management; that is what you choose to do?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

Ms McLEISH — And that is based on just your experience?

Mr BUSH — Yes. If you step into the room to try and calm them down — and again, with some students you can do that, but if it is a student who is right at that extreme level — it would be dangerous for you to go in. Therefore we advise staff not to, and we would not walk into a room where we are putting ourselves into a dangerous position. Also the student, when they are heightened, are unlikely to react to you trying to talk calmly; it just agitates the student. We have found — and the data that we have collected shows — that the time that students are at that heightened level is reducing because we are not going in there and trying to drag them out of classrooms or dragging furniture out.

Ms McLEISH — What about the number of incidents? Has that been reducing as well?

Mr BUSH — Yes. We are really pleased that with the introduction of the PBS framework in an intensive way it has reduced the amount of code blacks. We were talking earlier about how many we would have called this year, and we think there would be less than 20, whereas last year there would have been close to 100.

Ms McLEISH — Wow! I want to focus for a moment just on Britt and, for the record, the training that you have had in this area.

Ms HOLMBERG — Sure. As part of my role as Autism Connect and inclusion coordinator, I coordinate the positive behaviour support framework for Kalianna. I have had extensive training with George Sugai, who is a leader in positive behaviour support from America. Other staff members and I have attended multiple-day professional development sessions with George to help implement that framework into our school. Through Autism Connect we also have term PD days, where as a region we attend professional development sessions on varying topics, such as differentiating the curriculum. We have done coaching seminars as well. I have also attended functional behaviour analysis training through the Department of Education and Training, and on top of that I have completed my masters in special education.

Ms McLEISH — The United States work, was that through the university of Carolina?

Mr BUSH — I would have to check.

Ms HOLMBERG — That does not ring a bell, but I will check.

Ms McLEISH — So out of that quite broad training that you have got, what was the most valuable?

Ms HOLMBERG — The most valuable to my role at Kalianna would be the positive behaviour support training with George Sugai and completing the functional behaviour analysis training through the department of education, which was focused on looking at behaviours of concern, understanding the trigger, what causes those certain behaviours and how to analyse those situations.

Ms McLEISH — So is that an analytical background that has been most valuable to you in your role?

Ms HOLMBERG — Yes, and being able to look at the behaviour and understand why certain behaviours of concern are happening and what we can do to prevent those behaviours, because prevention is obviously key to success.

Mr BUSH — The important thing is that every time a child shows behaviours of concern it is for a reason, so the important thing is to try and find out what the reason is, whether it is environmental factors or personal factors, and that is where that analysis of the data is really important.

Ms McLEISH — It is like a baby cry, isn't it? You have got to work out the reason.

Mr BUSH — Yes, exactly.

Ms HOLMBERG — That is right; absolutely.

Ms McLEISH — I just want to talk about the software program that you have got at the school, Sentral, if you could talk to us about how it works and how it has been valuable for you in tracking students and incidents.

Ms HOLMBERG — Absolutely. We transferred this year from another data collection system called Xuno. Using Sentral to record incidents that occur within our school, it has been extremely valuable to use that data to look at where situations are happening within our school or where there might be a high-level number of incidents so that we can address the situations that are occurring there. I think I talked to you about yard duty and being able to look at areas where a lot of students were spending time on yard duty, and we were able to put more staff in that area. We have done a lot of training with staff around being able to record incidents correctly and how to use our whole-school system of positive behaviour support, as we have our behaviour referral table linked in with our PBS system, which helps staff know what level certain behaviours of concern are and how to record those on Sentral as well. It is making sure we have that consistent data collection across our school so we

can understand why the behaviours are occurring and where they are occurring, and what sorts of resources we can implement to help prevent those behaviours.

Mr BUSH — Cindy, the central reporting software is just a commercial software package, but the data that we collect, that is something that we have had to design, and Sentral is like the housing of it and where we collect the data. It is not Sentral coming up with what data you collect; it is through the PBS framework that we have decided on.

Ms McLEISH — Yes, terrific. Can you also talk about the student profiles and student management support plans. I know you showed us those on the day, but could you talk us through those, making sure that we get it on the record, and also about how your planning processes address individual student needs and development.

Ms HOLMBERG — Our individual student profiles were implemented at the end of term 3 this year as a consistent way of making sure every classroom had up-to-date information on every single student within our school. This was to ensure that we were involving all the people that worked with certain students so we had up-to-date information, so talking to parents, talking to speech therapists or OTs and, if they are in out-of-home care, talking to the people that care for those students to make sure we have got lots of information about what is going on in their lives. That can be simple things from contact phone numbers right through to medical information and different types of medication they might be on in case we have an emergency and we need to know that information, and right through to different information such as specialists they might work with and different types of behaviours, like tier 1 — so low-level behaviours they might display — and to give hints to CRTs and to different teachers about what to do in those situations, so what the behaviour might look like, what you could do and what that behaviour could mean, making sure we have that preventative approach to behaviour and understanding why behaviour is occurring.

