

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Traralgon – Wednesday 27 March 2024

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WITNESS

Kieran Kenneth, Principal, Yallourn North Primary School.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the proceeding of this Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. I would like to welcome Mr Kieran Kenneth, the Principal of Yallourn North Primary School.

Kieran, before we continue I just want to read this 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 all the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any actions for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, these 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, and you will be provided a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee website.

I will just quickly introduce the committee to you. I am the Chair, Trung Luu, Member for Western Metropolitan Region. The Deputy Chair is to my right Ryan Batchelor, a Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Close enough.

The CHAIR: South-eastern?

Ryan BATCHELOR: No, southern.

The CHAIR: Southern. Also, we have two members from the Eastern Victoria region: Dr Heath and Ms Melina Bath. And we have got two members from the Western Victoria Region, Mr Joe McCracken and Dr Sarah Mansfield, on Zoom today. Could you please state your full name and your department you are representing.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. My name is Kieran Ronald Kenneth. I am the Principal at Yallourn North Primary School and work as part of that with the Department of Education, educating students from prep to grade 6.

The CHAIR: Would you like to give an opening statement at all, Kieran?

Kieran KENNETH: No, I just thank you for the opportunity. I am just assuming it is to dig a little deeper and find out a little bit more. I have been in state education now for 24 years. One year of that was in Western Australia, but every other year has been here in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Deputy Chair is still reading a little bit, so I will –

Ryan BATCHELOR: No, no – if anyone else who wishes to start.

Kieran KENNETH: And apologies for the couple of spelling errors in there.

The CHAIR: Dr Mansfield, would you like to start with your questions, please. You have got 5 minutes.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, certainly. Thank you so much for appearing today. In your submission you talked about a need for more resourcing to tackle socio-economic disadvantage. Can you elaborate on that a bit?

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. My primary school serves, predominantly, the lower socio-economic areas of our community. What I have learned over the years at our school is that we have a lot of time to build some really, really strong and powerful relationships with families, so we generally now see the good and the bad and we have built enough trust and relationships with them to work through those. What we then see is the disadvantage in the classroom in terms of their learning ability is directly impacted by those wraparound services that families can access. There is a lot of trauma in my school, and autism in terms of additional

learning needs is also one of my highest areas as well. But the services that families can then engage in to actually support them in that space – it is really, really difficult and it is really, really hard for those members of the community to actually know where to go and how to access them. That then impacts on what we see in terms of the learning outcomes we get in the school and also the behaviours that we see in the students within those classrooms.

Sarah MANSFIELD: In an ideal world, what sort of resources would your school be able to offer those families?

Kieran KENNETH: There have certainly been moves in a positive direction there. The Schools Mental Health Fund has been a godsend – that has been a well-overdue reform that we are really, really pleased to be able to access – but like a lot of things, it does not go quite far enough. Being a small school with a hundred students, that gives me access to a counsellor two days a week. Ideally, when we are dealing with difficult students that have a lot of complex trauma, saying to them ‘Wait for Monday or Friday’ just, in an ideal world, does not work. That then ends up being my responsibility and my teachers’ responsibility. The upskilling that we have done in that space has been huge in the last five years, but we know that we are not the experts in that area either, so we are bandaiding it, in a sense.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, okay. You talked about the additional load that teachers are picking up because of that. Can you describe the situation for teachers in your school? We have heard a lot from other witnesses about higher risk of burnout, people leaving teaching and difficulties with retaining good teachers within the system. Can you describe your reflections on that?

Kieran KENNETH: We are really fortunate – I am fully staffed this year. That is harder and harder to do in the current climate. I have 50 per cent of my school on individual education plans, because what we target – we do not actually target the full recommendation because it is already, with half the school, overwhelming, but we look at kids that need support through the disability inclusion process. They all have individual education plans. And then we look at students that are 12 months and above, and they also then have an individualised plan. And that actually then is half of my school, so the amount of time it takes is substantial. There is the writing of the plans, there are the assessments that go into that, there are the family meetings that we do every term to make sure that all of those things happen, and that in itself is hours and hours of work for teachers, which cannot be done at any time but when the students are not there. And we have a very, very small window as primary school teachers in which to actually not face to face get that done.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, okay. And what you think would improve things for teachers?

