

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Victorian Auditor-General's report no.253: Managing School Infrastructure

Melbourne—Tuesday, 10 March 2020

Members

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Ms Anne-Maree Kliman, President, Victorian Principals Association; and

Mr Andrew Dalglish, Principal, Montpellier Primary School.

The CHAIR: Welcome very much to the Victorian Principals Association to our public hearing for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee following up the Auditor-General's inquiry into managing school infrastructure. If people have mobile telephones, we ask that they be turned to silent.

Just to let you know, all evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. The verified transcript, PowerPoint presentations, handouts et cetera will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

If there are any media present who were not here earlier this morning, we welcome you but we remind you of the following guidelines: cameras must remain focused only on the person speaking, operators must not pan the public gallery, the Committee or witnesses, and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing. Broadcasting or recording of this hearing by anyone other than the accredited media is not permitted.

We invite you to make a 15-minute opening statement to the Committee, which will be followed by questions from members of the Committee. Thank you.

Ms KLIMAN: Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I am Anne-Maree Kliman, President of the Victorian Principals Association. I have with me Andrew Dalglish, who is the Deputy President of the association as well as Principal at Montpellier Primary School. The VPA represents about 1000 primary school leaders and is the peak body for representing them through support and advocacy.

I am basically addressing the five statements that were presented to me through the letter, the first one being an outline of our views in terms of the VAGO audit into managing school infrastructure. In general the VPA supported the recommendations listed in the VAGO audit into managing school infrastructure that highlighted the need for greater assets management and planning and monitoring; long-term funding certainty at all levels that allowed for maintenance and of course for schools to be bought up to meet industry standards; school infrastructure that is contemporary and relevant to meet the learning needs of today and tomorrow's students; increased transparency through five-year planning at Government and school level; resourcing to assist school leaders to manage assets, including support in the form of personnel, tools and training; clarifying governance arrangements for assets management; consistent and transparent processes for managing student enrolment and system growth; increasing opportunities for planning between key stakeholders to explore multiuse and co-located facilities; and the development of an investment strategy for the entire life of assets, focused on both preventative and corrective maintenance.

Whilst the VPA supported the recommendations of the VAGO audit, it is important to mention that a key message referenced but not addressed in the Auditor-General's report is the devolution of infrastructure maintenance to principals and school councils. It refers to the shared responsibility for assets management that allows schools to make local decisions and meet their community needs and manage daily risks. With this comes compliance and accountabilities, but unfortunately nothing was removed from the principal's role to allow them to manage the additional responsibilities. The report did not address the impact of this devolution on principal workload and workflow nor acknowledge the limitations of the volunteers that make up our school councils to understand and actively participate in such works. The excessive workflow of principals is evident through a number of key surveys, such as Professor Riley's longitudinal study into principal health and wellbeing from 2011 onwards, principal work and wellbeing surveys conducted by Bevington on behalf of the department of education and the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2016.

There have been some well-received changes adopted—adopting a shared responsibility between DET and schools in the past two years to support schools to manage infrastructure that have included occupational health support for small schools, options for schools to either manage or opt out and have the VSBA manage some of the programs, with that being framed that they have to be over \$50 000, increased funding through the maintenance blitz that we saw at the end of last year and the asbestos removal programs have all been well received in schools. Anecdotal evidence still suggests that principals do not always feel confident, skilled or sufficiently trained to manage school assets and struggle to keep up with the constant changes in legislative requirements. They also are increasingly frustrated with the time and the level of detail required to maintain school assets that comes at the expense of managing the core functions of teaching and learning, school improvement, pedagogy, student wellbeing and staffing.

The majority of school leaders acknowledge and want to participate in decision-making processes of school infrastructure management but on average would prefer to see the project management managed at a regional, central level to ensure that contractual, OH&S, procurement guidelines et cetera are met, which allows them also to minimise conflict of interest, which is a particular issue in our regional/remote areas.

The next statement was about the role that the VPA has played in managing school infrastructure. And whilst we are not particularly in there managing it with school leaders, we are very much involved in consultations with VSBA on a regular basis, with most recent agenda items covering off on the roles and responsibilities of asset management, the essential safety measures, compliance and guidelines frameworks that were presented to school, cleaning reform and school placement policy and enrolment. They are things that have been key in the last couple of years.

We also have a very big role in disseminating this information out to schools through our media forms. We have board members on various stakeholder reference groups to bring the profession's voice to the work that is being done. VSBA provides a positive and proactive avenue to discuss individual school asset management, so we are able to connect our school leaders automatically to the VSBA to get support at that individual level. And in general they are very engaged with our members through our board and through our state council as well as our local regional meetings, often coming out to hear feedback from the ground.

