

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 8 May 2024

#### MEMBERS

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Joe McCracken

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Lee Tarlamis

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Georgie Crozier

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Richard Welch

**WITNESSES**

Kira Clarke, Principal Research Fellow, Social Policy and Research Centre, and

Michael Scicluna, Principal, David Scott School, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Joining us for our final session this evening are Kira Clarke and Michael Scicluna. Welcome.

I would like to read this information to you before we continue. 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 the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

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

Again, welcome Michael and Kira. My name is Trung Luu – I am the Chair – and my Deputy, Ryan, is next to me. We have Aiv Puglielli, Melina Bath and Joe McCracken, and Ms Moira Deeming is down the end. We also have Michael Galea joining us on Zoom.

I would like to ask you to please state your full name and the organisation you are representing, just for recording purposes.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Michael Scicluna, Principal from the David Scott School, and we are part of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

**Kira CLARKE:** And Kira Clarke. I am a Principal Research Fellow in education, skills and training in the Social Policy and Research Centre at the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thank you. Again, thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. I know we have got your submission, but I would like to invite you to make a short opening statement if you like before we go into questions.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Obviously the Brotherhood of St Laurence presented some responses to the terms of reference. I think we are in a unique position at the Brotherhood because we do whole-of-life work, from birth to end-of-life while supporting aged-care people. The David Scott School is the only school that the Brotherhood of St Laurence have. From my perspective I would like the committee to know that I have been in this position for 18 months and prior to that I worked in the government sector. I was a principal in a similar school. The David Scott School is a specialist school; we work with young people that are marginalised or are struggling to fit into mainstream settings. My previous work in the government sector was at a place called the Pavilion School. I worked there as a teacher, wellbeing worker, assistant principal and principal. In the last 18 months I have transitioned into working at the Brotherhood. I am really pleased to be working for the Brotherhood. It is a great organisation, and I am pleased that we have got an educational focus as well.

**Kira CLARKE:** On behalf of the Brotherhood, we really welcome the focus of this inquiry and the opportunity to contribute to it through the lenses, as Michael has hinted at, of the experience working across different communities but with a particular focus on disadvantage. We really see this inquiry coming at a time when there are a whole lot of reforms happening in the education and training space, but also more broadly in the space that looks to strengthen the opportunity for children and young people to thrive and come into their adulthood in ways that set them up for success. We are really keen to see this inquiry and to contribute to the inquiry today in ways that connect it to some of those broader reforms and opportunities for schools to really connect into those wider systems.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thank you so much. I will now open up the questions to the committee. Ms Bath, if you would like to lead us off, please.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you very much. Just tell us more about the David Scott School. How do students end up there? Usually, potentially, they may have come from another school and are feeling pretty low about themselves. What is the ethos? Tell us about it.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** We are a small school. We have got 120 students. We are situated in Frankston, so we do some work with local schools and communities there working with their support staff so that if a situation is not working out for a young person they are able to be referenced into the David Scott School. We have a waitlist at the moment of approximately 15 to 20 young people that are wanting to attend the school that cannot get in because we have a limit on size. We are quite a small space, and when you are working with traumatised young people, you need to give due consideration to spaces. We have small classes, up to 15 or 16 young people. We are just focusing on years 10 to 12. We offer the VCE VM and the VP certificate. I am not sure if everyone – I know there are ex-teachers on the panel – is familiar with those acronyms. There are three adults in every class, so three professionals in every class. We have a teacher, a wellbeing worker and a teacher support – we call them learning support educators, but they are traditional teacher aides. We have also quite a broad range of supports in the transitions and pathways. We support people from 16 up until 21, and we have a designated support worker for people after they are finished with us as well to support them to transition into further educational learning.

The young people that present have a range of different presentations, Melina, from neurodiverse right up to young people involved in the youth justice system, so trying to manage them in the same classroom – I heard a parent talking before, it might have been you, Moira, about the example about a young person who was neurodiverse and the other students in your classroom, how to support them to understand that. That can be really challenging, but the small class model of limited numbers of students with high numbers of professionals, or relatively high numbers of professionals, works really well at David Scott School supporting those young people.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. And we heard in Bendigo about the Bendigo FLO. Is there a FLO down in Frankston that you know of?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I am not aware of a Department of Education FLO. I am aware of lots of different Department of Education FLOs or similar settings to the David Scott School around Victoria, but not specifically in Frankston.