Kieran KENNETH: Well, as primary teachers – and this is just me personally – I do feel like we are the poor cousins to secondary schools. The resources and access that they have to additional supports in their schools is immense. They get more time, less face-to-face teaching than a lot of primary school teachers do, and yet I would challenge that what primary schools are now doing in terms of the curriculum development, curriculum delivery, supporting the whole student is far different to what it used to be. We just do not have that support time. And we do not have the people to delegate to. In my setting I am the only fully non-face-to-face teaching staff member in the school. I have got 23 staff, including me, and I am the only one that does not have a teaching load. So I pick up every single additional thing that happens. Every child that needs support outside of the classroom ends up being up to me, unless it is the two days a week that I have got my counsellor in the school, who can then do that. The ESs do an amazing job within the school actually engaging in the learning process and keeping kids in classrooms, keeping them engaged in the learning, but there is a huge expenditure in terms of I guess what pulls me in all different directions in terms of what my role is. And then what the department see my role as – being a leader in educational leadership – is a very, very small window of what I actually get time to do.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. What sort of resources, again, in an ideal world, would make that easier for primary school teachers?

Kieran KENNETH: Obviously state schools are not funded 100 per cent, with the state and the federal government partnership. That is one area that would help to address it. In terms of my school, that extra 10 per cent would actually give me another staff member, a full-time person, which does not sound like much, but that would double the capacity in my school of what we can actually offer in terms of the non-face-to-face. In terms

of the time primary teachers have in terms of developing their curriculum, they need more time to do those things. We do have the curriculum authorities that are looking at programming and actually building more supports for teachers in that area, but there still is a lot of time that goes into actually looking at the needs of the students that they are actually in front of in a classroom and then adapting those things to meet their need.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Sarah. Dr Heath.

Renee HEATH: Thank you. Thank you so much for coming today. You just mentioned then about the department expecting you to, in a sense, provide educational leadership. How much of your day would be spent on educational leadership as opposed to dealing with all of the other things that are going on?

Kieran KENNETH: Just due to my setting, less than 10 per cent.

Renee HEATH: Less than 10 per cent – okay.

Kieran KENNETH: And yet I know that the biggest in terms of student learning is in that space, but we get tied down. There is a massive amount of compliance that actually – if I was in industry, I would be looking at what my core business is, and none of that is my core business. I would contract that out; I would find people to do that for me. I end up doing all of those things. And, unfortunately, the compliance stuff needs to be done, but it does mean that I do not get the time to focus on the educational leadership stuff. And I do, within my setting, a lot more in the wellbeing space very, very heavily, because they are like the preconditions – if we do not get the child feeling safe and secure in their environment, having a full breakfast and being ready to learn, we actually cannot get to the education.

Renee HEATH: The rest is out the window.

Kieran KENNETH: We have done a lot of working on sort of building those foundations to try and then get every child at their optimum and ready to learn.

Renee HEATH: Thank you. There was a report, a long overdue one, that came out last week, the 2022 teacher supply and demand report. It reported that the forecast for teachers that are needed is expected to outpace the supply and that there will probably be a shortfall of over 5000 teachers. Does that surprise you, that figure?

Kieran KENNETH: It does not surprise me. I feel like that is probably underrating the problem. The reason I say that is if I am coming out of school and I am looking at opportunity, at the moment we are in a cost-of-living crisis. Things are expensive, and everyone is noticing. I have got decisions myself to make on what it is that I want. If I am a new entrant into the workforce I want, generally, safe and secure housing, employment, and then family and all those things that can come later. Teaching – there is no guarantee, being a teacher and going to university for four years, that I am going to be able to buy a house and that I am going to actually have those things that I need and be able to feed a family. Should I go to uni, spend a huge amount of money and rack up a massive debt, or could I go and do a one-week traffic controller course and earn more money than what I can pay my graduate? If we are coming down to what it is that I need, I can actually access far better employment quicker, with less debt. I do feel that with the challenge in terms of attracting teachers – it is all those base industries, policing, nursing – we are all going to suffer the same fate. It is all heading that way because there are other opportunities that will give them better financial stability than what I can in teaching.

