

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Bairnsdale – Tuesday 26 March 2024

MEMBERS

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

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Lee Tarlamis

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Georgie Crozier

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

WITNESS

Matt Kell, Teacher, Bairnsdale Secondary College.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Please ensure your mobile phone and your watch are on silent and keep any background noise to a minimum, please.

I would like to start by acknowledging respectfully the Aboriginal people, the traditional custodians of the various lands that we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and family. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of the issue to the committee.

I would like to thank the Bairnsdale RSL for hosting us today. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery.

I would like to introduce my team on the committee. My name is Trung Luu; I am the Chair and a Member for Western Metropolitan Region. To my left is Mr Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region; to my right is Ms Melina Bath, Member of Eastern Victoria; and to my far right is Dr Renee Heath, Member for Eastern Victoria. Also joining us shortly will be participating members Dr Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria; and Mrs Moira Deeming, Member for Western Metropolitan Region.

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

All evidence is being recorded. We will provide a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard recording, could you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Matt KELL: Matthew Kell, Bairnsdale Secondary College.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Because you have made a submission, we might just go straight to the questions.

Matt KELL: No worries.

The CHAIR: I think there are a few questions the panel would like to ask you. We might limit it down to about 6 minutes per member. I want to see if the Zoom member will turn up as well. Matthew, I will start, if I may. In your submission it says clearly that you have been experienced in regional teaching for 25 years. There is a lot of stuff you mentioned in your submission, but I just want to open it up and ask you to explain or expand a little bit. When you mentioned that public education is on the brink of collapse in this region, could you just briefly expand a little bit on that?

Matt KELL: Yes. I will preface it a little bit by saying it was November when I did the review, so that was getting towards the end of what was a pretty tough year, so it was probably skewed a little bit. But I read through my submission again last night in preparation for this – I was going to do some preparation and prepare some answers on where I thought you were going to go – and I thought, 'You know what, it is probably slightly negative, but I stand by everything I put in it.' We are having real troubles staffing the school. The further you get from the city, the harder it is. This is noticeable in Swifts Creek and Mallacoota and has been for years. As it gets closer to the city, it becomes a bigger problem for the regions. I still do not think people in the inner city have got any idea how bad things are in a country area to staff.

The school system is ultimately based around getting the score at the end of year 12. People that are looking for careers in education, people that are looking for promotion, play the data game, so it is all about bringing your

VCE scores up. In an area like ours, where less than a third of our kids are now going off to university, from the time they walk in – I am assuming primary school but I will speak about secondary school – they are in a system that is based around collecting data and funnelling them into VCE classes so the school can get good VCE scores so that we look good to the community, so assistant principals become principals, leading teachers become assistant principals, principals become executive principals and people move into the department. My understanding is that less than – I was going to say less than a third, but I will say less than 50 per cent of students that go to university are ATAR dependent. So less than 50 per cent of the kids that are going to university actually use the score that 100 per cent of kids have to try and fit into a school system that it has been designed for.

When I started at the school – 1999 was my first year – I was naive, young, had no idea what was going on. We had a new principal start that year, and I watched us build up capacity in the staff. We had a higher socio-economic demographic than we have got now, and for years it probably was not noticeable because our cohorts were much better suited to VCE. We had a change of principal at about the same time as a few social issues crept into the school. I am now watching three-quarters of the kids coming to the school trying to fit a program that does not suit them – they are not going to go to university. All of them are employable – I am not trying to denigrate our kids; they are all employable – but university is not their path. What is a kid meant to do when they come in at year 7 – they do three lots of standardised testing before they sit NAPLAN testing. Our year 7s would have had three or four lots of standardised testing this year. If you are a student that does not see education as your pathway, or you do not have the support at home to help you with your education, you are being told four times in year 7, before the first term break, ‘Hang on a minute, you’re going to really struggle here.’

The more staff that leave to move back to the city for jobs that require less student management or that move into the private system at higher pay, it leaves more work for those that stay behind. I said in my submission all the issues we have had with just granting staff leave or time fraction requests. This year we have not been able to do it. Everyone at the school is teaching more than they should be teaching. The impact of that is more tired staff, more sick leave, more classes covered by teachers that are not trained in the area or just do not have that relationship with kids.

