T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 12 June 2024

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WITNESS

Dr Jordana Hunter, Education Program Director, Grattan Institute.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the state education system. Welcome to Jordana Hunter from the Grattan Institute. It is great to have you here today. I will just read out our opening statement.

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All evidence is being recorded and 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.

My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Acting Chair of the committee today. I am a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. Joining us we have Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria; Joe McCracken, Western Victoria; Rachel Payne, South-Eastern Metro; Aiv Puglielli from North-East Metro; Moira Deeming from Western Metro; and Richard Welch might join us in a moment.

For the Hansard record, could you state your name and the organisation you are representing.

Jordana HUNTER: Dr Jordana Hunter, Director of the Education Program at the Grattan Institute.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks so much. We understand you do not wish to make an opening statement, is that –

Jordana HUNTER: I have been advised that you do not want one because I had provided a submission.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. A lack of an opening statement just gives the committee more time for questions, and fundamentally that is what we like. We might proceed from there. I am going to kick off. The committee has heard a lot of evidence about reading and how reading is taught in Victoria and Victorian schools. What is the Grattan Institute's position on the teaching of reading in Victorian schools? Is there an approach that you would prefer, and how should it be implemented?

Jordana HUNTER: Thanks for that question. This is an issue that the Grattan Institute has done a lot of work on recently, and we published a major report earlier this year on the reading guarantee. Our view is that Victoria, like other states and territories in Australia, have taken too much of a hands-off approach to the teaching of reading in schools. There has been some contention over the last few decades about the most effective approach to teaching reading, but the evidence base is increasingly clear that a structured literacy approach is the most effective evidence-based approach, particularly in the early years – so the foundation to grade 2 years – where students are establishing their skills in decoding. It is very important that students have the opportunity to learn through a structured, systematic, phonics-based approach so that they can decode words and match letters to sounds. It is also important to build their oral language fluency and their ability to understand the words that they are reading.

As students move through school and they master decoding, they should be supported to keep working on their fluency and building the background knowledge and reading comprehension. That work really to teach reading effectively should continue right through schooling – so all the way up to the end of school. We know some students will take longer to master the critical decoding skills, and those students are likely to need additional support. That can be delivered effectively through a catch-up program, such as a small-group tutoring program, which it is good to see Victoria has invested quite heavily in.

If we are to look at reading across the board in Victoria, it does, based on the evidence we have, which admittedly is imperfect, look like there are too many schools unfortunately that have not adopted an evidence-based approach. There are some schools that are really world leading, I would argue, and certainly leading in

the Australian context and are teaching reading very effectively, but that practice is not common practice right across the system. So unfortunately too many students are being left behind. There are some quite straightforward things I think that the department could do in government schools and also in Catholic and independent schools to improve reading outcomes for Victorians.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Why do you think there are some schools doing it well and others that are not following that approach? What do you think the reason for the differences is in Victorian schools?

Jordana HUNTER: That is a great question. Victoria has traditionally had quite high levels of autonomy, so schools have had the ability, and sometimes teachers in their classrooms have had the ability, to determine for themselves how they want to teach reading. Sometimes that has meant that some teachers have not necessarily kept up to date with best practice approaches or they have been trained in approaches that we now understand to be less effective, and those approaches are still in their classrooms. That is why we see that mix of approaches across schools. There are some grassroots professional development movements where teachers have really strongly embraced the evidence base; they have updated their practice, they are working with their colleagues and they are changing their practice so that it is in line with the evidence, and those schools are really punching well above their weight and delivering some great outcomes for students. So the profession is mixed, I think, in terms of the types of practices that are being implemented.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: What relationship do you think there is between reading practice, reading instruction and student outcomes, and what does data tell us on that?