The next statement was around challenges and opportunities faced by educational leaders in managing school infrastructure. The opportunities have been the fact that the rolling facilities evaluation and condition assessment reports are allowing schools to develop those five-year maintenance plans and, importantly, providing high-quality data to the department to inform future investment decisions as well. A challenge of that though is some of those rolling facility audits, because they are visual inspections of a school, they often then require in-depth, specialised services coming in to follow up on further work, particularly around roofs, underground work and stormwater-type things.

VSBA-managed projects are perceived as supportive. So the safe trees program that was run or the asbestos removal program where VSBA are actually in and managing those things, the principals and school leaders are feeling very well supported and they have helped to reach a balance between the roles and responsibilities of schools and that of the department in managing school infrastructure.

Online tools to support school asset management—school leaders are actually really looking forward to, because the system we probably have at the moment is a little bit clunky, but they are looking forward to the new assets information management system where it will be that one-stop port where they can actually engage with all the tools and information that they need to make informed decisions moving forward. It will also support them working with their school councils as well in developing five-year maintenance plans.

The enrolment policy and the enrolment zones, including the development of Find my School, has been really well received. It provided transparency and consistency for families and schools, and it also obviously assists the department to make wise decisions and informed decisions about where to next build or how to plan for growth.

The roles and responsibility clarity through the assets management roles and responsibility framework and then also the essential safety measures framework has provided a clearer list for schools around what is corporate responsibility, what is school responsibility and what is school council responsibility. The establishment of

panels for direct access to trades has also been well received. Although still limited in our regional and rural areas, they are seen as timesavers.

Greater opportunity for shared location and co-location for schools, particularly with new schools having the kinders built on site or adjacent to them, has been seen as a positive and an opportunity for schools. And Make Safe—the support that they are providing is both welcomed and appreciated when there have been storms and damage done to a school.

A big challenge is funding certainty is needed if schools are to develop five-year school maintenance plans to allow schools to address planned maintenance issues rather than simply respond to reactive maintenance. Schools will be able to make better long-term decisions based on the needs of their schools. While we saw the maintenance blitz come in at the end of last year, which was fantastic for those schools that had already been through the rolling facilities audit and were able to get targeted plan maintenance to start to address them, that money is not guaranteed moving forward. Therefore we need to know for the two-thirds of schools that have not been through it what will they expect in the way of supporting their five-year plans.

There is a perception that there sometimes is inadequate allocation of funds to manage projects. I do not have an answer of how that would be fixed, but it is a perception out there. Insufficient funding in the SRP other than the recent boost again through the blitz. However, that is not future guaranteed. The current funding model is not based on meeting industry standards, it does not allow schools to shift their focus from reactive maintenance to preventative maintenance. Ongoing funding certainty is required if schools are to maintain their assets and meet the compliance requirements and for the system to actually get the schools up to the standard expected in the industry.

Some of the lack of transparency particularly around new builds and school works, and we understand that that is very much due to the annual budget process that Government goes through, which does not then allow schools and communities to really plan in advance. The lack of knowledge about how capital works projects are prioritised and allocated is a concern. We hear about it when the budgets come out in May, so schools find that quite challenging. There is a lack of understanding of how building facility schedules are applied to schools. It seems to be a moving feast.

New schools are designed without significant input from school leaders to ensure they are fit for purpose, and because they start to be developed at least three years prior to the build the new principal is not really responsible or contributing to that design.

Training, skills, knowledge and expertise of the workforce is also a concern. There is a lot to get your head around. There is contract management, traffic management, OH&S, induction, processes, procurement and conflict of interest, and that is without even hitting the ground and worrying about teaching and learning in a school, so there is a lot of information for school leaders to have an understanding of. I will address later that they do not always have that clear understanding either. Increased complexity in the roles of principals, so just that sheer workload that they have and then managing almost all aspects of school infrastructure also needs to be considered.

I raise the question of how can DET provide differentiated support to schools. School principals are required to manage assets and meet compliance requirements regardless of their school's size. For a large school, if we are looking at—most schools that are 1000-plus are generally secondary schools, not primary schools. They have greater capacity to employ someone to assist them in that work. Having a look at some of the data we have, two-thirds of our primary schools are under 400, and they just do not have that capacity in their budgets to be able to outsource or have someone on staff to be able to manage that, so it does fall to the school leader's responsibility. That poses a challenge. What we would be looking for and what we would like to see into the future is that greater differentiation of support for schools. While the Government has put in place, or the department has put in place, significant support for what they classify as small schools—that is, 80 students or less, and that is a good couple of hundred schools our system—having been a principal myself of a school of 400 and less I did not have anyone that could manage those sorts of things that I was required to do. It is a huge area of the work we do.