This is going to get worse before it gets better. It is a big ship to turn around, finding teachers – 1500 jobs in the government system, roughly, on eduPay. I did not check it last night, but when you drill down on that there are over 100 leadership positions. There were 50 leading teacher jobs and learning specialist jobs and about 40 assistant principal jobs. There were even 40 or 50 targeted financial incentive jobs. So that is teachers saying, ‘I’m not moving for the \$80,000 over three years.’ And it is the regions that cop it. Until this is Melbourne High and places like that, I do not think it is going to be taken seriously.

The CHAIR: Joining us on Zoom now are Dr Sarah Mansfield and Mrs Moira Deeming. One quick question before passing to the next committee member: with your experience over the last 25 years, and you have been in high school teaching, currently our standard in relation NAPLAN recording and results, our maths and reading results have prominently dropped. Has the curriculum got much to do with it or has the way we are teaching got to do with the results?

Matt KELL: The way we are teaching. I need to be a little bit careful here. I am not a primary school teacher and I am not primary school trained, but I must say I laughed when 20 years ago we moved away from phonics. Really – we are not going to teach kids to sound out words? Here we are 20 years later and we are bringing phonics back in. So decisions that get made by people that have not worked in schools or that read small parts of research groups or that try to attribute things that work in overseas countries that may have completely different teacher training and then introduce them into schools, with no accountability, all they are doing is trying to get re-elected. No-one goes back and revisits it.

Let me tell you a story. Fifteen years ago, when my daughter was in primary school, my wife used to go in and do the reading program – you know, parents come in and read to the kids. My daughter loved reading. My wife would go and sit there and she would read books to the kids. And it was the same kids each week: ‘Have you done your reading?’ ‘No, I haven’t. Sorry, I haven’t done the reading. Mum can’t read, Dad’s not home.’ So from the time kids walk in at prep – by the end of prep these kids are already falling behind. The funding of public schools in Victoria is below what was recommended by one of the many reviews that has been done into

education. If you do not think \$2000 per kid makes a difference to what can be done at all levels of school, but especially at lower primary school, to bring up illiterate and innumerate kids, then you are kidding yourself.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Michael, would you like to ask some questions?

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Mr Kell, for joining us this morning. What subjects do you teach?

Matt KELL: I am PE science trained. I have not really taught much science. I have taught junior maths. I have taught little bits of other things but mostly PE. I have done pretty much all the roles in the school below assistant principal – year 11 coordinator, leading teacher, curriculum coordinator, all those jobs – but PE science is my training.

Michael GALEA: That is quite that broad mix, then. I know you talked about tech schools being removed quite a long time ago as a major issue, and we have seen some brought back, but I realise the Latrobe Valley is not quite really close to you.

Matt KELL: And the tech schools when they were brought in – one of the thought bubbles someone had 20 years ago – they were not really like the tech schools of old.

Michael GALEA: Not in the same way. I know of young kids in my region who have gone and accessed their local one, and it is obviously not the same thing; it is a bit later in the journey. It worked for them, but I realise that Churchill from here is quite a fair way.

Matt KELL: It is a fair trip, yes.

Michael GALEA: Would you support more of them being rolled out?

Matt KELL: Yes, as a premise. Little fixes here and there are not going to do anything. Root and branch – let us pare it back and start again. If that is part of what is recommended to put in as part of an overhauled education system, yes. But if you are just going to sit here and say ‘We’ll put in tech schools and fix it’ – of course not, no.

Michael GALEA: I will come back to some of the things that you raised as well in just a moment, but with VCAL now progressively being replaced by the vocational major, I am curious to know any thoughts you have around that.