Jordana HUNTER: Yes. Look, it is a very significant relationship. We know reading is a foundational skill. It opens up access to the full rich curriculum – not just the English language curriculum, but also mathematics has a very heavy literacy load, the scientific and the humanities curriculums all rely on students' ability to read. In around grade 3 students switch around from learning to read to reading to learn. If you are struggling with reading, you are going to struggle right across the board with your academic subjects. We know also students that are really struggling with reading are likely to have worse wellbeing, a worse sense of their own abilities as learners. Particularly in the upper primary, lower secondary years it can affect their engagement with school, their motivation to come to school. It can feed into disruptive behaviour, which again can further compound and have an impact on learning and also the learning of other children in the school environment.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: We have had evidence that some advocate, some in the university sector and others – parent groups – that the department should take a more prescriptive approach and mandate the methods of reading instruction in our schools. Is that something you would support?

Jordana HUNTER: We certainly think the evidence is strong enough now that we can be very confident about giving teachers very clear guidelines about how to teach reading effectively. There are many areas of education where we do not necessarily have that level of confidence, but reading has been incredibly well studied now. The research base is very strong. There are particular reading programs, for example, that we know are very effective, so we can be confident I think in giving much clearer guidance to teachers and much stronger professional development so that they can be confident enacting best practice day in, day out.

We do not have time to waste here. It is important to get this right for students today. Families expect schools to meet that foundational promise that we will teach their children to read, and we are not doing that yet. Even in Victoria, one of the highest performing jurisdictions in the country, around a quarter of students are not at that proficiency level, that proficiency benchmark, in reading. I think we can do better than that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks very much. Mr McCracken, do you want to –

Joe McCRACKEN: Yes, of course. Thank you. Thank you, Jordana, for coming along today. I am interested to hear about your thoughts on this idea of setting really clear, tangible targets, and then I think also you said about regularly reporting on those targets as a separate report in Parliament. Can you tell me: what are the things that you would like to be reported on – I imagine there is a whole raft of different things – and how to measure progress from year to year?

Jordana HUNTER: Thanks for that. I think the most straightforward, the first cab off the rank, I would say, is setting some ambitious targets about students meeting proficiency baselines. NAPLAN is the main data assessment mechanism that we have in Australia. The NAPLAN scale was rebooted last year, helpfully, to

include an indication of proficiency. It is significantly higher than the old national minimum standard under the previous NAPLAN scale, which was woefully inadequate. The new proficiency benchmark cuts between students that are in that 'developing' category – so above 'needs additional support', above 'developing' – and just below 'strong'. So it is that cut point between 'developing' and 'strong'. If we look across the country, around one in three students in literacy and numeracy are not at that proficiency benchmark, according to NAPLAN, in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. In Victoria – as I said, one of the most advantaged educational jurisdictions – it is still around a quarter that do not make that proficient benchmark. We think looking at the data we could get to 90 per cent of students meeting that proficient standard. Certainly the evidence around teaching students to read is that if you are using enough evidence-based techniques and you are providing sufficient teaching dosage, you can get almost all students to that proficiency benchmark. We believe the same is possible for numeracy provided you have enough supports. So that 90 per cent proficiency benchmark is I think the right ambitious target. It will take a while to get there. We have recommended that all jurisdictions, including Victoria, seek to achieve a 15 percentage point uplift from where they were at last year in the next 10 years. So in Victoria that would take you to around 85 per cent if you could achieve that 15 percentage point uplift. Now, one of the benefits of that as a target is that it is incredibly easy to measure. The NAPLAN data is released every year. It is incredibly easy to calculate an average across the reading and numeracy domains, so it does not require a lot of complex statistics to get a good read on how we are going against that.

Joe McCRACKEN: One of the challenges that we have heard from other people that have given evidence is that NAPLAN is not necessarily an accurate measure of where a student may or may not be. I guess, and I am sort of playing devil advocate's here a bit, what do you say to that given that that is probably a more fundamental thing to, as you were saying, how you would measure those sorts of outcomes?

Jordana HUNTER: NAPLAN does not measure everything we care about in schools, but at a population level it does a pretty good job of measuring how well students are progressing in their learning in the foundational areas of literacy and numeracy. It is not going to tell you how well a student is engaged in school. It is not going to tell you their mastery of the history curriculum. But it will tell you whether or not on average across the population students are developing at that expected level in those foundational skills of reading, in particular, and numeracy. I think all different forms of assessments have got strengths and weaknesses. I certainly would not want to hear of any school only relying on NAPLAN, and I am certainly not aware of any schools that do only rely on NAPLAN. But as a system-level health check, I think it is a very appropriate dataset to use, and it is the one we have available.