To give my family as an example, in our family we had teachers, then they had kids and they became teachers. That is not going to follow on, because all the people that are currently in the industry – and I am the same – tell their kids, ‘If you choose teaching, I will not let you do it.’ It is purely because of the financial cost and the amount of time that they have to commit to be a good teacher. My wife is also a teacher. She does 55 hours a week, comes home every single night, sits on the desk and actually does more work because it is to benefit the kids. But that is at a cost to our family. I could choose, for example, traffic controlling, fit it into my work hours and then actually have more recreational time for myself. So I do think that is where we then see a lot more teachers saying, ‘I’m stressed; I’m burnt out.’ It is the same with principals – you know, ‘Are you feeling overwhelmed?’ ‘Yes’ – because there is just such an expectation, and you cannot do a good job within what our EBA says.

Renee HEATH: Interesting. Following on from something you just said then about burnout, what are the drivers of burnout in the education system?

Kieran KENNETH: Most people get into teaching because it is actually something that they want to give back. At the forefront we want to help change kids' lives. We want to actually break some of those cycles of poverty. We actually want to see people do better than what their parents did, for example. So we put in a lot of time; we invest a lot of energy. I spend a huge amount of time in my day understanding all my families, building relationships with every single child in the school. It is really, really important to understand where they all come from because it then directly benefits the educational outcomes we get as a school. But that all takes time, and it does not fit with the compliance, the curriculum and all the other things that you build. Because you want to do well, you keep adding to the pile, so we will just do that little bit extra. We will work that little bit harder. I have scheduled half my holidays to come into school, and not one of those tasks is education-in-the-classroom related. It is all building maintenance, getting all those sorts of things sorted, which theoretically could actually be done by another authority, rather than me. But you just keep adding them.

Today I had a family ring and say thank you to us for the fact that they do not think their family would be where they are if it was not for the support of the school, and they are the things that keep you going. They are the reasons you go, 'You know what, that's why I got into this job.' Unfortunately, it is what pays in that bank – why we go, 'That's all right; don't worry about myself, because I am actually making an impact.' It is one of those jobs that is a little bit selfless. You do just commit because that is what we do, but we are not seeing that same ethos in the newer generations. It is definitely shifting to, 'Well, I finish here.' Unfortunately, teaching does not work in its current way if you just actually do your 38 hours.

Renee HEATH: Yes. I think I just heard an alarm, so I think that is my time up.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Deputy Chair?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Kieran, for coming in. Your submission says that you think the tertiary course is not delivering the type of graduates that we need. Particularly you talk about how they are coming out not understanding instructional models and not being taught how to manage a classroom. I wonder if you could give us a bit more about what you think the deficiencies are, particularly on the instructional models front, and why you think that is important.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. Leadership is terribly important, and I am a really big believer that as a state we have a really good system and we have some amazing things that are happening within it. However, we do not provide enough leadership in terms of: if I forget to do something compliance related, there is a very, very fast reaction from the department around, 'Well, these things weren't done.' We do not have the same checks and balances in curriculum. And if we had stronger leadership from the top, we would actually – I know a lot of what principals feed up is that we do not want so much oversight and so much of a heavy, top-down approach, because we fail to recognise the nuances within each school. However, when we are talking about 'best practice', 'evidence-based', 'research-driven', then unfortunately sometimes there is not a choice. Like, if we know that this is how kids learn through current research –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Is this issue about learning approaches?

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. So, for example, my school works with the science of learning, which is a little bit out of kilter with where the department still stands in the whole-language approach, and we are one of the last states to shift from that whole language to the evidence based.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So you prefer a more phonics-driven –

Kieran KENNETH: Well, it is phonics-driven teaching –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Explicit teaching –

Kieran KENNETH: We have melded the two; however, it is all backed up by research, and it does actually demonstrate that –

Ryan BATCHELOR: No, no, no – I do not need to be convinced about that. I am more interested in your comments about the tertiary institutions. What are you seeing in the teachers that turn up on day one not knowing what to do?