Most but not all primary school leaders believe greater centralisation of asset management would make their role more manageable. Dare I say, some of the ones that do not think it are those that have been in the job 30 years-plus, and they have got a much broader understanding than our early career principals and often our female principals who are not as enthusiastic about doing the work of infrastructure.

Attracting trades to regional and rural areas to undertake the work and meet procurement requirements and to meet time lines is very difficult. Accessing relevant documentation and guidelines has been a very big challenge. However, we will see next week the policy advisory library, so hopefully that will be corrected through that and it will be a big timesaver for schools.

Time lines in general can be challenging for schools. With the rolling school facility audits, the schools get their report and it is within two weeks that they need to respond to that. That short turnaround time does not allow effective time to be able to go back to school councils, who also have responsibilities and oversight in this area, so there need to be greater time lines for schools to manage that, and really time.

The next one asked how Victorian Government primary school principals responded to the findings and recommendations of the audit. I would say most principals—I know from when I have held it up at meetings, ‘Do you know what this is?’—are unaware of VAGO’s reports. It is not the work that lands on their desks. But they are aware of the work that has resulted in the last couple of years.

Over the past three years we have heard from members that there has been a notable increase in their workload and workflows steering them towards managing school assets and infrastructure. But a lot of the new documentation guidelines released over the past 12 months to support schools to manage and be aware and know the roles and responsibilities of managing school assets as well as essential safety are not well understood. A lot of that was due to a soft launch rather than training being involved with that and then the low level of socialisation of those documents. Just last week I was at a couple of different regional meetings and held it up, and whilst they said, ‘Yes, I’ve seen it’, they were not necessarily aware of the contents of it and the obligations, because there were a couple of new things that had come in that were compliance-related that impacted on their work.

There are an increasing number of requests to us from members needing support, clarification and guidance regarding school asset management—that is our job, but it is how schools are responding. School leaders have had really positive responses to the maintenance blitz—tree safety programs, the bar work that is being done, planned maintenance funding, safety switch upgrades, the increase last year, although temporary, to the grounds and maintenance part of their student resource packages, and the increase in annual contract funding, particularly annual contract funding which was fairly set at a low level of about \$3000. I know four years ago, when I was in the school I was in it used to cost me \$18 000 just to manage and meet compliance around all the things that needed to be done in their annual contracts.

However, some have stated there is a need for greater cohesion between the multiple providers involved. It could be a VSBA activity that is running at the same time as a school-managed one and the two are not actually communicating well, so there is work to be done in correcting some of that. A significant issue for primary schools is the sheer quantity of work related to managing school infrastructure at the expense of school leaders having the time to focus on the teaching and learning. I am not sure you really need to hear it, but there is buildings, grounds, playground equipment, pest control, cleaning, facilities hire and essential safety—you know, it gets down to managing basketball rings, shade sails, asbestos, so they are some of the types of things that they do.

The last one was around any significant developments that have occurred subsequent to the audit, and of course there has been significant work done in the expansion of three-year-old kindergarten and the kinders onsite or adjacent to schools with the new builds and significant investment in new school builds and/or primary schools having kinders, as I said. The fact that the money has been put aside to start looking at building for the future and also the upgrades that have been happening to schools have been well received. There was greater anticipation in the population growth than previously expected and even as listed in the VAGO audit. The relevant frameworks to support schools, where they have been read properly, have been well received. There is the maintenance blitz, as I mentioned. The rolling facility audits are giving schools some sense of

understanding about the importance of managing their infrastructure in a planned and sustained period of time. What they probably would like to see is that that funding is ongoing to support that work and it does not fall away, because we went through CARS assessments five years ago and did not see anything particularly strong come from that.

The asbestos reform for schools has been well received, particularly around the new modular builds that are coming on to replace some of those really old LTC buildings, with limited workload on the principal and also in such short time frames so it is not impacting significantly on schools at the same time. We have had changes to utility suppliers, specialised panels for trades have been well received and there has, as I said earlier, been some differentiated support for schools in terms of the small schools projects but also particularly in the maintenance blitz it was pleasing to see that schools had that choice of opting in or opting out of managing an aspect of the maintenance. And then the cleaning reform has also been a significant development in the last few years.