Joe McCRACKEN: Yes, I know. And that is part of the challenge too; I do understand that. Apart from that, what other measures would you want to include in a proposed report to Parliament on a regular basis?

Jordana HUNTER: I think an easy additional option – an important additional option – would be a year 1 phonics screening check. That has been used very successfully in England, for example, as well as in New South Wales and South Australia, and it will be rolled out shortly in Tasmania. One of the challenges with NAPLAN is that the first assessment data does not come until year 3, so students have already been at school for over three years of schooling. By that point children should be well on their way from learning to read to reading to learn. It is really too late to pick up how our littlest kids are travelling. A year 1 phonics screening check is a quick and easy assessment. It could be rolled out without too much fuss and would provide an important check on learning in that year 1 context. We do think there should be a resit policy in year 2 so students that do not meet that cut-off benchmark are identified. They are given additional supports so that they can reach a 90 per cent threshold level across the population in year 2. A similar numeracy check I think would also be valuable in year 1, and I understand there has been some work done on that nationally.

Joe McCRACKEN: My time is up. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Ms Payne.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you for coming in and presenting to us today. I am really interested in understanding more about the small group tuition and MTSS models – not only of benefit to students but also, I am also assuming, of benefit to teachers. Can you just talk us through your proposal there and, in the report that was produced, what that data actually indicated?

Jordana HUNTER: Thank you for that. Small group tutoring, internationally, has an incredibly strong evidence base attached to it. When it is done well it can deliver up to four months of additional learning over the course of a single year. So if a student has significantly fallen behind, that can be a real lifesaver for them. It can make the difference between whether they continue to languish or we get them back on that learning bus and making the most of classroom instruction.

That can also have a significant pay-off for teachers. One of the things that teachers say to us in the numerous surveys that we have run now at Grattan is that one of the biggest workload pressures they face is having the time to meet the needs of such a wide variety of learners in their classroom. We know that in the typical classroom in Victoria you can have five or six years worth of learning between the strongest and the most struggling students, so that creates a huge burden for teachers.

The best way we think to implement small group tutoring, according to the evidence, is to have a strong responsive intervention model, and that is basically this idea that you really prioritise getting what is called your tier 1 or classroom-level instruction up to scratch. You try to get that working as well as possible so that you minimise the number of children that need additional catch-up support, but you recognise that some children will need additional doses of effective teaching, often just to really get the opportunity to practise those foundational skills that underpin reading and mathematics in particular. Short, intensive doses of additional catch-up support in that tier 2 or small group type setting can help those children stay on track. Some children may need more intensive one-on-one supports, and that might be children with really complex learning difficulties or physical or emotional or developmental challenges, but for many students a short period of catch-up tutoring can get them back into making the most of classroom instruction.

A really critical factor is that tutoring should be provided as an additional dose, so unless there are very good reasons to do so, children should not be coming out of their mainstream classes. They should be undertaking the mainstream classroom teaching and getting an additional dose of tutoring to help them get back on track. I think that is one area where there is probably some room to look at what is happening in Victoria. As I understand it, and again the data is a little patchy, there are times when kids are being taken out of class to be given that additional tutoring, and then they are not really getting an additional dose; it is a substitution, not an additional dose. There might be some times when that makes sense, but it should not be the first option.

Rachel PAYNE: And just on that, with how it reflects with teachers and, I guess, taking that pressure off having to facilitate intensive learning in a space where you do have 25 students, is it found within your research that teachers are receptive to that support, or is it something where there is a bit of a counterintuitive conversation there?

Jordana HUNTER: From the conversations we have had and the work that we have seen on both the Victorian and the New South Wales tutoring programs, teachers are very supportive of investments in small group tutoring. They see it as a really valuable way to support those sometimes quite complex and specific needs that students have. We talk a lot about differentiation, and it is important that teachers in their classrooms are able to respond to the different learning needs of their students. But sometimes I think we assume that it is possible to tailor a lesson 25 different ways to 25 different students, and it is very difficult to do that. So as much as possible supporting high-quality whole-class instruction with appropriate scaffolds and extensions for students as they need it but within a narrower range and then supplementing that with additional tier 2 support as necessary is a much more straightforward way to support teachers and students.