Matt KELL: To be fair, I was part of implementing our VCAL program when it ran. I have not really paid much attention to the VM. History would tell me that it is going to pretty much be the same present with different wrapping, but I am wrong from time to time so maybe I will be on this one. But if we go back to what VCAL was like when it was well funded, 10 or 12 years ago, we would have 70 first-year VCAL students. Each of those students would do one day a week work placement. One day a week would be their VET training. They would be at school three days a week. Seventy kids in workplace training for a year at a work placement was incredibly powerful for them. It gave the kids a good opportunity, because even if they did not move into work with that employer, a prospective employer could ring up and say, ‘You’ve had this kid for a year – not a two-week work experience. What can you tell me about it?’ The issue with that is you have got to go out and do 70 workplace visits over and over again, and who has got the time to do 70 workplace visits? So again, it comes back to funding. With a little bit more money, then you can get your VCAL coordinators out, or associated people out, to liaise with workforces, to go and see the kids and to have that link between school and employers.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. You have also talked about gaming the system.

Matt KELL: It is where I thought we would start, actually, when I read it last night. I thought, ‘Oh, that’ll be where they start.’

Michael GALEA: Yes, well, I did want to get to this.

Matt KELL: Yes, go for it.

Michael GALEA: NAPLAN obviously is one thing that you have identified in this thing, such as attendance data. I wonder if you could flesh in a little bit more detail of what you have seen schools do and, I guess more to the point, how to close those loopholes – how to make it so that schools do not.

Matt KELL: As long as you are promoting people on data, people will corrupt the data. Did you ever watch the old TV series *The Wire*?

Michael GALEA: A long time ago.

Matt KELL: Right. So they are up there and they are talking about deputies becoming majors because they duke the system. It is happening in education. We are naive to think it is not. How? I do not know, is the short answer. Unless you actually use NAPLAN data for what it was I think originally intended for – a snapshot in time, not attached to funding and not used for league tables, comparison tables or anything like that – then there is no incentive, is there? If you want to stop something happening, disincentivise it. Does that answer your question?

Michael GALEA: It does, yes. Thank you. I do not have a lot of time. I will just quickly ask you: you have been teaching a long time.

Matt KELL: Yes.

Michael GALEA: The average student-per-teacher ratio has gone down in the last 10 years with the investment over time. Have you seen the benefit of that investment in this area?

Matt KELL: Have we really reduced class sizes in the last 10 years?

Michael GALEA: They have gone down – statewide they have.

Matt KELL: Through legislation or just through –

Michael GALEA: No, this is through investments.

Matt KELL: Look, we up until one principal ago had a pretty strong sub-branch that did a pretty good job of keeping the eye on our year 7 and 8 numbers. We used to have a trade-off where we kept our year 7 and 8 numbers at 22 and year 9, 10, 11 and 12 prac classes at 22. The trade-off was slightly larger classes elsewhere. But we had a different prin, who said, ‘No, you can have 25 in years 7 and 8.’ So we are at 25 in years 7 and 8. Yes, we do not plan to run any classes above 25. At our school, I would say our class sizes – especially with the teacher shortage, you cannot run classes of 12 or 13 if there are 300 sessions a week you are trying to find cover for. So I would be incredibly surprised if any school more than 50 kilometres out of the radius of Melbourne is running small class sizes.

Michael GALEA: Of course I did want to get to that topic, but my time is up.

The CHAIR: We can come back if we have time. Melina.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr Kell. Can you tell me: you are representing yourself today, aren't you?

Matt KELL: Yes.

Melina BATH: So it is your own personal point of view.

Matt KELL: Yes.

Melina BATH: Thank you. You talk about the 100 positions that were advertised, and two were filled. Over what kind of time span?

Matt KELL: That is over the year.

Melina BATH: Over one year?

Matt KELL: Over last year.

Melina BATH: One year?

Matt KELL: Yes. We had the same set of eight or nine jobs advertised the entire year. When I say 100 jobs, it is not 100 different jobs, it is the same set of jobs –

Melina BATH: Readvertised, readvertised.

Matt KELL: Readvertised, readvertised. It started without TFIs and finished with TFIs. When I wrote this last year we were still yet to staff a lot of those positions. So yes, we had the same set of jobs advertised from term 1 right through until term 4 last year.

Melina BATH: Okay, and what did that do to student class sizes?