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. What we see from that tertiary space and the educational training space is that they actually do not have any of those skills. They have not been taught how to manage a classroom. They have not been taught about instructional models. They do not know, so we actually then spend all our time upskilling, when ideally if we had a better training system, we would have better quality teachers and the upskilling I provide would then be just topping up rather than starting from a base load.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What do they do?

Kieran KENNETH: Well, it comes down to the fact that they do not spend enough time in schools. There is a lot of theory in education, of course – a lot of theory. And it is not until you actually get out and work with kids that you go, ‘Oh, that’s what that means.’ ‘That’s how that relates.’ ‘That’s how you actually put money in the piggy bank for the students to draw on later when they’re not doing the right thing.’ They are all things that until you actually do it in practice – it is a bit like TAFE. If you do not get out and practise that craft – you can give them a million things in a textbook, but until you do it, it does not cement what it actually looks like.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So less time in a lecture hall, more time in a classroom?

Kieran KENNETH: Well, I would probably argue that the course could be a little bit more in terms of the time requirement that they do. There is obviously a lot of theory that needs to be done, but there is a lot of learning in schools, and we can actually provide a lot of that information and a lot of that upskilling. We can actually give them the classroom and support them and guide them in ‘This is how we do explicit instruction. This is what good behaviour management looks like. This is how we deal with our most difficult students.’ Because it is really, really hard when you are out as a graduate. I get the same comment from families now: ‘I would rather my child have this teacher, because I know they can teach.’ And I am like, ‘Well, they’re qualified too.’ ‘Yeah, but they’ve only just come out.’

Ryan BATCHELOR: Do you think the parents figure it out pretty fast?

Kieran KENNETH: They do, because unfortunately we throw them in and we are like, ‘Now, there’s a lot of learning’ and ‘Go for it’ – you know? And they are like, ‘You know what? I’m not equipped. I’ve done my teaching rounds’ – but it does not give you a true indication. They do not have the staff meetings, the ILPs, the kids that do not want to work for them that they have then got to learn the relationships to build to actually get them to work. And with all of that stuff, the only way you can do it is to be in schools.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The other comment you made in the submission was that teachers spend as much time planning as they do teaching, which is not sustainable.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If we are thinking about ways to make it easier for teachers to reduce the amount of time they have got to do planning – and I assume planning means lesson planning and figuring out what they are going to do day to day and week to week in the classroom and how to adapt the curriculum to what happens on a day-to-day basis – do you think that more guidance, or templated lesson plans, on how the curriculum should be adapted and implemented centrally or regionally would help?

Kieran KENNETH: Absolutely, because at the moment – like my school as an example – in terms of the explicit instruction we do in our assessment cycles and the fact that they are very, very rapid and fast, where do my teachers go to find their content? Google, because we just do not have – we have got a curriculum document that says what we should be teaching at all our year levels, and then pretty much after that it is like, ‘Well, you go and find everything that will then match that.’ It does not matter what school you are teaching or what socio-economic – you are always going to have kids that are above, you are always going to have kids that are below and you are always going to have kids that are ‘at’. So if you had curriculum banks that actually addressed the curriculum at those levels, you would probably cut out 80 per cent of a teacher’s current workload that is admin because we are not actually having to find all those things – we actually know that it has been fact-checked, if you like, it is quality, and then we just adapt it to the individual needs of the students

within the class that you are teaching in that year. So that would actually reduce it a lot. We have seen things like that with some of the principal workload, where they have actually given out templates. There was a lot of reluctance for a long time to do that, but it has saved 90 per cent of my time for me in that policy space. We can develop good curricula, and there are great programs out there, and there also great programs that unfortunately we would have to build ourselves, but we do have that curriculum knowledge within the department to do it – we have just actually got to prioritise it.

Melina BATH: How interesting, to prioritise curriculum – that would be fantastic, and I say that slightly tongue in cheek. Thank you, Kieran, for being here. When you just said there was a lot of resistance in terms of the proformas or templates, was that from principals to adopt it or from the education department to deliver it to principals?

Kieran KENNETH: From the education department to deliver it to principals. There was a bit of a belief at the time that it was not something that was possible, which I assume was the feedback from the legal space, which is beyond me. But having that portal is just gold; it is brilliant.