Rachel PAYNE: That makes sense. Thank you, Jordana. Thank you, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much for being here, Jordana. You are prolific in your content, the Grattan Institute, so congratulations on your great interest in a very important topic. I have got quite a few questions. The first one is: in the opening of your submission you say:

> Too many Victorian teenagers are not reaching minimum proficiency standards.

You go on to talk about instructional specialists, master teachers and principal master teachers. I am interested in unpacking that, because if per se I put the current Victorian education department here, they might say, 'We're already doing that.' How does your model differ to theirs, and why is it better?

Jordana HUNTER: Thank you for that question. Grattan published a report called *Top Teachers* a few years ago, and in that report we looked carefully at a few different models around the world, including the Singaporean model, to think carefully about how we structure the workforce. We know we have got workforce pressures. We have got teacher shortages. I think there are also some important questions to ask about whether or not we are investing sufficiently in building the expertise of the profession. It is important to do that for a few different reasons: (1) we want to get the most out of the profession that we have got; (2) we know that a strongly expert profession that is recognised as being highly expert is very attractive to higher performers who want might want to go into teaching. So there are a few different reasons to do that.

When we look at the models that are used internationally, particularly in Singapore, we do see that they invest more heavily in building the expertise of the workforce quite systematically. Informed by that concept, we wanted to put some recommendations on the table around having instructional specialists who are very rigorously identified based on their expertise – and they are trained to have that expertise – into roles in schools where they can do a lot of coaching with teachers, they can run demonstration lessons and really the system can be confident that those instructional specialists have up-to-date best practice and are delivering that really effectively.

Now, in Victoria we have different types of teachers in leadership roles, including learning specialists, but it is less clear that we have sufficiently rigorous identification of teachers to go into those roles. It is less clear that we have a sufficiently rigorous professional development program, that we can then have confidence that they are using the up-to-date methods and that the roles and responsibilities at the school level are as effective as possible in systematically building the capacity of the whole, school-wide staff. Again, in the Grattan model master teachers would sit at that regional level. They would work with around 25, 30 schools and closely with their instructional specialists, and they would effectively provide that kind of cascading support, I guess, to make sure that instructional specialists have the support they need and the oversight that they need to help them do that work. Now again, Victoria has got master teachers, but the role design and the selection look quite different from the model that Grattan recommended.

Melina BATH: Thank you. It is a fascinating topic. I have got two more questions, so I will read them both out and then we may end up with one on notice. OECD comparison: in 2018 Australia ranked 69 out of 76 economies indexed for disciplinary climate – which equals 'Our classrooms unfortunately are highly noisy places, and teachers and students are struggling'. I want to understand the student wellbeing and learning and how to address that; that is one question. And then the other one is in relation to a very interesting commentary around shaking down the curriculum and looking at an independent report – I think in the US it is called EdReports – that says, 'What is the best curriculum to offer time-poor teachers? What's the best curriculum to offer?' And it does not have to come from the education department; it can come from not-for-profits or for-profits. So there are two parts. Pick whichever one you want to answer.

Jordana HUNTER: Absolutely. Well, I will start with EdReports. Grattan has recommended the establishment of a curriculum materials quality assurance body modelled on EdReports in a number of our reports now. We think it is a great model. It is genuinely independent. They have an evidence-based, highly transparent set of criteria by which they judge comprehensive, at least year-long curriculum materials, and they review materials through teacher-led review panels, so it is very much a teacher-led process. We think any curriculum materials created, be they by government departments, not-for-profits or commercial providers, should be reviewed by an independent quality assurance body. So I think that is a strong model to go down.