**Melina BATH:** Sure. Thank you. I guess part of the ethos I think from that school – and I am not going to get it right – was basically ‘unconditional positivity’. I have not got quite the right word.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** It is called ‘unconditional positive regard’.

**Melina BATH:** That is right. Is this a similar philosophy that David Scott School would run?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Yes, that is it. It is a similar ethos. Schools like ours are underpinned by article 26, declaration of human rights: everyone has the right to an education. The idea of unconditional positive regard is that you are separating the young person from their behaviour. Schools like ours tend to have a no-suspension, no-expulsion policy. When young people cannot meet the expectations, we go into restorative practice conversations that look and feel a little bit different to what might be in a mainstream setting. But, yes, the idea of unconditional positive regard and terms like ‘rolling with resistance’ is making sure that staff have an understanding that how young people present on a day is not necessarily reflective of them as a whole person. But getting an understanding of what the underlying factors are behind the behaviours – when staff have an understanding of that, it allows them to sort of utilise terms such as ‘roll with resistance’ and actually support the young people in a different way.

**Melina BATH:** I am drilling down into this school, but then I am going to say – are you the last resort for these students quite often, or are you a beacon? How do they view the school?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I would like to think we would be both. I think philosophically schools like ours are ‘if not us, who?’ because we want to kick the can down the road – a lot of the young people and parents you have met today would have had multiple exposures to different schools.

**Melina BATH:** I am going to get one more question in because my time is up, and then you can keep talking for as long as you like.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Okay. Sorry.

**Melina BATH:** How then do we transfer this model? We have 1500 other state-run schools, state schools, primary and secondary, in regional areas as well. How can we take a bit of that model and overlay that into our state schools?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** That is a good question. It requires a different approach to schooling. Our young people are not there at the full-time cost.

**Melina BATH:** It is the cost, is it?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** The funding is different, and I can talk to that if there is a question specifically around the difference in funding between the school I am at and the school that I came from. I am at an independent school at the moment; I came from a government school supporting similar students. But the way we operate the school day looks different, and obviously there is specific training for staff, there is specific support for staff. We pay for a counsellor to come in on a Friday and support our staff. We know that when our staff are feeling supported they are in a better position to support our young people. The triad model that we talk about, or the quadrant model, where you have three or four professionals – something like that could be replicated and sent out into mainstream schools, but it would cost money and it would require us as a society to think about schools differently and how we do schooling differently. I can bang on about that, but I will stop.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Bath. We will come back if there is time. Deputy Ryan.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair. Kira and Michael, thanks so much for coming. Michael, it is obviously a pretty special place and environment you have created. The letter that was attached to your submission was pretty powerful in terms of the difference that it has made to one life, but no doubt that experience is replicated across the board. I might, having just listened to Melina's question, switch from the school to the system. Part of the submission, Kira, from the Brotherhood talks about what we need to do to the teaching profession, because obviously other than the students, teachers are the biggest other part of the education system here in the state. One of the things you talk about being important to assisting I suppose success in delivering quality education and engagement in diverse communities is having a diversity of the teaching profession itself. I am wondering if you can talk a bit more to us about the kinds of measures you think government needs to take to improve the diversity of the profession to better reflect the communities it is trying to serve?

**Kira CLARKE:** Yes. Thanks. I am going to put the issue of wages and salaries to the side, because I think that is a very well trodden – and you have probably heard a lot about that. That undoubtably is a big part of the puzzle.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** We had the union in earlier. They were clear on that.

**Kira CLARKE:** I think opportunities and pathways into the teaching profession offer a real opportunity, and we certainly see that in the consultations and the collaborations that the Brotherhood engages in across Victoria but also across Australia. Currently for people who have transitioned out of high school into vocational pathways, there does not exist a pathway back into the teaching profession, despite the fact that they might have established 10 or 20 years of a career in a technical trade or vocational area and have a lot of the life experience and willingness to teach in schools. There is not currently a pathway back into the teaching profession. So there is a bit of a –

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Sorry. At all?

**Kira CLARKE:** Unless they start all over again and go back and do an undergraduate qualification, which a lot of them – there are financial barriers to that to take that time out of the labour market with mortgages and families and those sorts of things. So you may be familiar with one of the recommendations, recommendation 11, that came out of the recent status of VET national review. This actually called for a pathway for those in vocational and technical areas who can feed into a wide range of particularly secondary

school curriculum areas as a pathway into schools. That is one really critical opportunity to diversify the teaching profession and to bring into schools a whole lot of lived experience that currently might not be there that reflects different communities. Another part of that is thinking about where we make initial teacher education available outside capital and major cities to draw in and create better access for more diverse and regionally located potential teachers as well.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** What impact do you think a more diverse teaching profession would have on school communities who themselves are diverse?