Another important part about our individual profiles is to make sure that that information could be transferred to specialist teachers as well so that they have consistent profiles from classroom to classroom so that every single teacher was not giving them different information on students and causing inconsistencies — to make sure that that was consistent across our school for our specialist teachers. It also ensures that at the end of the year when those students go to the next classroom with the next teacher, we can just hand that profile over to that teacher, so there is that transfer of information from year to year as well, and that information is not being lost.

So that is that individual profile, and that is a tier 1 intervention. That is used for all students within our school. Part of that individual profile was to ensure that we were not having too many safety plans or support plans developed for students, because we want to make sure that when we make a support plan at our school or a safety plan they are relevant and worthwhile for every individual student. A safety plan, as Peter touched on before, links in with our Zones of Regulation program, and that is one type of support plan we have. That is to describe a student's behaviour of concern, so it goes through the different stages a student will move through, from what the behaviour might start to look like before it is occurring and through the levels. We link it in with green, yellow, red and then blue, so when they are coming down after a behaviour too, which is a really important part. It will have on one side what the student does and on the other side what the teacher or staff member should be doing and who is involved within that certain stage of behaviour. That would be individualised for every single student. When we develop and plan those plans, we involve all the people that work with the student, so ESs, leadership members, teachers, parents, carers. We make sure we have all the important, involved parties, so all that information is up to date and relevant.

Our other plan is a support plan, which outlines a process — so if we have a different process happening within a school. We have one student, for example, who comes in a different gate, which is to help him as he has anxiety around crowds. That is a really successful way for him to transition into school in the morning, and we have a plan that outlines that. His mum had input into that, so we were able to sit down together and make sure that that process was really clear-cut and everyone knew their different responsibilities and the different steps that had to happen.

Ms McLEISH — Is it onerous to maintain?

Ms HOLMBERG — That is why we have our individual student profiles, because that ensures that when we develop a safety plan and a support plan they are extremely relevant and worthwhile. We are not just creating unnecessary plans, because if we had too many plans that were not relevant — —

Ms McLEISH — I guess my question is more around was there any push-back from some of the staff to think, 'Gosh, this is more work for us in what we need to do'?

Ms HOLMBERG — It has actually created less work because we are making it more relevant and consistent.

Ms McLEISH — Yes, good.

Mr BUSH — Initially it is more work, but when you explain to the staff that the end product is going to mean less work —

Ms McLEISH — Streamlined.

Mr BUSH — because we are clear on what we have to do, now they are seeing the outcomes.

The CHAIR — And the reduction in code blacks.

Mr BUSH — Yes. It is definitely rewarding.

Ms HOLMBERG — And the idea with all of our safety plans and our support plans is that they are one page. It is really making sure that it is not an overload of information that no-one is going to be able to remember or refer to during a behavioural concern.

Ms McLEISH — So it is looking pretty good at this point.

Ms HOLMBERG — Yes.

Ms McLEISH — Excellent. Thanks.

The CHAIR — Do other schools use that program that you are aware of?

Mr BUSH — The PBS program, yes. I am not sure — —

The CHAIR — There is Sentral and then the follow-on program that Britt referred to.

Mr BUSH — They would be using it. They would be collecting data on PBS. I am not sure exactly — —

The CHAIR — So your adaptation of that is pretty specific to your school?

Mr BUSH — For us, and that is what every school would have to do.

Ms McLEISH — Do you share this at your principals meetings?

Mr BUSH — Yes, we do.

The CHAIR — Any interest; any take-ups?

Mr BUSH — If something is working well, we like to share, especially in the special school community, because we want to see success. Yes, we do share, especially at conferences, things that are working well with the different software packages and PBS.

The CHAIR — Is there plenty of support from the department for your program?

Mr BUSH — Yes, there is.

The CHAIR — Excellent.

Ms COUZENS — What are your thoughts on the special needs plan? Do you have anything to contribute?

Mr BUSH — My thoughts? The part where I am involved with the inclusive schools project is exciting thing to be part of. We are looking at going around — in my role as principal of Kalianna — looking at the different models we use to provide support to the mainstream schools, so that is one part of the special needs

plan that I think is good. I am hesitant because it is getting into my personal opinion. I am mindful that I have got to not give a personal opinion.

The CHAIR — I think you can. You have got parliamentary privilege, so you can.

Mr BUSH — As principal of Kalianna special school, I am excited about the special needs plan because it has a focus on students with disabilities, and that is my passion. That is what I see as an exciting thing — that there has been a real review of the entire program.

The CHAIR — Excellent.