In terms of the disciplinary issues that you raised, this is a significant concern. It is something I am personally very concerned about. I get to spend a lot of time in a lot of schools, and it comes up again and again. I do think this needs to be a priority issue for Victoria and indeed other states and territories to tackle for a range of reasons. One is that if students do not feel safe at school, and we know that many of them do not, it interrupts their learning; it means that they have a harder time engaging at school. But also teachers recognise that disruptive environments are a push factor. They are more likely to leave the profession if they do not feel safe and engaged in their school context. So we have got to do some work there.

Melina BATH: So what is your response? What is your take-home message for us on that? I know it is a very big topic, but what are some pointers that we need to recommend?

Jordana HUNTER: The most important thing is that we have a whole-school approach to setting clear learning expectations and behaviour routines. Engaged behaviour is something that can be taught quite effectively, but it does need teachers all to be on the same page, to have good clear communication with students, lots of positive incentives for engaged behaviour and a more engaging teaching practice. There is a lot we can do there, but we have to stop sort of taking a piecemeal approach and just make sure we are investing much more heavily in the professional development for teachers to support that whole-school consistent approach.

Students, if they think that Mrs Smith is a lighter touch than Mrs Andrews over here, will pick that up and that can be quite confusing for students, so consistency is really important. There is also a lot in the teaching practices. Explicit teaching in particular actually can be very engaging for students. It can be fast paced, engaging and keep students paying attention, and there is a lot in that I think that we could be exploring further.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Bath. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you very much for joining us, Ms Hunter. Just to start with, you do in your role have a very good overview of both the Victorian and the national perspective with regard to education. Can you please tell me how Victorian students compare with their interstate peers when it comes to numeracy and literacy?

Jordana HUNTER: Thank you. Victoria and the ACT across most measures are the highest performing jurisdictions in the country. I think the one kind of caveat to that, though, is that they are also the most advantaged jurisdictions, so they have the lowest levels of geographic dispersal and of some of the social, cultural and economic kinds of challenges that some of the other jurisdictions face. When Grattan has done some work that is looking at NAPLAN data in particular and we hold those other kinds of contextual factors constant, what we see is that Victoria actually performs around the same level as the other jurisdictions. To me, that says that Victoria, while its raw results look pretty good, could be aiming higher. If we just look at the NAPLAN proficiency measures, as I said, we see around a quarter of students in Victoria are not at that proficient benchmark. Across the country it is about a third. So while Victoria is outperforming on raw measures, a quarter of students not being where they need to be is still too many for me given that we can probably get with effort up to around 90 per cent of students meeting that threshold.

Michael GALEA: Absolutely. There are obviously ongoing discussions between the state and federal governments and states across the country in terms of getting that full funding under the national schools agreement. Would you see that as being an important step towards being able to achieve those targets?

Jordana HUNTER: Yes. I think absolutely we should be as a top priority trying to get all schools to 100 per cent of their SRS. That is really critical. I think at the same time we need to be thinking hard about how that money is spent and we also need to be thinking about some of the shortages in the sector. We know that there are some schools at the moment that actually have money in the bank but cannot recruit the teachers – or the teachers with the levels of expertise that they need – to fill those roles. Money is important and I think it is very important from an equity perspective, but unfortunately it is not as simple as just funding schools to 100 per cent of their SRS.

Michael GALEA: Sure. In terms of some of those other options and opportunities that we have to improve those outcomes for Victorian students, we have already touched on phonics a bit, so apologies for retracing some of that, but I am just curious if you can expand on some of the evidence base that supports a greater emphasis on phonics, especially at an early age, and also if there are any particular examples. I believe you may have cited the UK as one where we can expect to see improvement if we were to implement that year 1 testing.