So in conclusion, the VPA recognises the findings of the VAGO audit and acceptance of the recommendations by DET and also applauds the progress made in addressing the issues presented through the report. The VPA also supports the initiatives that DET has developed and implemented over the past three years. However, we look forward to greater funding certainty and increased transparency to support schools to effectively manage school infrastructure.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. That was very comprehensive. Much appreciated. I have a question that goes to the differentiated support that you were talking about for principals. As I said with the earlier witness, my previous role, before being elected to Parliament, was with the Catholic Education Office training principals. I was part of the induction process, training them in industrial relations and occupational health and safety and those types of matters. As part of that, I sat at the table for the induction on a whole range of issues, clearly in areas I guess that principals had not previously had experience in before they became a principal. Obviously the nature of every school is so different. There were people at the table who, like you said, represent people from 30 or 80 student populations through to massive secondary schools where they had, as well as a principal, a business manager and a maintenance manager and whatnot. So I certainly through that process got a good understanding of the work of a principal as a whole and the sorts of things they are expected to do and the level of experience that they bring to the table when they first take on the role in particular. When I asked the department about this this morning they clearly have turned their minds to it, partly as a result, no doubt, of this audit, and they are talking about the sorts of things that they are doing and where their thinking is going forward—about how they can better support principals and in a differentiated way acknowledge those capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, and old principals and new principals. But do you have a particular view about what that differentiated support could look like that would help with the maintenance program?

Ms KLIMAN: Look, I think there needs to be greater support out in regional offices and points of contact. There are currently points of contact, but it is not necessarily on-the-ground work. Part of what principals say is that ‘I don’t have time to manage it. I also don’t have the expertise, and the half-day training session I might have gone to is not sufficient for me to have my head around all the compliance and legalities of what I need to manage’. I have asked that same question in the last week of a few different regional groups. You do get some variation in perspective. Particularly, as I said earlier, our older male principals, who have been principals for 30-plus years, say, ‘Give it to me. I want to manage it myself’. But the majority, particularly early career principals, are overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility that comes with managing those tasks. I think there even need to be some hubs developed that are more supportive to a series of schools, or there needs to be consideration around: how do we give that facilities support to those schools that cannot actually access it because they do not have that resource available in their SRPs to be able to buy those services in? But the one thing I do hear from the schools that have been involved in the small school projects is that they find it extremely valuable. They feel very supported. They are singing their praises, and everyone else is looking at them, saying, ‘That’s not fair’.

The CHAIR: So does perhaps the definition of a small school need to be extended?

Ms KLIMAN: It needs to be broadened, yes. There is a differential in the way primary schools and secondary schools are funded, full stop. In the old days, when we go back prior to SRPs, the principal in the

secondary school was outside the budget straightaway. But that has never been the case for us, and so we are counted in the bottoms that sit on the seat, so to speak. So you do not have that extra resource to be able to buy that. We share an office with VASSP, the secondary principals association, and I often get comments from the president saying, 'I don't know how you know this stuff about infrastructure'. I say, 'Because I had to do it', and she says, 'We have facilities people to do that'. So there is a bit of a have-and-have-not situation between even primary and secondaries and those that are deemed sizeable, even though they might be between 200 and 400. Two-thirds of our schools, as I said, are less than 400. Did you want to add?

Mr DALGLEISH: If I may. One of the things that we have seen occurring, particularly with the amount of acting principals in place and new principals, has been training through school financial officers that come out and work alongside those principals to help coach and support them in managing budgets and staffing and so on. Again, we have got anything up to a third of principals that are in acting positions at any one time, and they just do not have the depth of knowledge or experience that they may need to manage the challenges that there are with that, so it is about whether those sorts of opportunities are available as well. I think across the state there are six technical support officers.

Ms KLIMAN: There are six technical support officers out at DET, which are really well received as well, but that is a lot of space to cover.

Mr DALGLEISH: And they will hit anything up to 600 schools in a 12-month period.

Mr RIORDAN: Have you received much feedback from principals with regard to the advantages or disadvantages of various joint facility things, particularly in small regional schools, whether it is libraries, sporting facilities? Also the feedback I have received on the public-private partnership, where the whole maintenance is taken away from the principal, one of the comments from the principal was, 'I didn't realise how much time I used to spend on worrying about light globes and broken door handles. I don't have to worry about that, and it's given me a lot more time'. Would you like to comment on whether there are some learnings in those two sorts of different approaches—because quite often the public-private is the whole school and then the joint venture is often expensive pieces of school infrastructure to maintain and look after—whether generally those principals find that they work well? Or would you prefer not to?

Ms KLIMAN: No, no I am happy to discuss it. The public-private partnership schools, we hear very positive things from those principals, and it is along the same lines—that they are able to focus on other aspects, the very many and varied aspects of running a school, and are not worried about actually, as you said, the plumbing or the hole that gets put in the wall because that is managed by the facilities manager. So they are sort of seen as a bit of a positive compared to everyone else. The only negative I have ever heard of that was that if they want to change anything that is a difficult thing to do because they are not owned by the department. They are leased et cetera, so they do find that that is a little more challenging if they want to change things. But on the whole they are all very happy with that, and I sort of wondered why we stopped producing PPP schools for that reason too, because they are seen as favourable.