Melina BATH: Great. In terms of those teacher-fed lesson plans or lessons and the like, clearly depending on wherever the school and the teacher is, they are going to nuance that to suit themselves. They are not going to be robotic in those lessons plans and the like, but they are used again as a template just to cut down Mr Google time and Mr Scramble time – is that a fair comment?

Kieran KENNETH: There would not be a teacher in the system that would not modify things for their students, but we all start at a base point. So what that curriculum would allow you to do is have that base and a starting point to then modify it for the students. In the way that we teach at our school, we are into our second year but we still have a fairly high cognitive workload, because as we learn and get better at it, we are changing a lot of things, but also where the students are at changes, and that will change year to year. It would be too simplistic to think you could just have a curriculum that in 2022 would do grade 4 and then in grade 4 of 2024 we can roll the same thing out.

Melina BATH: It needs to be nuanced.

Kieran KENNETH: To have a base that actually has the content. In terms of compliance for ourselves, the department actually ticks off a few things too, because then we actually do have a bit of control around the quality, the content, the delivery – like, what is actually happening. We can then have confidence that 100 per cent of our schools are delivering the content that we are actually mandated to deliver through our documents. So it goes both ways.

Melina BATH: It can work. And you speak about the science of learning and explicitly teaching. I feel like sometimes it is a bit like flares – they come in and go out of fashion – but there seems to be some significant evidence around the explicit teaching model. Can you speak to that a little bit more, and could some of those, I will call them, lesson plans or curriculum plans work in this space?

Kieran KENNETH: Yes and no, because what we have found is that there are certainly some programs out there that we have been able to pick up and use. There are also programs that we have been able to take components of or that we have adapted to make suit our own school's instruction model, because what we did not want to do was go 100 per cent direct instruction, because we also value the creativity that we can actually build with some of those times when we allow kids to explore and wobble and work through things. So we have tried to, as a school, balance a bit of that – having time for kids to discover and be creative as well.

Melina BATH: Putting the framework there and then letting that creativity go.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes.

Melina BATH: Thank you. In some of the terms of reference we look at adequacy of the education department to support teachers – I think you have been speaking to that – and also we look about the current state of student wellbeing. Just quickly, Yallourn North is a changing town. The power station is going to close beside it. I would say it is a challenging environment on that basis. How many students?

Kieran KENNETH: We have 106 this year across six classrooms.

Melina BATH: Fantastic. And student wellbeing, you say, including measures to address poor mental health, school refusal and student disengagement – speak to that part of your submission, please.

Kieran KENNETH: Up till a couple of years ago, when FISO changed and we got FISO 2.0, which then recognised wellbeing, we as a school worked really heavily in the wellbeing space, because we cannot expect kids to learn if they are not regulated.

Melina BATH: We have heard that entirely.

Kieran KENNETH: So that has been great. However, within that wellbeing space, students are less prepared now than they have ever been before. In terms of students' mental health, we see kids with significant anxiety at prep, which is a really new thing for us; we never, ever would experience those sorts of challenges that early. The social skills that students come with have reduced, but that then means that as a school the programs and things we have had to put in to try and help support and address that have been pretty significant, hence why I have so many educational support employees. The big one is attendance. Attendance is one that we are not winning the battle in. In that space, what we are doing is not working, but I do not have the golden answers to that. I just know that in terms of my school setting we try really, really hard around attendance, and we are not really shifting that curve, because some of the levers that we have to try to support us in that again do not have a lot of support mechanisms for those families still experiencing those challenges.

Melina BATH: I know my time is up, but what has worked? What is an example where there has been a school refuser and you have made some progress?

Kieran KENNETH: In terms of school refusers and progress, probably the best progress we have made has been with ones that we have picked up from other schools in terms of –

Melina BATH: Starting afresh?

Kieran KENNETH: starting afresh and actually building really, really strong plans and being really, really very, very strong right from the outset in terms of family relationships and trying to actually understand the complexities, and then trying to work with them to support them.

Melina BATH: Which requires a lot of time, and there is only one person in that school that has not got a teaching load to create that.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes, correct.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Joe.