Jordana HUNTER: Yes. Thank you. England in particular is an interesting case. The other interesting case is Mississippi. Both of those jurisdictions have really taken the evidence about teaching reading, particularly in the early years, really seriously. They have made strong political commitments that it is important that teachers use up-to-date evidence-based practices. But what I like in both those contexts as well is a significant investment in professional development. Every teacher I have met wants their kids to learn how to read. That is just a common factor that connects all teachers. Really it is around equipping them with best practice and the tools of the trade to get those outcomes in the classrooms. That comes down to the curriculum materials that

they are using, the actual learning sequences and learning programs that they are using in the classroom, as well as the assessment tools. In Mississippi, for example, when they launched their reading reforms, they committed that all early years teachers of reading would do 160 hours of professional development. That is a very significant commitment. I am not suggesting you have to go that far, but that does give you a sense of the intensity of commitment to professional development that some jurisdictions have embraced. In England they have released micro-credentials, national professional qualifications, several of which have got a focus on reading instruction. They have introduced a policy called English hubs, where high-performing schools that have done very, very well in supporting students right across different demographic characteristics are working with schools around them to help their teachers improve their practice and improve their learning programs. I think that is a really effective strategy, because it is one thing to learn in the abstract how to teach effectively but being able to go into another school that has got all those bits of the puzzle coming together and working really effectively can be very powerful for schools to see. So there are a couple of examples of things that have worked well.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Also quite interesting is the Mississippi example. There is actually a saying, I believe: 'Thank God for Mississippi'. A lot of the states in the US will use that – if they are doing terribly on something, they are usually still doing better than Mississippi. I would be curious to see the results from that and how perhaps they have come from – not to disparage them, but I am assuming – close to if not at the bottom of their national rankings. How has implementing phonics changed that?

Jordana HUNTER: Well, they cannot say 'Thank God for Mississippi' in relation to reading anymore, because in the 10 years of that program of improvement, Mississippi increased 10 percentage points in terms of the proportion of children that reached that proficient benchmark, and they are now at the national average. So to have that level of achievement as, I think, the poorest or the second-poorest state in the US is quite remarkable. They have also, admittedly from a low base, doubled the proportion of highly proficient students as well. So that focus on proficiency has driven an uptick in excellence too.

Michael GALEA: And just, sorry, finally: how long a timeframe are we talking about that they have been able to achieve this?

Jordana HUNTER: It is about 10 years.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Thanks for coming in and for a really comprehensive submission and quite practical suggestions – things like the master teachers we were hearing about earlier. Subject specialists allocated to a region and working with 15 to 30 schools sounds really awesome. In terms of the resourcing to deliver these practical examples, do you think we need to reach the 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard if we are to properly deliver these things?

Jordana HUNTER: More money is always helpful. Our modelling, particularly on the teacher workforce aspects, is that if there was new money that came into the system to get to 100 per cent of SRS, that could sufficiently cover the increased expenditure on instructional specialists and master teachers paid. We recommend a $40,000 uplift for instructional specialists off the top teacher salary and an $80,000 uplift for master teachers. That would be affordable with additional Gonski funding to get to that SRS 100 per cent.

At the same time, I do think that there is a lot we can do within the existing budget envelope, and we need to be thinking creatively around that. We cannot solve every problem with a policy announcement that points to hiring new teachers, for example, because there is a shortage. Not across the board, but in certain areas there are shortages of teachers, and there are shortages in other workforces as well. Education exists within a state and national economy, so we do need to be thinking about boosting the effectiveness of the staff that we currently have and retaining more of them – it is a lot cheaper to retain than it is to recruit another teacher, everything else being equal.

We need to be thinking more around the multidisciplinary teams that we have in schools and those intersections between teachers and allied health and teaching assistants. Grattan has written a little bit about that as well. To me that just points to taking a more systematic approach to thinking about workforce design and also the

connections between the school education system, the community services system, the health system et cetera. I think education is a little bit left behind in some of that work, and particularly when you think about intersections between the NDIS, for example, and schools. There is quite a bit of work to do, I think, to integrate those different service systems better, and given the workforce constraints, we need to get smarter at doing that. So more money is definitely helpful, but we also need to get better with what we have got.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: And that integration you are talking about – that is not contingent on us reaching 100 per cent, would you say?

Jordana HUNTER: Well, there is integration work we can do better now without more money being on the table. You know, money is very helpful, because it can facilitate all sorts of reforms. We can invest more heavily in the workforce. But I am not prepared to say that we should just stand by and wait for more money to appear. We have got children now that we could be doing a better job with.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Absolutely. We were hearing earlier today a brief discussion with regard to what is often called an accounting loophole, of that 4 per cent of the schooling resource standard that is applied to things like capital depreciation and non-school costs. Does the Grattan Institute have a view as to whether that should be deducted from the total 100 per cent?