Mr DALGLEISH: Richard, you talked about that joint approach to facilities management. I was fortunate enough to experience a number of years ago now in a smaller regional community secondary college three Government schools ranging between 150 and 300 children plus probably a cluster of about eight rural primary schools outside that which had between 15 and 35 children, where over a two-year period a trial was held. There was a facilities manager that came in and worked with those schools, supported them through procurement of trades, managing their maintenance and so on to the stage where efficiencies were starting to be made to support schools in how they were working. Now, that is a trial I think that was about 10 years ago. Where it disappeared to I do not know, but certainly in conversations with colleagues I can see benefits in that in the operational nature of getting their input and then going out and sourcing trades, materials and so on as well.

Mr RIORDAN: It is a bit like the example of one whole area where the principal has an opportunity to put the input in as to what the school needs and how they would like it done but then can handball the getting it done part to someone else.

Mr DALGLEISH: Someone to make the phone calls as need be to a plumber that may be contracted to work within five or 10 schools, depending on the workload.

Ms KLIMAN: And there is a fine line. Principals do not say, 'We don't want to be part of decision-making processes at all'. They do want to be contributing to the decisions that are going to ultimately produce the facility. It is just they do not want to necessarily do the work.

Mr MAAS: Given that, what is the principals association view on what might be the best system? In the past we have had a centralised model. We have currently got this hybrid model. We have had the school managing itself with council before. What is your view as to what might be the best system?

Ms KLIMAN: As I said—and it is not just my view, it is what I hear from my members—the majority of principals, and the vast majority, would say they want to move away more to a centralised system; however, I am not sure that they understand fully what that would look like if they do choose that. What they do say though—and you cannot have your cake and eat it too—they also want to be part of the decision-making process as well. So I would say that we need to come up with a balance of what can be taken away that is very unnecessary time-consuming work—and I know it is all necessary—things that can be removed from the role of the principal.

Often OH&S comes up under that, and that is not saying they do not want to provide safe environments for schools to be in, because you do that daily, but it is the walking around the school every three months to check your asbestos, it is every time a new trade comes in and having to manage that trade by making sure that they are aware of where asbestos is or then organising part 6s if they have got asbestos. So there is a lot of technical stuff that needs to be done to manage that. But OH&S is the big one. The paperwork that goes with OH&S they find very time-consuming and overwhelming and to a certain degree have a lack of skill and knowledge to bring to that task.

The everyday 'The toilet's blocked; I need to ring the plumber' is a local thing. You usually have contacts; it is an easy fix. It is the bigger things that they require or would like more support around, like managing capital works programs, even though they are not doing that themselves. But there has been some choice between the \$50 000 and the \$200 000. It is a fairly big spend if you choose to manage that yourself. Maybe having some requirements about what we should and what we should not be able to manage in terms of a spend is important to consider. Did that get to what you were asking?

Mr MAAS: Yes, it did. What kind of support would you be looking for?

Ms KLIMAN: I think the concept of the hubs is really important to support a range of schools. We would all love a facilities manager, but we know that is not realistic to have a facilities manager in every school. But what can we do to have a collective number of schools that have the support of a facilities person that may oversee a network of schools or 15 schools—whatever it happens to be—to be able to be that key contact and help to take some of the running-around stuff off the desk of the principal?

Mr HIBBINS: You indicated the issues around certainty around maintenance funding. Can I just clarify: in terms of the school maintenance plan—they gather the data, they have got the five-year maintenance plan—does that come with a dollar figure attached from the department?

Ms KLIMAN: No. The rolling facilities evaluation is done at the school. It is sent out to the principal, who has a chance to look at it and send back anything that they think might be missed. It then comes as a condition assessment report. Schools then use the information that is contained in there, which will tell them what the item is, a photo of what needs to be corrected, what trade they may need to use to actually rectify the matter, but no dollar figure. They do not even get told approximately what it might cost. They then have to put that into their school management plan and estimate themselves what they think it might cost, which is a bit of a nuisance, because if it is a big spend, it is requiring quotes et cetera to get down that path. So there is a little bit of grey space in that too, because they have no certainty. I can look at the plan and go, 'Okay, there's a whole list of things to do', but I do not actually know what it is going to cost me and I do not know when I am going to get the funding to actually do that. For those schools last year that got money through the blitz for planned maintenance, often a lot of that was around providing specialised trades to come in and do further investigation

on roofs and stormwater et cetera because they had only done their visual inspections. There is no definite dollar figure, and therefore—

Mr HIBBINS: No funding attached to it.