Joe McCracken: Kieran, thanks for your contribution before, and a lot of the things you said I 100 per cent agree with as well. I want to touch on the compliance stuff that you spoke about before in terms of teachers being burdened. Is it a matter, in your view, of the compliance burden being too much or that teachers do not have enough time to deal with the compliance? Or maybe the compliance should be shifted to another matter or another sort of body to deal with – another person, employee, compliance officer, whatever?

Kieran KENNETH: I am a big believer that a lot of the compliance stuff we currently have for teachers unfortunately is necessary; they just do not have the time to do it. As a teacher it would be great to say, 'Look, you've got 10 individual education plans in your room that you've got to do this term, and here's someone to do it,' but then you actually underestimate the relationship and the strength that comes from the teacher knowing the student and being able to build quality plans that actually mean something, so rather than just having a document, you actually have something that works and is embedded and used within that room that benefits the student. So a lot of the work that teachers do, unfortunately, we just – in terms of a school model, it is still very industrial age. We have not moved, and the compliance and the complexity around what we now know and what we do is not matching, so that is where you get that disconnect.

Joe McCracken: Yes. I have been a teacher in the past too, and that is certainly my experience. Here is a specific example. Sometimes when you have got to go on an excursion you have got to do – it never used to be that big – reams and reams of paper, you know, all the risk assessment and that sort of thing. I know – look, let us be honest – a lot of schools just do a copy-paste job and just insert the update figures or locations and whatever. Do you think that area could be adjusted to become a bit more streamlined? I mean, little things like

that really do add up in teachers' time and they do create a lot of extra work when it is probably in a lot of ways unnecessary.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. Things like excursion planning, camps and those sorts of things you could easily have an education support class member do, and just at the end have a handover that actually runs through what the program is. In terms of camps and things like that, generally we have probably as teachers set up the basics; you would just need someone to polish it and finish it off and actually submit all that risk assessment and everything. They would know in terms of what educational outcomes they are looking for and then what sort of camp is built, but you could actually get someone that then does all the compliance stuff for that. They would not have to be a teacher. And that would not actually degrade anything in that experience. It is more some of those curriculum-based things and also education plans and things that directly relate to the student in the room.

Joe McCracken: Yes. That is a pretty fair comment. I guess the next thing I want to talk about is the development of curriculum. You said before that if teachers want to know something they quickly go on and google. Is there some way in your mind that you think there could be some sort of streamlined, generic document that could be even a baseline to start writing curriculum? I have experienced it as well; I have had to write curriculum basically from scratch. When you go onto the department website and all that sort of thing, what they give you as guidelines is rather vague. What are your thoughts on that?

Kieran KENNETH: We ask every school with our VRQA compliance to provide scope and sequences, to provide actually curriculum on all those things, so what we are in effect doing is asking 1500-plus schools to do the same thing 1500 times. And yet there is no reason why, in my view anyway, as an education department that you could not have a scope and sequence, that you could not have pacing documents, that you could not develop curriculum that says, 'In term 1, to meet our curriculum obligations,' – because every school is working to the VCAA's outcomes. So if we are all working to that, it makes sense that you can then actually from that build, ideally, in an ideal world: 'Every school in week one should be working about here. In week two here's what we want to cover.' There is no reason why you could not have something like that that then also has some suggested curriculum resources for it. Especially knowing in my setting and how digital we have become, it is actually really easy to pick up and run with.

Joe McCracken: Yes. I could not agree with you more. I have always found inconsistency between schools and where they are sequencing – it is just bizarre. I do not understand it and I do not know why it is that way.

The other thing I want to talk about is teacher training. I am a big advocate for – it was sort of alluded to before – something like an apprenticeship model to do teaching. So a preservice teacher comes in, and they might spend two or three days a week in a school and then another two days doing theory, so they get a real feel for and flavour of the rhythm of a school year. What are your thoughts on that model or something similar to that that could be implemented, as opposed to the current system we have at the moment, which as you quite rightly say is incredibly heavily theory-based, not in the school setting?