Matt KELL: It would not have done anything to class sizes last year because everyone taught more than they should have. Staff picked up extra –

Melina BATH: So staff took over and above their load?

Matt KELL: Yes, absolutely. So we had assistant principals with a zero teaching load who all had to pick up a teaching load. Learning specialists and leading teachers had to pick up extra classes and also extra responsibilities for KLAs and jobs like that.

Melina BATH: Key learning areas.

Matt KELL: Key learning areas, yes. Sorry. So, for example, our numeracy learning specialist is also the head of maths. We do not have a maths KLA. Both of those jobs are meant to come with small time allowances, but if you give it to one person who has got a leadership position, you do not have to give them a time allowance, you can just give them a little bit of extra money. So I do not think it would have affected our class sizes last year, but the impact of that is that everybody is running faster and harder than they should be, and more people burn out quicker and more people leave. You know, it is a self-repeating circle.

Melina BATH: In relation to that, not for yourself but speaking from observing other staff in your school, what is that doing to them?

Matt KELL: Staff are knackered. Staff are tired. Staff are less ready to deal with day-to-day teaching –

Melina BATH: Issues.

Matt KELL: Teaching is a wonderful job, but it can wear you down. If you are dragged down by trying to work out how you are covering classes, or you are maybe not getting the support from your key learning area because that person is doing two or three jobs, it just wears you down little bit. So rather than being out of puff in November, you are out of puff in July.

Melina BATH: And you have still got another full year.

Matt KELL: And you have still got another semester to go. If you hear staff saying they are tired, it is a pretty good indication that the system is struggling, and a lot of teachers are tired now. I always say I am a great teacher in term 1, I am a pretty good teacher in term 2, I am okay in term 3 and I am bloody hard work in term 4.

Melina BATH: You are surviving.

Matt KELL: I drastically reduced my teaching load at the end of last year because I could see what was coming and I know myself well enough to know that I needed to do that. So I am only working 2½ days a week now. It is not that I do not care about my job, but my job is now my job; it is not a career. I am not trying to climb the ladder; I turn up and do my job and I leave. Other people that have still got a good heart, who are really trying to go above and beyond and who are trying to look after the kids, are crashing early. I am guessing a bit, but I reckon if you look at short leave sick leave data in schools, it is up in term 1 from where it has been before, and that is an indication that people are tired already. The advice you get when you start teaching is,

‘Don’t use a sickie in term 1; that’ll give you five to take over three terms if you need them.’ Well, I know for a fact that people are taking them in term 1.

Melina BATH: For genuine reasons.

Matt KELL: Well, what is a genuine reason? If you are tired, if you are mentally struggling –

Melina BATH: That is a genuine reason.

Matt KELL: That is a genuine reason, isn’t it? Yes.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. What is region doing? Because there are layers in the education system. This is very much a school focus, trying to get teachers in front of classes and support those students with their learning, which is really important. I am a former VCAL teacher, and I know the benefits of VCAL too. But in general, how is region assisting?

Matt KELL: Look, they cannot invent teachers. If we look at last year, on really tough-to-staff days we would get a regional person or two coming to the school. I am pretty sure that the SEIL last year took our 8–9 footy team away for the day because we could not find someone to coach the team.

Melina BATH: Staff.

Matt KELL: So they do jump in. They did organise – I am assuming it came through region – to have Tradewind CRT teachers based at the school for about a month last year, and the school then sort of farmed them out to other primary schools as required. I do not get super excited. Once you get outside the principal of the school –

Melina BATH: You kind of –

Matt KELL: I am trying not to say anything that is going to get me in trouble, but I do not always see a lot coming out of regional offices that makes a big difference in the schools, but I also do not look that hard to see what they are doing. They threw us a couple of bones last year, which was nice, but what can they do? Ring upstairs and say, ‘We need some more teachers.’ Yes, we know we need some more teachers, but where are they?

Melina BATH: Mr Kell, in terms of these terms of reference, we are hearing the problems, and I am sure we will hear them again and again and we have read them in submissions, but part of this is supporting teachers to retain their jobs and be supported. What are some of the solutions, from your grassroots point of view?