Ms KLIMAN: there is no funding attached. As I said, the blitz was a one-off thing, so it is not necessarily guaranteed that any of these schools that are going through 2020, 2021, 2022 in terms of facilities audits are going to get any money.

Mr HIBBINS: Would it be up to the school to decide, ‘Right, we’re going to have this maintenance come out of our SRP funding, but we’ll have to lobby for the rest of it’?

Ms KLIMAN: Yes. And even then the SRP funding comes in in minor works and urgent minor works and then another line around planned maintenance. But some of the items that might need planned maintenance, the money may not be there to address that.

Mr DALGLEISH: And then it becomes sort of a priority. Once your budget comes in, you then start to prioritise and hope that some do not become more urgent if you do not have the cash in that space to be able to rectify.

Ms KLIMAN: The blitz did give money to priority 1 and priority 2 items in the school maintenance condition assessment report, so those schools were able to address priority 1, priority 2. Then 3, 4 and 5 you manage through your plan, but that as I said is not guaranteed moving on.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes, and in terms of how principals, or schools, go about actually securing the funding for some of these works, it is a case of having to put in submissions and make the case on an annual basis?

Ms KLIMAN: There is not really anywhere where you can put a submission into, unless it becomes a Make Safe issue, then yes, you can, or if it is a relatively urgent issue, yes, there is another tool, a place that you can apply to, for VSBA urgent maintenance-type works. But if they are regular maintenance items that you are doing just to get the quality and the facility up to scratch, it might be painting or it might be new carpet, if it is not an OH&S issue—well, painting is not going to be, but if the carpet was, say, threadbare and people were tripping over it, that might be an OH&S issue, but otherwise—it is through your SRP and locally raised funds.

The CHAIR: Just on that, as principals have more and more experience with the new asset management plan, the experience of the blitz as well as the capital investment projects that are happening on such large scale, do you think that is breeding confidence amongst principals that the department is at least working towards implementing a recommendation—well, implementing or on track with their recommendations—and that we are making progress, effectively?

Ms KLIMAN: Yes, definitely there is. As I said, it is great to have the documents because they clearly highlight what my role is, what the school council role is and what corporate will do to support. So having clarity is really, really important, and those documents, as I said, are not totally well known yet, because they were in the last six months of last year, so it is really about the socialisation. Sometimes it is just-in-time knowledge, too—‘I’m going through a building program’ or ‘I’ve just been given money. What do I need to go off and read about, because if I’m not involved in it—

The CHAIR: That is why I thought the experience of it, as people are involved in a project or receive the money or whatnot, that in itself breeds the confidence because people are having the experience.

Ms KLIMAN: Yes, it certainly does. I was in a school for 15 years as a principal—I am confident enough to manage that sort of work now; maybe not so confident when I first went in—and there were nowhere near the supports in place when I was principal 15 years ago. So the work that has been done is very positive and should breed confidence, but what we also have to be very cognisant of is the fact that there are so many early career principals as well as acting principals, and so what supports do regional offices provide when these people come on board?

Mr DALGLEISH: The other part about confidence increasing also is, as principals go through this work, sharing that knowledge through their own personal experiences so people learn who to go to for advice or support to point them in the right direction.

The CHAIR: And I have seen that in my own local area, where I have got a number of school projects. They talk to each other, and the ones that have just gone through unsuccessfully then seem to talk to the others, in terms of both how to get the money and how to then use it.

Ms KLIMAN: And I think we have to encourage principals, and we do that ourselves through the association, to actually go to the department and ask the questions too, not just rely on someone's maybe misconception and be led down the wrong garden path, really.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Just to follow on from part of the answer you gave to Sam, is there a clear enough pathway for PRMS to seek major upgrades? I am not talking maintenance and little bits and pieces, but existing schools where they say, 'We need a rebuild', or it may well be a configuration—two campuses onto one, a new greenfields site, or anything. Is it clear within the departmental processes how they go about it?

Ms KLIMAN: No—simple answer.

Mr DALGLEISH: You wait.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That is my experience.

Ms KLIMAN: You wait.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The principals sort of come to us and go, 'How do we do this?'.

Ms KLIMAN: I would say that that is generally what principals will do. They will go to their local Member and get support, and school councils will get involved. But there are no clear pathways that we are aware of.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Should there be? What sort of process could be in place within the department? I mean, obviously we have got the whole rolling facilities in now.

Ms KLIMAN: Well, that should be driving transparency and decision-making and the condition of school builds. From that data they will have—once they have gone through all the schools—system-wide data of where are the greatest needs, and that should be driving that and making that transparent. It should be very transparent. It should not be that we have to wait until the May budget and find out if we are actually funded for our projects. Lots of schools will go through and do master planning on their own accord, but that does not mean they are going to get any funding at all. That is their choice, and probably that is not done as much now as it used to be because of the way things work.