Ms COUZENS — I am really interested in the use of equipment for ASD students and how you plan to build that into your new school. Is there new equipment? I am aware of a number of new pieces of equipment, particularly around the IT area, for people with ASD, so I would be interested to know what you are planning in terms of new equipment for the school.

Mr BUSH — When you say new equipment, are you saying around IT?

Ms COUZENS — Yes. There is a robot, for example, that works with children with autism.

Mr BUSH — Yes, I have seen the robot at conferences. I have not read enough about that robot and that program and whether it does improve student outcomes, but we are always looking at ways that ICT can improve the outcomes for students on the spectrum. One member of our leadership team is in charge of ICT, because we want ICT. The important thing is not to just buy robots because they look good but to make sure that the ICT is seamless, just like it is in society, and that we can use it to improve the kids' outcomes. One of the students that you met on the tour is passionate about ICT. We have used different programs, and he has helped staff in learning programs.

So in relation to the use of equipment, we have got iPads, we have got Chromebooks, we have got notebooks, we have got tablets, so we have got a wide variety of equipment. Again, that is where we hope that the partnership with La Trobe University will strengthen that use of equipment. Instead of just saying, 'Oh, that looks good', let us have it researched and evidence-based, and then, 'Yep, that piece of equipment is going to improve the outcomes of students'.

Ms COUZENS — What about playground equipment and that sort of thing? I do not know if there is any particular playground equipment — I am sure you would know — along those lines.

Mr BUSH — There is lots of playground equipment, and if we won Tattslotto, we could put in all the great pieces of equipment. One of the — —

Ms COUZENS — So is it not affordable to build that into the new school?

Mr BUSH — Yes, it is. One of the important things is as simple as trampolines. We have got trampolines in our junior and our senior schools, so those kids that are 17 and 18 love getting on the trampoline, especially those on the spectrum. There are simple things like areas where you actually have to squeeze through, so just simple poles with padding. There are some cheap pieces of equipment that you can get. We are excited with the new school build because it means we can rebuild our playground so that it will be inclusive of all and help the students, because it is at the break times when we need to have more activities for the kids to be doing in a structured environment.

Ms COUZENS — Great; thank you.

The CHAIR — I have one more. I just thought of it then, and I should have asked it earlier. You have lots of students who are doing VET and VCAL and outside of school doing some training — or they were; hopefully they have found somewhere else to train.

Mr BUSH — We have.

The CHAIR — There have been some issues put to the committee around students with ASD having to leave school at a certain age, like 17, 18, and not necessarily being intellectually or socially, or whatever, able to

really do that. Because that age is so discriminatory — like 'You have to leave school; you have no choice' — there have been some suggestions made to the committee that individual students who have ASD should be assessed on their individual basis, not necessarily on their age basis, when they have to leave school. So they could actually stay at school a little bit longer, learn some better social skills or become more emotionally capable outside of school. This is your personal opinion, so what do you think?

Mr BUSH — I can say that from my recent briefing with the NDIS on the program that is going to take over the Futures for Young Adults through DHHS — it was run by DHHS — and the information that I was given, I believe our students will be supported post-school. It is really important that before they leave school they are given the training and the skills so that they can successfully transition into either the workforce or TAFE or sheltered workshops, whatever their post-school option is. At Kalianna we start working with students when they are 15 to get them ready, and we work with the parents. Then we chat to the parents and ask the student, if they are capable, 'What would you like to do?', and then we work out a pathway and try and support them on that.

The CHAIR — But even some students at 15 would not necessarily be able to comprehend the fact that they would have to leave school when they are 17.

Mr BUSH — Correct. But, as best we can, we can make a judgement of what skills they have and what skills will be useful to them when they graduate from Kalianna. We focus on those, whether that is extensive work experience or they start a TAFE course with us or they do a school-based apprenticeship, which they can continue on when they do leave. The clientele at our school are more than likely to succeed out there, or have the ability to get full-time employment.

The CHAIR — And social enterprise is a big way forward?

Mr BUSH — Yes.

The CHAIR — Do you have any data on students who have left Kalianna and where they are and what they are doing?

Mr BUSH — I have not, but the department does collect that data.

The CHAIR — That might be worth chasing up, I think, particularly as you have quite a few students who do VCAL and then go on to further training.

Mr BUSH — We can find the students that are completing VCAL when they finish at Kalianna. But there is also data that the department collects on where students are in a year after leaving the school.

The CHAIR — It would probably be worthwhile the committee chasing that up. Thank you very much. Your trip down from Bendigo is much appreciated, so thank you. I hope we have not kept you too late. Sorry for going over time. Thanks again.

Mr BUSH — That is all right.

The CHAIR — Well done, and good work. Keep up the good work.

Mr BUSH — Thank you.

Committee adjourned.