Matt KELL: You are right. We have not got an attraction issue; we have got a retention issue. I think the stats are: for every hundred people that go into a teaching degree, 50 do not make it out, and of the 50 that make it out only 50 per cent of them are left after five years. So for every hundred teachers that go in –

Melina BATH: You have got a quarter.

Matt KELL: after 10 years we are down to 25. Maybe speaking to someone who has been teaching 25 years is not the greatest starting point, but schools need better options for student management. We raised the compulsory leaving age to 18, 10 or so years ago. I do not think that is the right move. Some kids are never going to be successful at school. Some kids need to get out in the real world. Not only does that do them a favour, it makes the job of a teacher easier – but more importantly, there are less disruptions in the class. I am not about wasting kids. I have worked in re-engagement programs and I have worked it out off campus. These are the kids that the public system is failing. These are the ones that we need to support most, and by putting them into a school where they are constantly tested –

Melina BATH: And failing, by the standards.

Matt KELL: and failing and therefore not wanting to go to class, therefore falling further behind, not seeing any – how do we help those kids? It is not by forcing them to stay at school. Teachers need more capacity to deal with unruly students and unruly parents.

Melina BATH: Support from the education system or –

Matt KELL: Support from policy, all right? Whether it is written or not, it has certainly come through the schools that suspending a child can be really hard; expelling a kid is near on impossible. Now, again, I am not talking about expelling 10 per cent of the kids, but I got chased across the school by a kid threatening to kill me. I sat in a corner and cried while he yelled and screamed at me. The kid got three days suspension. How is this right?

Schools need more tools to deal with problems in general. It is a hard job when everything that happens publicly tends to chip away. If we are talking about teachers popping up in the media, it tends to be negative. I have watched the professionalism of the profession slowly get chipped away over 25 years. I read a really interesting article. I wish I could have found it because I would have put it in my submission. Compare the salary of a backbench pollie with a top-of-the range teacher, policeman or nurse. In the mid-1980s – about the same. You guys are, what, \$170,000-ish now? We are \$115,000-ish now. Would schools, teachers, nurses and police have the problems that we are having now if our wages went up at the same rate as yours? I doubt it.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

Matt KELL: No worries.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Dr Heath, question.

Renee HEATH: Thank you so much for coming today. Do you prefer ‘Matthew’ or ‘Mr’?

Matt KELL: Matt.

Renee HEATH: Matt, okay. I am going to go now towards the outcomes that we are seeing. You probably touched on it a little bit before. Programme for International Student Assessment data has highlighted that Victorian 15-year-olds are now reading worse than ever. Their maths skills are worse and their literacy skills are worse than have ever been recorded. Why do you think this is happening?

Matt KELL: You have got to compare apples with apples. If we are speaking specifically about PISA, all our kids do it. When comparing results to overseas, they are opt in, so it is not a fair comparison. Are you with me?

Renee HEATH: I am with you, but I think this is rated against the rest of the world.

Matt KELL: Yes, but all our kids do it. The rest of the world have opt in; not all their students do the test.

Renee HEATH: So you do not think that is accurate, that we are –

Matt KELL: I do not, no.

Renee HEATH: So you would say that 15-year-olds’ literacy –

Matt KELL: No, not at all. I am just saying that PISA is the wrong reference point for it.

Renee HEATH: Right, okay. So now I am asking: do you think that 15-year-olds’ literacy and numeracy skills are as good as they were, say, 20 years ago?

Matt KELL: No, I did not say that at all. I just said PISA is the wrong tool to use for the comparison.

Renee HEATH: All right. So now let us go to the outcome. Do you think that they are –

Matt KELL: No, I do not.

Renee HEATH: Okay. Why is that?

Matt KELL: A range of reasons – but I touched on it before. Phonics – we threw that out the door 20 years ago and went with whole-word recognition. I would say that is a pretty big stumbling block. Again, I touched on it before – reading at an early age and the students not getting the support at home for that.