Mr DALGLEISH: And historically we have seen cases where schools have master-planned, and they may have a multistage build, and they may get stage 1, stage 2, stage 3—stages 4 and 5 never see the light of day because of uncertainty of funding.

Ms KLIMAN: And the other thing is that that is still happening in terms of new builds. That can happen. They get the first stage and they are not sure when that next stage is coming—and this is probably more in line with our schools that are being built as P-9s. They get the P-6; they are not sure when the next part of the build is coming along. And that can cause issues in the community, particularly if parents have moved their children to that school and they want to have their kids go through for the end of year 9 and the build does not happen, so there is that also.

And whilst we have heard in the past of where schools have been, 'Yeah, you'll be in the next round, you'll be in the next round', sometimes we get a change of government, and there goes that plan. So there is no transparency and certainty around that.

The CHAIR: Before I pass on to Tim, to follow on from that point, what would be the alternative as the decision-making process? So at the moment the decision-making process is the budget, which is when all of the

schools—and unfortunately there is never a bucket of money big enough to fund all of the stages of all of the master plans of all of the schools that are asking for it. If the decision-making point was not to be the State budget, there still has to be a point, I guess, and what would you see that as being? If it was not the first Tuesday in May, by and large—I mean, the Catholic school funding program that was set up has two grant rounds; I think they are early in the year and late in the year, but there is still a time at which they get announced—what is the alternative to the budget?

Ms KLIMAN: I am not sure if I know the alternative to that, because I do not think I can change parliamentary ways.

The CHAIR: Well, just as an idea—like, I mean, at some point the Minister for Education makes a decision about—

Ms KLIMAN: Well, that is the thing. If they are going back to, ‘Where is the growth, where are the new schools, where do we need the new schools?’, that should be up and transparent. And when do we do plan to have those? So they should be viewable by community and the system. The other thing is using the condition assessment reports to make sure that there is a prioritised order of what might happen.

The CHAIR: So is it more about not necessarily the decision-making point but understanding the process of the decision-making?

Ms KLIMAN: Yes.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thanks, Anne-Maree and Andrew, for popping in, and thank you for your thorough presentation. One of the key Education State targets is confidence in schools. How interconnected is that to infrastructure and maintenance? Despite all the elements that go into the role of principal—but those new parents, the tours that you all do—how interconnected is it to infrastructure and maintenance of facilities?

Ms KLIMAN: I giggle, because one of my first schools was a very, very interesting school built in the 70s that was totally open plan and quite an unusual build. And the number of times I had to say, ‘Buildings do not teach your children’—to give parents confidence to actually feel that it was about what happened within those buildings that was the most important thing. And then in my second school we were fortunate to have one of our LTC buildings replaced with a BER building. And of course every time you walked a new prospective prep parent through—‘My child will be in that building, will they?’.

So it is a sad thing that we do have a community that focuses on facilities. And whilst they are important, and we know that they should be conducive to, you know, effective pedagogical approaches and appropriate teaching and learning, they do not teach children. So I think that in saying that too, though—and Andrew has just been through a rebuild; he might want to comment.

Mr DALGLEISH: And from personal experience, absolutely. The confidence from parents when they walk in and they see new facilities, and you can talk about the construction and how it is to work as a modern teaching and learning environment—it has a real impact.

Mr RICHARDSON: And how much, in your experience, has parent and community fundraising gone to the absolute necessities rather than the aspirations that happen in schools? So the fetes, the barbecues—how often is that divided into maintenance of the schools over your journey as opposed to the aspirations that parents put forward—and the wider community—into the education outcomes for their kids?

Mr DALGLEISH: It is an interesting one. I suppose we tend to use the fundraising to get the extras. I suppose having come through a major build program, too, it is the finish off, it is the landscaping, it is the playgrounds and so on which becomes very much the domain of families, because it gives them a focus and they then have got that pride in the fact that, ‘We have helped put that in’. Ideally we certainly utilise the funding that comes in for maintenance and minor works; we are not seeing a huge amount, from personal experience, but I know some schools do.

Ms KLIMAN: I would say on fundraising, I was always in very low socio-economic schools, so we always had very targeted things, and it would be playground equipment or shade cloth or whatever, so it was very much driven towards parents being able to see that the money went to those things rather than maintenance.

Mr RICHARDSON: I have got two more quick ones. Is it getting better for principals despite the workload? Has the regional support over the last few years improved, or is the complexity getting more difficult in the workload?

Ms KLIMAN: It is a bit of both. It is complex work, and therefore it becomes overwhelming for them, but at the same time the ones that are having positive experiences are talking about the fact that that is a direct result of the support they are getting from either the VSBA or from regional offices, so it is a bit of both. It often does depend on where you are in your journey and comfort in managing facilities.