**Kira CLARKE:** We know that you cannot be what you cannot see. Young people, children, being able to see adults like themselves from similar cultural backgrounds, similar ethnic backgrounds, similar lived experience and have the opportunity to build relationships and trusted student-teacher relationships is critical in classrooms. Having a classroom and a teacher that reflects your family, your community, is another opportunity for schools to really make young people feel safe, connected and seen within their school environment. You know, there is a big focus through the banking industry at the moment in bilingualism in local bank branches. I think there is a similar appetite that we hear from in schools to really diversify who is coming into the teaching profession that reflects and speaks the languages and has the cultural competency of those communities as well.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Have you seen any examples of where those sorts of practices, whether they be in the teaching profession or in the education support elements of the school, are working particularly well? What are the sorts of things that assist that?

**Kira CLARKE:** Certainly. I will not speak to the cultural and linguistic background, but certainly through places like the David Scott School and some of our youth re-engagement and outreach schools that we work with at the Brotherhood, where people have a lived experience of low socio-economic status or homelessness or housing and food insecurity, bringing that into classrooms in schools where there are young people experiencing that themselves, has a really transformational impact because those teachers are less likely to make assumptions that young people have two parents at home. There is just that sort of lived experience of not making assumptions that are very sort of middle-class driven.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Ryan, if I might, it would be a good question to ask the next person coming through as well, because they could share an actual experience of an employment of an Indigenous person and the impact that had on the Indigenous community at that school.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Hopefully they are listening, and they can get ready to answer that question.

**Melina BATH:** They are hanging off your every word.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for coming in today. Quite conveniently we have put wages and salaries to one side. I would like to pick it back up and go on that well-trodden path, as you put it. Your recommendation 7 in your submission is to adopt competitive salaries and benefits for teachers, particularly as career progression unfolds. I would like to put you both in the chair of writing the rules, setting the scene of what teachers should be getting and what that salary and wages scheme should look like. What would you like to see? How much should we be paying our teachers?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I think in our report we have acknowledged that entry level salaries are strong, I think, for teachers. It is more as we start to progress through – classroom teachers that have been in the system for 10 years tend to tap out at a level so there is no more opportunity for progression unless they step out of the classroom generally or take on more management-level responsibilities. I know the department a couple of years ago brought in another classification for teachers called a learning specialist, and that allowed an opportunity for somebody else to access a wage somewhere between \$110,000 and \$120,000 if we are talking actual numbers.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, that would be great.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** So that would be a salary, I think, that would certainly attract lots of people. I know there is an issue in the way the structure is set up, and it is financially based around where you go when you

reach the top end of classroom teacher 2-6, which I think is a wage at the moment of about \$105,000 or \$108,000 – I am not in that system anymore so do not quote me exactly on that – and then what happens to you from there. There are a lot of people that actually want to stay in the classroom, that actually do not want to end up being a principal or assistant principal. But the incentive there as costs increase, cost of living, things increase, so I would encourage this committee and the Council to consider ways of how we can continue to support people to extend that salary post 10 years into the profession.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, and just before you perhaps continue on, identifying that issue that you have got, that comparison of other career paths that people might pivot into in order to pursue better remuneration as their career progresses, what sorts of parallels can you potentially draw in terms of other roles in the community that might be much better paid?

**Kira CLARKE:** I will be honest: I have not done much thinking on that one. Also, I might take that question on notice.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Absolutely. You are welcome to.

**Kira CLARKE:** I am happy to come back, because I think that point of comparison is a really important one. Prior to this role at the Brotherhood, I spent 10 years in the university sector training secondary school teachers and doing research with them, and one of the common findings from the research and consultation we did there, alongside wages and career progression, was not just about progressing up but the opportunity to move horizontally and diagonally. The common example that comes up is for teachers who start their career in a senior secondary college or start their career in a junior college and then feel that they have sort of hit the ceiling there, and it is risky to transition into the other environment or to move sideways into another arm, another part of the teaching opportunity. It is not necessarily guaranteed it is going to work out, and how are the actual salary structures and professional development set up to allow that exploration where you go, ‘I have done 15 years of teaching English language, I have not got room to grow here’? How do we actually build that into the remuneration packages as well?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** When you say risky, do you mean risk of winding up in a position where you are earning less than you otherwise would have and the risks for the growth of that remuneration over the course of your career to come?