My son finished year 12 last year. I am pretty sure his year, the year below and the year ahead were the three biggest years the primary schools have had down here, and they were big baby bonus years – \$8000 per kid for a baby bonus. Now, did that improve our fertility rate? Yes, absolutely. The influx of children that came through then did not necessarily have the grounding or the support at home that they would need to be strong literate and numerate students. I am trying to not come across as an arsehole when I say that. I might just leave it there before I say something that I am not happy with. I am not having a go at you guys. I cannot word that properly without sounding like I am being quite derogatory.

Renee HEATH: Okay. Well, data does show that the lower the education rate of the parent, the harder it is for a child. Is that sort of what you mean?

Matt KELL: Yes. What is the number one indicator of how well a kid is going to go at school? That should have been my starting point. It is about how much home values education. You cannot be what you cannot see. If you are not getting a lot of reading done to you at home – I heard something last week about students in homes with generational poverty here, and I cannot remember the number – you get 7000 less words a week than someone who is not, or whatever it is. So just purely where someone lives or the home environment someone lives in is going to have a big impact on how well they go at school or how valuable they see school even being.

Renee HEATH: Yes. That is reflected in data. I totally agree with you. When Melina was asking before ‘Where do you need this support from? Is it the education department?’ and you said ‘in policy’, what sort of policies would you –

Matt KELL: Look, it will not happen, because it is way too big a football to get blown up. We need to start again – like, honestly. I mentioned in my submission about when VCE first came in – and I was lucky enough that I was a student. I did my year 12 twice actually, in 1992 and 93, so I could become a teacher. And I remember that what are now SACs you would do four of. PE had three, but let us say each class did four – pretty much one a term. Your VCE exam at the end of the year was 25 per cent of your mark, and 75 per cent of the mark was school-based. There was no moderation of your internal marks against your external scoring or anything like that. There were big days when teachers got together in their regions so they could moderate it, and apparently that was quite costly – again, why they moved away from it. But all of a sudden, HSC went because of the pressure that was on students to sit end-of-year exams. We introduced VCE. I was lucky enough to go through it when it was out of 168, and it was a great process, all right. But then by the time I had finished going through university and into school, we were pretty much back to all the pressure being on end-of-year exams. And now you see it all the time – you have kids freaking out coming into end-of-year exams because in their mind if they do not nail their exams their future is over. As I was saying before, less than 50 per cent of university entrants are on ATAR.

So look, honestly, start again. Do a complete rebuild. It will not happen, and if it does it will be for my grandkids – and I do not have any yet. But I think we need to start again. And the people that are looking at the rebuild need to have been people that have worked for big chunks of time in education.

The CHAIR: I might move on to the next, if I could.

Renee HEATH: Okay, no worries.

The CHAIR: Mrs Deeming, would you like to ask some questions? You have got 5 minutes.

Moira DEEMING: Great. Thanks so much for coming along, Matt.

Matt KELL: No worries.

Moira DEEMING: I have also got a background in teaching, and I can hear how much you care about the kids. I wanted to ask you a few questions about the idea that schools should not be expected to solve social problems. I agree with that, and I just wanted you to expand on that.

Matt KELL: I did not say that they should not be. I just think that for every one of those that gets added in, it takes away from other stuff. You know, we do what we do, but every time something new gets added in or

every time something goes in that falls to schools to help fix, if something else does not come out, then what was in there is not being done as well because we are doing other stuff as well.

Moira DEEMING: Like the overcrowding of the curriculum.

Matt KELL: It is not the curriculum, because these things are not always curriculum-based, but yes. We are trying to do too much, and by doing too much, we are not doing enough of it well enough.

Moira DEEMING: Fantastic. And I would like to know what you thought about teacher training over the time you have been a teacher. How do you think that is done?