Kieran KENNETH: We have been really fortunate. Probably 90 per cent of the teachers that come through my school in training run in that old model of first year you get five days, second year you might get 15, third year you might get 30 and then you are in and off you go, to the other side where – it is very small, because it does cost more – they are actually in our school every week for 40 weeks of the year. The quality and the skill base that they develop is poles apart between the two cohorts. In every single case that I have had where they have actually done the apprenticeship model and been in my school every week and been part of the staff, every one of those has been offered a job before they have finished their teaching placement, because you can see the knowledge they have built, the skills they have gained and the fact that they are actually a really, really good calibre graduate.

Joe McCracken: And the experience as well.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes. So it definitely does translate into better prepared professionals.

Joe McCracken: Yes, and I note that one of the things you said before was that a lot of the new teachers that come through, the graduates, have a different view on teaching as opposed to some more experienced ones that have been in the system longer, in terms of giving back and that sort of thing. Why do you think that is?

Kieran KENNETH: I think that is just a generational shift. The work environment has changed. When I got a job – I went through university while Kennett was closing schools and cutting teaching jobs, so there was this big thing about – ‘You’re very lucky to have a job’, you know, and ‘You’re just lucky to be able to teach’. Now it is like there are seven schools that have vacancies and for every one of them it is, ‘What can you offer me?’ and ‘What can you offer me?’ And the bigger schools have more money than what I do, so they can offer incentive payments. They can also offer a decreased workload compared to my small school, because I have still got the same compliance requirements. But they do have choice, because the competition is actually in terms of the employer trying to secure the employee. It is reversed, so they do not have to put in the same levels that, I guess, were expected before because we just did it as a system. Like, when I started, everyone – that was what you did. ‘You’re a graduate. You’ll need to do 55, 60 hours, because you’re learning your craft.’ Whereas now they are like, ‘I’m a graduate. However, you pay me for 38, so I’ll do 38. If you’re lucky, I’ll do 40, but it should fit within the 38.’ So it is just a different expectation.

Joe McCracken: A different marketplace, so to speak.

Kieran KENNETH: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Joe.

Joe McCracken: Sorry, my time is up. Thanks.

The CHAIR: I am just minding the time, Kieran. Is there any recommendation or any outcome that you would like to see out of this inquiry?

Kieran KENNETH: Just a bit of refocus, I guess, in terms of supporting – I am really, really conscious that, as a system, we have a great system, but we can do better, and we always ask schools to do better. I guess this is me saying that as a system we can do better. There are actual things that we can control, and there are things that we cannot control. But what we can control – can we actually develop quality curriculum that reduces the teachers’ burden in their admin? Absolutely, we can. In the big scheme of things, is that a huge ask and will it cost a lot of money? Probably not. But it can be done, and overnight you would get data back from teachers through their staff surveys that said, ‘I’m actually coping better.’ Can we prepare graduates better so that schools are not spending a lot of time in that training and development space? Because really what we want to do is refine practice, not teach practice, and at the moment what we do at a lot of schools is what the tertiary institution should have done. And it is not to say that they are at fault either, because they are working also in a constrained environment. But with a lot of things, sometimes it is time to change and it is time to say, ‘We’re in a different era, and we need to move on and modernise.’

The CHAIR: Just one last quick question before we finish up your session. As a principal in this area for a primary school, do you feel you have to compete with other schools for funding and grants from the government?

Kieran KENNETH: There is a lot less competition now that we have our enrolment zones and because of the fact that the government has taken away some of those incentives. Before we had the enrolment zones, if I grew my school, they would provide me with the facilities. Now that we have removed that, that definitely does reduce the competition. There is a lot more collegiality within state schools because of that. But in terms of some of those federal grants and things that you can access, there definitely is a bit of competition there.

The CHAIR: But with the state, you are happy with the process?

Kieran KENNETH: Yes, yes, but I think unfortunately when you have got a limited pool, I cannot see a better way of actually – you know.

The CHAIR: As long as you are happy with your school; that is what we want to know. Thank you so much for your submission today. If you have anything more you would like to submit to us, please submit it, and we will gather that. With all of the submissions we will definitely look into them in relation to our recommendations down the track. Thank you so much for your time.

Witness withdrew.