**Kira CLARKE:** That is right.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I think the other thing to consider is the competition within the marketplace as well. So government schools lose lots of really excellent teachers to independent private schools because they simply just cannot compete with the comparative wages as a classroom teacher. There is a different set of conditions that come with moving into those spaces as well – it is not like for like. Often the salaries those schools can offer far outweigh what is offered and what you can achieve in a government school.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** And is that by virtue of the fact that they are privately funded so therefore they have got the cash to offer more wages?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Yes, and they are smart. They look for teachers that are winning awards in the government sector and they headhunt them and they find them and they pull them out. If we think about the young people that the government sector is trying to support, they are the ones that I would argue are most in need of our best teachers, and we are losing them because we cannot afford to keep them. That is within our sector – forget about moving out and doing other things. I can talk about flexible work conditions and the changing environment since COVID and what is possible and not possible within schools; I think there is some work to be done there. I know at our own school we have tried to be a little bit more flexible within the confines of contracts and so forth, having some flex in that space to be able to adapt to what is happening in the marketplace.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Aiv. Moira.

**Moira DEEMING:** Thanks, both of you, for coming. It sounds like you have got amazing experience behind you and that you really care about kids. Your comment about, basically, how a lot of these things would take a society-wide change in terms of how we think about what we are doing for children is just one of those things where you think – how do you change that? It reads to me like you are talking about encouraging kids. On the wider metrics to assess student achievement, I want you to talk a bit about that in your school and what that looks like.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** It does not look that different at the moment, Moira, in terms of the metric systems that have been referenced in that response. It is something that we are working towards. We are working with New Metrics at Melbourne University about how we can get different recognition systems in our school. At the moment all our young people are completing those certificates that I talked about, and they will have an education plan or a wellbeing case plan that will recognise the different challenges that young people have to access education, but in terms of recognising what they do, we are still in that system because we have not identified a different system yet. We think it is a system-wide response that we need in terms of that, so at the moment the David Scott School is not at that point. We certainly have different ways that we do interventions. We do assessments and we might think about how we have got some young people that are 17, 18 that might have grade 1 or grade 2 reading levels, and we have got phonics-based interventions that we can provide over there. It is not really a metric system, but it is good for that young person and good for the parent, if a young person has missed learning how to read for a range of different reasons, that you have got a school that can provide that intervention. It is a tier 3 intervention – you know, 16- and 17-year-olds are not going to sit in a group and sound out words, so it has to be one on one. It is resource-heavy.

At the other end we have got transitioning work with universities, partnering up with universities for alternative pathways into university through a different recognition system. So it is not an ATAR score; it is actually sitting down and completing work with the support of staff from the David Scott School or like schools and then getting into university via an alternative pathway, not through an ATAR score. I do not know if I answered your question or not, but there are ways of doing it. We are being mobile at the moment and agile in the way we are doing it, but in terms of a statewide recognition system, we are not engaged in one yet. But we have referenced those things because we think that is something that the committee should consider – that as a system we move towards.

**Moira DEEMING:** That is fantastic. So when you have got students like that – I mean, we talk a lot about self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing for young people. I have found, and you have probably found the same thing, when students learn something or they succeed where they have not succeeded before, they just get such a boost, and it really changes their trajectory and their view about themselves. It is transformative in a way, and it is probably the exact thing that every single teacher got in there to see and to be a part of. Tell us a bit more about how that happens at your school.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Well, you would all have similar stories. If I go back to that young person that we are supporting to get to a proficient level of reading, we are never going to get them to be assessing a Shakespearean play. We want to get them to a space where they can manage the challenges they will face after they leave school.

**Moira DEEMING:** And they are not humiliated anymore. They can read.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Well, yes. What we have seen is that young people that cannot read – at the moment you have to be able to read to sit your learners test. If you want to go to a GP, you have to be able to fill in a form and understand what the questions are asking you. What we have seen is that building the capacity of young people in those spaces – the key elements of education that are still important, alongside the wellbeing and alongside the other parts – and recognising what young people need to be able to function effectively in the world post school are the most important things. As you spoke about before, it is transformational when young people learn things, and for the people that we support that are disadvantaged, often they are labelled as not being able to achieve by schools, individuals and teachers. Within mainstream schools there are fantastic teachers, and they will talk about those teachers and how they believed in them and so forth. On that sense of belief, there is data around that. There has been research done around teachers saying ‘You can do this’ or ‘You can’t do that’, and the actual outcomes that students produce are based around the belief of the teacher.