Matt KELL: Look, it is hard to comment on because I am not in universities anymore, but I went out for dinner with my daughter who is at uni and one of the girls that came out with her is doing a PE course. I think she was saying that she has got 8 contact hours a week at university. I had a little bit of a laugh to myself and thought back to my first year of uni when I was doing 24 hours – contact hours. Now, to be fair the 24 could have been whittled down to 16 and we would not have lost anything. There was a fair bit of gumph in there. But 8 seems like it is pretty low. Again, without being in all the universities I do not know what is going on. We do not get as many student teachers down here as we used to, but more time in schools I think is needed. Like, teaching cannot be an apprenticeship; you have to have a degree. We are dealing with issues at the moment where people are midway through degrees teaching, and it is great because we have got someone in front of the class, but that brings its own issues with it. We have got a lot of teachers that are teaching in trade subjects that have got no teacher training, so I am certainly not saying that there should be more of this.

Aspiring teachers should be in schools more than they are now. I remember at the end of my first year of school thinking, 'I have learned more in my first year at school than I did comfortably in five years of teaching.' They need more time in the school to work out whether or not they are up for it. Some people go into teaching with a romantic view of what it is going to be: 'We're going to go in and we're going to save all the kids and we're going to be wonderful and it's going to be all rainbows and flowers.' And then three weeks into term 1 when they have been abused by a kid, not supported by admin and yelled at down the street by a parent, they think, 'Bloody hell. I didn't see this coming.' So let us get them into schools more often. You know, if they are not doing, I do not know, 200 days over their course, then that is a pretty good goal to aim for. Try to have a full year's experience before you walk into a school.

Moira DEEMING: That is a great idea. Thank you. No further questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Deeming. Dr Mansfield, would you like to ask a quick question?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thanks so much for appearing today. I think you have covered a lot of ground. Are you able to tell us about the volume of job applications you have advertised –

Matt KELL: Yes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: and how many you have actually filled? And, I guess, then how you have had to deal with filling any gaps in your rosters.

Matt KELL: My role last year was actually in the whole school organisation office, so I was much more over these figures than I am now. So what I am saying is there may be a little bit of flex in what I am telling you now, but I will do my best to be accurate.

Schools are meant to deliver 25 hours per week face-to-face instruction. We do not do that. We have had to reduce that down. A teacher should be teaching 11, 10 minutes. If they were all hour sessions it is 18 and a bit, I think, or 18 sessions. But we had to reduce that down to 57 last year and to 55 this year, so a full-time teacher is still teaching 20 sessions. That kicks back in the equivalent of seven or eight staff that we did not have to find at the school. If you then add up the bits and pieces that we got – leading teachers, learning specialists and assistant principals – to teach, we have probably saved something like 14 or 15 teachers. And people will look at that and say, 'There's no teacher shortage there.' There is because we have had to find dodgy ways of coming up with those.

We are still not fully staffed. We are waiting on VIT approval for some of our overseas teachers. That means that they are in a classroom teaching the class, but they have to have a qualified teacher with them, so you

know, that hurts. We are still waiting on some to land from overseas, and we knew that when we employed them, and we are still waiting for one to come back from Chinese New Year. I am assuming she is not coming because she would be back by now.

I do not think we currently have jobs advertised, but that does not mean that if you reached into your back pocket and said, 'Here's 10 teachers,' we could fill those 10 teacher loads just by reducing a handful of staff down to what they should be teaching. I mentioned in there that we have got a pretty good track record of giving our younger staff a year of leave without pay so they can go on travel or do something like that. They come down here and work a few years, earn some money, take a year off, travel and come back. Every single application for a year's leave without pay last year was knocked back, and every single one of those staff resigned. We have got long-serving staff that have been in the school longer than me that want to reduce from five to four or three days, and all but one we had to knock back because we just do not have the capacity to cover these. As I say, the more things like this we do, the closer to the wire everybody is running and the more tired everyone is getting. If everyone is at school – if we have got no excursions out, if we have got no PD on and we got no teacher illnesses – we are fine. But this is week 8. Let us say we have had 40 days. Do you want to take a guess at how many days we have had this year without any of those disruptions? I am going to say less than five.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. What you have said is that there is an underlying teacher shortage.

Matt KELL: The teacher shortage is worse than it looks on paper.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, but you are patching together arrangements that are covering it.