Mr RICHARDSON: Finally, the department—the Secretary and the CEO of the VSBA—submitted that in 2012 there was a \$420 million maintenance backlog. The real cost of that in current dollars would be a lot more. Have we gotten through a lot of that backlog from the association's perspective? And what impact does that have on the confidence and pride that we place in our school communities?

Ms KLIMAN: I would definitely say we are working towards getting through that backlog, and that is making principals and school communities a lot happier about what where they are going every day and what they are not having to deal with. I speak from the experience of the last school I was at. It just happened to be after I left that they got two buildings replaced. That brings a huge confidence from the community into Government education for a start, and I think the fact that it is happening and it is visible makes it better for the education sector in itself.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic.

Mr RIORDAN: Just finally, health and education are a little bit similar in terms of often the desire of communities to contribute through fundraising and so on. My experience in health was that there was really no assistance from the department or sort of a pro forma on how to best manage gifting and fundraising. Even in low socio-economic areas you can have a generous benefactor come out of the blue. Is there an opportunity for schools to not necessarily have to reinvent the wheel? Would it be of advantage to have some assistance in sort of formalising that fundraising, whichever form it takes, to help get those extras in the schools, to move the school from being a good school to the best school?

Ms KLIMAN: In terms of the support and advice that is available to schools, there is quite a bit of information around to guide that work. I sometimes wonder how that would be done, though, in terms of if that is another task we are asking a school to get on board to do, because that often again falls back to the principal. If I am having to then actively go out and source funding to actually get some work done in the school, it is nicer when the benefactor wants to just come and donate it to the school and then, as I said, there are supports there—guidelines on what to do and how to treat that money.

Mr RIORDAN: So you are not forced to account for that money in a way that goes into paying—

Ms KLIMAN: Yes, you are.

Mr RIORDAN: for the ongoing recurrent costs of the school rather than for the extra benefit of the school? In health it was often or always put into recurrent—and therefore you would end up losing it on just basic day-to-day expenses rather than being able to quarantine it for the betterment of the school.

Ms KLIMAN: Having not been involved in dealing with that matter, I am not totally over it, but I believe the guidelines do provide some fairly rigid advice about how you should be using that, and it should not be going towards your day-to-day maintenance.

Mr DALGLEISH: Our school had established a building fund for families over a period of time where they could choose to contribute and so on. That also had taxation benefits. Also you had to establish it along ATO

guidelines and then report back against that. But we were holding those for part of the major build as well. It was not just recurrent operational or maintenance funding.

The CHAIR: Often in school communities the parents are doing it and the school community as a whole is doing the fundraising, and sometimes even when they are not doing the fundraising they certainly have often very valid but sometimes different views to the principal about what the maintenance needs and the future facilities needs of the school are. How do you perceive that tension? Do you think principals are supported in managing that tension? Is there more that can be done? Do you think by and large that is not a problem, that it generally works well—expectations align?

Ms KLIMAN: I think it is fairly clear in the *Education and Training Reform Act*. It was adjusted last year or the year before, and it is quite clear about who plays what role in that. And it is also very much a conversation you are having at your school council, with P and F being involved, and making sure that you deeming that they are going to the right things too. Again I have not experienced a tension, but I have heard from schools where it can cause a tension.

The CHAIR: And is there anything that Government can do to better assist principals who are experiencing that tension, or do you think that the existing wellbeing programs and so forth are helping principals address that?

Ms KLIMAN: Well, the existing wellbeing programs have definitely been a bonus to education, to provide that support, and particularly if it gets to the stage of being vexatious and they can go and ring complex matters to get the support they need, which is a really positive thing. Do we change the legislation or do we change laws? It could be—and again it might be my inexperience or my lack of knowledge in this space, but do we need to have a fine line of should it not be used for maintenance at all, because it usually should have a purpose of what you are actually targeting to spend that fundraising money on? So it is a hard one, because again I have not had the experience of having complications in there. Have you?

Mr DALGLEISH: No, and I suppose we tend to just set a really clear line around what it is for so it is up-front, so that when we are fundraising, this is what we are raising money for, so the whole community has transparency right up-front.

Ms KLIMAN: If it is done effectively right from the outset.

The CHAIR: Are there any further questions? No? Okay, well, thank you very much for your time and all of the information you have provided us with today. You will be provided with a transcript from Hansard to verify, and then that will be available on the website. We thank you for taking the time to come meet with us and inform our Inquiry. Thank you.

Mr DALGLEISH: Thank you.

Ms KLIMAN: Thank you. Goodbye, everyone.

Witnesses withdrew.