**Moira DEEMING:** Yes, on whether you are a good learner or you are a smart kid – I have seen the research.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Whatever your label is, sometimes you respond to that label.

**Moira DEEMING:** That is right. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Joe.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Yes, I was going to talk about wages and salary too, but I think we have probably gone over and gone over and gone over that, so I might avoid that one. I guess one of the things I have come across is that there are a lot of societal issues that feed into the ability of a young person to engage in their education in a meaningful way. I guess part of the challenge is what does a school take on and what does a school not take on? Because if you really had all the resources, you could probably take on as many things as you had to fit with your context. That is the challenge I am trying to grapple with. A lot of people have said to me that sometimes parents outsource their teaching to schools. It is a bit of a crude way of putting it, but I guess my question to you is: where do you think the role of a school lies within that debate? What should a school take on and what shouldn't a school take on?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I have just done a lot of talking; Kira do you want to?

**Kira CLARKE:** I am happy to have the first go at this one, but I know the example of David Scott School is a really useful one to concretise this as well. There have been models of full-service schools historically here in Victoria and across Australia for that very reason – because they offer a hub environment to bring resources in – but you have to sort of determine where that scope is. In terms of where we see really effective models of that working, not under the full-service school model, it is where schools are operating within a local ecosystem – so it is not just about, 'You need to go to this GP,' but there are relationships that exist that can be agile and flexible to see the school as supported by the community, not just referring people out. So it is being able to establish those connections between the school at all levels and your local health providers, health professionals, local sporting clubs and local council so the school becomes a hub of networking connection to build the social, cultural and network capital that young people need. As sort of a starting principle for answering your question about what roles schools should play, that should be a core common role across all schools – that they set young people up for that network and social capital in their communities.

I think particularly going back to the idea of metrics at a time when there is so much focus on young people coming out of schools as work-ready – you can be work-ready but actually have no capacity to navigate your local community, know how to pay taxes, know where to go if you get into trouble, know those sorts of things. So by bringing local community into school, you have the opportunity to start to build some of those connections alongside the core academic metrics that are central to the education system.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** It is a great question, Joe. Every day at my school I am asked if we can spend money on this or that. Schools like ours tend to attract people that think about whole of life, and so there are restrictions around what you should be doing with education-based funding, and then it comes back to the committee's and society's understanding of education more broadly and what it means. I take the position in schools such as ours that we are considering education in a really broad sense, with a key focus on key literacy and numeracy skills, and not going too far away from that. That has to be a central part of the work that we do.

**Melina BATH:** You have got to live in the world.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Then you have to make decisions about what you will do and will not do. Interestingly, with the NDIS at the moment, Joe, there are lots of families that cannot advocate. You talked about handballing that – you did not use that word, sorry Joe – about advocating –

**Joe McCRACKEN:** Outsourcing.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Outsourcing. Sometimes it is because families do not have the capacity to do it for themselves and they do not know how to advocate. To get a diagnosis at the moment for ADHD I think it is about \$3000.

**Kira CLARKE:** At least.



**Michael SCICLUNA:** In a well-resourced school a lot of families cannot afford that. When you talk about our school, we are being really judicious about who we support with that because that is a post-school thing, but that diagnosis can actually help us in what we do with that young person daily. I have got different positions on diagnosis and whether it helps – sometimes it helps and sometimes young people with that label define themselves based on that label as well. It is a really interesting question and one that I think requires consideration if we step into spaces such as ours. Where does our work start and stop? We do have to prepare people for when they leave school, though. It has to be a really clear mantra, because we just retraumatise young people. If they have attachment issues and they attach themselves to the school and they think the school is the only place they can survive and then at 18 it cuts off, if you had attachment issues as young person, it is very easy to translate that into another lived experience of that. So you have to be really careful about how you going about that work.