Matt KELL: Not just us – every school I have spoken to are doing clever things like this to try to cover the teacher shortage. When you hear from different people that, 'Oh, look, there's not really a teacher shortage, because there's not that many jobs.' Well, that does not take into account all the clever things schools have done to get teachers in front of students.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. If you had to suggest a few key things, because at the end of this inquiry we will be making recommendations to the government about what they could do to address some of these problems, what are some of the practical things that the government could implement to try and address particularly the teacher shortage issue?

Matt KELL: Is your question: how do we attract more teachers?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, attract and retain more teachers. Is it more pay, less contact hours, more support staff or a combination of all these?

Matt KELL: Yes. Show me the money – yes. And I know that that is a simplistic argument. But every time someone somewhere makes a save in education, whether it be closing tech schools or closing multicampus schools, that has an impact. I would love to see the facts on successful schooling – and I am not talking about year 12 completion, I am talking about successful schooling – and prison population. I would argue that education is the silver bullet that keeps people out of jail – one of the reasons. To steal from *The West Wing*, schools should be palaces. Public schools should be palaces, and the teachers – the staff that work there – the kings and queens that work the corridor. We should not be an afterthought. We should not be 'Oh, you guys will work it out' or 'Come on, it's just Bairnsdale; it doesn't really matter'. How do we attract more people into a profession? Treat it like a profession. Raise us up, do not tear us down.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you, Dr Mansfield. We have 1 minute left. Ms Bath, if you would like to try and finish it off with one more question.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much for coming to us. I think it has been really illuminating. You speak about attendance data. We have only got a short time, but schools hide non-attenders. At the end of the day, it is about their welfare and their learning. What is happening there? Could you expand on that?

Matt KELL: Right. We have got a new principal this year. I am not saying he is not doing it, but I have no evidence that is happening this year. Of two of the last three principals we have had – the last one definitely but not so much, but the one before that was appalling. Students do not come to school. Someone rings up and says,

'Your students aren't coming to school.' Shit – enter them on cases of re-engagement. So I open my roll. I will see that three kids are on my roll, highlighted in blue – re-engagement program. Now, that, I would have thought to most, would indicate that they are at home doing something – that they would be getting some work off the teacher, that I would be getting something back. They are just sitting at home. We are just marking them away as re-engagement program, and they are not doing anything. But that goes through as an approved absence, so the school figures do not look like they are bad. And I know we are not the only place doing that. Do you know what CASES is, the school system where all this stuff gets entered? So an attendance officer looks at why a student is away: is it family illness with a medical certificate – you get a tick; or is it something else? Re-engagement program is one of the ones you can put on there. Someone should be looking at that.

Melina BATH: Not just an audit, but an understanding.

Matt KELL: I do not understand CASES; I am a PE teacher – I struggle to spell IT. But I would have thought that it would be easy enough – thank you for the laugh. But I would have thought off CASES you could identify what percentage of the school students were out on a re-engagement program, and for the ones that spike, 'Hang on a minute, it might be worth asking a question or two there.' And not through region.

Michael GALEA: And if I might ask as well, what are those re-engagement programs meant to actually be?

Matt KELL: I think they could be anything. I have actually worked in a couple of our re-engagement programs. We have got Ngooloo, which is an off-campus re-engagement program for at-risk kids. We are a dual-campus school, so we have got a lot of room – but they are crap buildings – on one site, so we have tried to run re-engagement programs there. The re-engagement might be you come in and do two sessions on a Monday, three sessions on Wednesday and you complete some of your work at home. Or it might be that you have got a lot of different reasons why you cannot be a full-time student at school. We are going to keep you as a full-time student at school, but you are not going to be at school full-time. I know last year we did have some students that were doing some remote learning with a teacher, so we did have some legitimate re-engagement stuff going on last year. But I also know we had a lot of illegitimate re-engagement stuff going on last year as well. And again, more so under [REDACTED] than before.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Matt KELL: No worries.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Mr Kell. This brings us to time and this panel session to a close. Again, thank you so much for coming in. All of your submission is very valuable; we will definitely be using it and referring to it in our submission later down the track. Again, thank you for your time. I know you have got a class at 10 o'clock, so I will let you go. Thank you, Matthew.

Witness withdrew.