**Joe McCracken:** I guess – if I may, Trung – the other side of that too, we have heard a lot of evidence already about staff and a workload that is increasingly becoming difficult to manage. If it is unclear where work starts and stops, and also the accessibility of staff, which might be after hours as well, depending on what the context is, it makes it really difficult to try and staff schools that might have a higher need in a particular area. So I know that only adds to the complexity of what we are talking about. Staff pay and remuneration – I know we have one standard for teachers, it is on a scale, but it is not all the same work that they do.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** When there are 274 submissions, there are so many different groups that are lobbying this committee from so many different positions about what they need in education. It is a really complex space. I think culturally you can set up a school so that you are really clear about what the boundaries are and what you can and cannot do, and actually what is helpful to the young person, bringing it back to the student. Sometimes we have a tendency to go into a saviour complex because these young people's conditions are so dire, but in a good school that has a really clear culture and keeps repeating that over and over, there is a limitation on what we can do because the support ends and they have to be able to be self-sufficient after they leave.

**Moira Deeming:** That is success.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Yes. It just looks different for different young people, like in terms of –

**Joe McCracken:** Yes, true. Thanks for that anyway.

**The CHAIR:** Michael, do you have some questions?

**Michael GALEA:** Thanks, Chair. And thank you for joining us. It has been very interesting to hear what you have had to say. To start with, there has been a lot of discussion about general disadvantage and what you can do to balance out that playing field a bit. I am curious to hear both your thoughts. There was today, I am sure you are aware, a big announcement on expanding the free school breakfast program to all Victorian government schools by next year. Is that the sort of thing that will help to address that, and is that something Brotherhood of St Laurence would support?

**Joe McCracken:** That is what we were just talking about: where does it start and stop?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I will be quick this time, Kira. At the David Scott School we do free breakfast, recess and lunch. There are no fees at the school – no-one pays any fees – and we provide breakfast, lunch and a recess meal. It is really important that young people have access to food because food scarcity is an issue for a lot of our community. That is because we are funded differently, and we can afford to do it. If you ask me the question I will answer it, and if you do not I will not talk about it. But Michael, it is something that makes a difference. We have young people at our door at 8 o'clock in the morning and our classes start at 9:30. It brings them together socially as well. We know how important food is in society. We have got young people working in our food kitchens, so they are doing VET placements there and they are getting paid to provide food for the rest of community. We have got a food van at the school that is happening now where we are going to be giving back to the community, so we are reversing that poverty cycle. So lots of opportunities, and food plays a really important part in that. Sorry, Kira.

**Kira CLARKE:** Yes. Just briefly to add, absolutely the Brotherhood welcomes the announcement and welcomes all attempts to actually look at some of those wider conditions that impact the young person and

children's opportunity to attend and participate and engage at school. Certainly having food security and access to healthy meals is a big part of that.

I think sort of broadly behind that question is also that idea of general disadvantage. I think there is more work for the government to do to support schools to really understand the needs of different key priority groups. There is a lot of deep understanding about the needs of young people coming from out-of-home care, from homelessness, from domestic violence environments, from food and security environments, that can be better used to support schools to design interventions and programs complementary to things like free breakfast and free lunch programs. It is just part of the puzzle.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. I am particularly interested as well: Michael, with the David Scott School – you touched on this with Ryan as well; that letter that is attached to the submission is very, very moving, and I know that young person was referred through Headspace, I believe – what is the typical pathway by which students will come to your school?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** You mean how will they be enrolled, or how will they be supported if they are presenting with mental health challenges?

**Michael GALEA:** How they become enrolled.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** It is a range of different ways, Michael. It is referrals from other schools, it is referrals from other support services, it is also word of mouth. The communities, particularly the neurodiverse community, are really well connected in my experience and will quite quickly refer other young people when they realise there is a school that is supportive in that environment. So it comes in a range of different ways – youth justice, people in out-of-home care. If you look at the list and you see the range of people that we support, there are often different support groups that are supporting those young people. They will know the David Scott School or like schools and they will refer young people. Sometimes it is the Department of Education, but not in our case; we do not get referrals. But in my previous school we did through – I cannot remember what it was called – Lookout, I think it was, which is a service provided by the DET.

**Michael GALEA:** Great, thank you. I believe we have them next too, so we can talk to them about those pathways there. Also, you just recently spoke about the challenge of private schools poaching often the best teachers out of public schools. Two good friends of mine who are teachers in government public high schools have shared that frustration with me frequently as well. What can we do? I am sure wage is probably the number one, but what can we do holistically to stop that and to address that problem and keep our best teachers in public schools as much as we can?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I think philosophically many people come to the work or work in public education because they believe in it. How do you keep the dream going, if you like? When you look at the facilities and the opportunities in private schools – it is a question that I want to keep contained because I do not want to drift off into different spaces, but I do not really have a specific answer for how we do it. We build really great schools, we create great cultures where people want to stay and work, we supplement that with an agile wages system that recognises the work that teachers do and we think about how we can systemically change the way we do education so that it primarily supports the young people and the diversity within our community of young people and also supports the teachers that work in that profession.

**Kira CLARKE:** Just to add, it is also a bit, we see, of a chicken and the egg type scenario. You will have seen in our submission the ambition to reduce the concentration of disadvantage in certain schools and so residualisation in certain schools where we see the highest amount of attrition, particularly amongst early career and mid-career teachers. Where you end up in a classroom that has been residualised, where it is the most challenging students all in one room and a very large class size, that is going to ultimately lead to faster teacher attrition and burnout. So interventions and programmatic approaches that reduce the concentration of disadvantage and target more interventions, resources and priority target group programs within those environments ultimately are going to also contribute to better teacher retention in those schools.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you very much.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Michael.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. First of all, I want to say thank you for coming in and for your submission because all kids learn differently and through our society we have a got different cohorts of people and students, and I think with your school actually you have captured how to assist those who need the most. So thank you to your school and what you provide.

I think you answered some of the answers there, but I want to follow-up in relation to what Melina said. The school – is it the last resort for someone or is it a school where people seek to go? How many schools have we got, basically how many campuses have we got in Victoria?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Of similar schools?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** I could not tell you. This is one of the issues about alternative schools or flexible schools. It is not regulated. There is a whole range of different things that are happening, and everyone has got best intention. I would estimate there is probably about 150. They range from schools that might have 10 or 15 enrolments in a country space and it might be just an add-on to an existing school – it might look and sound a bit different, and school done differently – to larger schools where you might have an enrolment of 200 or 250 students across two different campuses.

I do want to let the committee know that coming from the state education system supporting 240 extremely at-risk young people, my budget as a principal was \$3.3 million approximately. Coming to this school, I have got half the number of students, funded federally, and I have got double the budget. My budget is \$6 million to support half the number of students compared to the previous school I was at. A lot of those students have social disabilities, so the funding models work differently. But that was a real eye-opener for me – and I had no idea – coming from one system to another. We talk about egalitarian systems and what young people can get access to or cannot. That was a real surprise to me.

**The CHAIR:** That would be my next question, because the model you have got here is basically – you mentioned about three adults in the classroom looking after the kids. With the funding you have got in relation to running the school it is not feasible, realistically, to do that to every school across the state. We have got to be realistic. So I am asking in relation to the way all the modern schools run, what kind of practice can you recommend which is cost efficient, that can be implemented into a state school with benefits where a school has a cohort of disadvantaged students, which could be useful for that school?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Disadvantage – the reason that model that we have got will not work is because, as I said, our students have the most amount of classification of a social or emotional disability, which comes with a different level of funding for young people. Disadvantage can look and sound different in different schools, but I think you need flexibility within schools. The worst example is Gumnut Cottage. I cannot remember the series, but you had this sort of –

**Joe McCracken:** *Summer Heights High*.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Thank you. I know it is not appropriate anymore, *Summer Heights High*, but it had space in the back of the school –

**Ryan Batchelor:** Brighton Secondary College.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Was it? There you go. Young people were sent off to – I am not advocating for that model, but there needs to be increased flexibility. Teacher training has to be really important, so ideas such as unconditional positive regard, rolling with resistance – that should form part of teacher training. There should be an opportunity for teachers to specialise in those spaces as well, I think, so at some point the teacher training can diverge into something different if someone identifies they would like to work in a specialist school, so they can focus on that. There just needs to be a lot more crossover, because I think alternative schools can learn a lot from mainstream education settings and vice versa, but we tend to silo and we tend to just sort of close our doors and do not necessarily look sideways or up or down because we are so busy in the work. So I think, yes,

teacher training would be really helpful and I think flexible ways of thinking about how you can support disadvantaged young people within a school setting, and if you have a different metric system or a different recognition system, that will allow you to change the way you do schooling.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Any comments at all?

**Kira CLARKE:** No, I just think, as you will see from Michael's comments and all of our comments, it is not just one piece. It is when you line up all those pieces – so connecting things like a dynamic maturation model, which is one of the approaches used at David Scott School, and grounding that sort of training at the very beginning of the teacher's career within their initial teacher education, offering opportunities for them to keep upskilling and reskilling, and then to specialise and to see specialising in that space as a really worthy career progression opportunity I think is also something to be explored.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. I will make a comment in relation to what you mentioned in relation to teachers having life experiences being essential in relation to how they relate to their students. I understand it is about how they look after students who have challenges and stuff, and that needs to be related to, but I do have a difference of opinion in relation to the appearance of a teacher regarding – I understand life skills are important to relate to students and understand where they are coming from and what culture they are coming from. That is why I always advise young adults to go and travel so they know different cultures. But I do differ in relation to the colour of your skin or what you look like – that should not affect whether you are a good teacher or not. It is basically your experience. It does not matter what race or colour you are; it should not determine whether you are more suitable for that job. It may be in those settings where there are students with more challenges in relation to it and will relate to an issue relating to the people, yes, but in the mainstream I think that relates to what has been said. Life experience, definitely, but in relation to appearance, that should not be an issue. I just wanted to make a comment about that; that is my take on it.

We have got a bit of time left. Have we got anyone to have more questions? Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** I will have a turn. I think you really touched on it with Trung's comment, but I was going to say to you, with the experience that you have had now, Michael, and if you were put back into that old school with that old budget, what are two things that you would take from the school that you are at now in order to – because what we are looking for is, we cannot have 1500 David Scott Schools, so what are a couple of things that you would do? You have mentioned, I think –

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Working with the same budget?

**Melina BATH:** Yes.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** That I had previously, or the one that I have got now?

**Melina BATH:** Yes. I am going to put you back in that old school. How are you going to make it better for students?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** It is a great question. It is very difficult without access to funding. There are different programs. We are running a psychotherapy, a horse therapy – equine therapy – thing at the school at the moment. I would love to take that back to the previous school, but we could not afford to do it. There was a food program at my previous school as well. It just was not as extensive as the offer that we have at our current school. The teaching ratio of a wellbeing worker, student support worker and teacher is very similar, so that is able to be done in a government school on a much smaller budget. You just do not have the opportunity – the allied health professional is an interesting one. The school nurse – we have definitely got a school nurse, and I would consider how I could fit that into the existing budget at my previous school, because that is really helpful as a nice gateway. But allied health professionals, occupational therapists, speech pathologists – even getting them in for a day or two to help the teachers understand what the sanctuary spaces are that we need to create, how we help this young person access learning. So access to allied health professionals would be really helpful as well.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. I am not trying to put you in a difficult position. I guess at the end of the day I am asking you to pare back what the essence of a good education is but also student wellbeing is and focus on the student – I am not trying to say that excursions are not great or whatever – and you have, and thank you on

that one. My other question is: when they leave your school – and you have mentioned not getting too attached to your students, because you are a beacon, I am assuming, and really supporting, and you have been life-changing – they go on to university, you said. Sometimes they go into the workforce. Sometimes they go on to TAFE. I guess my question I have around TAFE is that some of the anecdotal evidence I have heard is that it can be a bit of a vacuum there after school: what pathways are you doing to support them, noting that you cannot then walk into the TAFE and start teaching there?

**Michael SCICLUNA:** We have got a program where people that have finished at the David Scott School can come back once a term and get support from our careers and pathways. It does not help them necessarily with their experience in TAFE, but we have got a couple of young people that have exited the school that we are still helping with reading interventions as well. So, yes, TAFE can be a bit of a vacuum, and you have got to make sure you do not set a false dichotomy for young people that believe they have attained a certain certificate and then they go into a TAFE or somewhere else and cannot access that space effectively. You have to be really careful about how you do that – I think having a post-pathways worker in a school or something similar to that ilk where you are supporting young people even after, because it is really clear. Our students come until they are 20 – they can come until they are 20, not all of them. It is just interesting to think that at 18 we are cutting off services – ‘bye, see you later’ – so how as a system do we continue to support those people but also give them the opportunity to transition and not rely on coming back? You have got to get that balance right, which goes back to your question before.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you.

**Moira DEEMING:** Even mainstream students struggle with that cut-off.

**Michael SCICLUNA:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much, Michael, for coming in and making your submission and for your information today, and it is definitely something that we can take on and put forward in the recommendations. Thank you for your great work. It definitely does help, your assistance, and hopefully there will be more of those similar services available in our system as well.

**Witnesses withdrew.**