Jordana HUNTER: We have previously published a report – under a previous program director – that suggested that 4 per cent should be closed. I think, as I have suggested to you today, it is an issue we should look at, but it is probably not the top issue that I would be concerned about.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. It is still worth addressing, though. You have made statements in the past, you are saying.

Jordana HUNTER: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Perfect. I might pass back to you, Chair. Thanks.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. One quick question: we have talked a lot about phonics versus balanced where it relates to literacy. Are there equivalent debates taking place in numeracy, because we see at international schools and other places – we do get flashed up on our screens high mathematic and high scientific and high STEM attainment. Are they also subject to the same kinds of debates?

Jordana HUNTER: I think there are some similarities. Certainly there has been quite a bit of research work done looking at, from a scientific perspective, how children learn, and some of that work has looked at how children's working memory is constrained – and indeed adults' working memory is constrained – and how much emphasis needs to be placed on opportunities to practise and achieve mastery. And a lot of that research I think has been helpful in informing an evidence-based approach to reading and is also applicable in mathematics. In mathematics, particularly in the early years, there is a real opportunity I think, aligned with the learning sciences, to improve opportunities for students to achieve fact fluency and algorithmic fluency, and that would really support a stronger engagement with problem solving down the track for those students. So there are some parallels there too.

Richard WELCH: And I was really interested in the master teacher concept – and they would be subject matter experts, in effect – but what is the intersection there with things like the national curriculum, then? Would they have a say in curriculum as well? What would be the intersection?

Jordana HUNTER: In the Grattan model these teachers are effectively the pedagogical teaching leads but in a subject-specific domain. So they would be the experts in mathematics teaching, which would obviously require them to have a very good understanding of the mathematics curriculum and mathematic content knowledge in addition to pedagogical content knowledge. I think a really significant benefit of this model of investing more in subject matter expertise in the profession, which is something that Australia used to do pretty well but has taken its foot off the pedal on, would be that we have a broader cohort of teachers in the profession who can contribute at the highest levels to those curriculum reform conversations.

Richard WELCH: We talk about evidence-based learning, which is absolutely great. There are subjects of course where that is – if we are doing English literature or we are doing humanities or we are doing other forms, there is a qualitative 'Which literature?' So how does evidence-based learning apply in those education areas?

Jordana HUNTER: There is still an evidence base about the most effective ways to teach. So once you have made a decision about what aspects of English literature you want to teach, the types of things you want to explore, there is still a lot that the science of learning can inform a teacher about, about the best way to build that content knowledge for students, to support them with their writing, to help them with deeper factual and conceptual understanding and their ability to communicate that.

Richard WELCH: I think I can sneak one last question in?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: You sure can.

Richard WELCH: Quite rightly, we have talked about making sure that our base is higher – that our attainment levels get to a minimum. But do you have any general comments to make on accelerated and higher achievement and our place in that and what we should be looking at as a committee in that?

Jordana HUNTER: Certainly when you compare Australia's, including Victoria's, performance to the highest performers, particularly in the East Asian region, we are off the pace in terms of excellence. The PISA data demonstrates that in quite a compelling way. If you look at the proportion of students that excel in Singapore, for example, in mathematics, it is about three or four times the proportion that excel in Victoria. I think we need to raise our level of ambition. We are a rich country. Victoria is a rich state in a rich country. We can do better here, and that should be certainly focused on proficiency. But I am ambitious for our students that can excel as well.

Richard WELCH: Are there any specific recommendations around how we do that, whether that is generically or by subject?

Jordana HUNTER: I think there is a real opportunity for all jurisdictions, including Victoria, to focus more on the primary school curriculum, knowledge-rich curriculum, particularly in the humanities, social sciences and sciences in upper primary school. Building that knowledge base, particularly before children hit puberty and things can get a little bit more complicated in secondary, is a great opportunity to just lift that foundation so that children are in a position to thrive. By the time children hit year 7 – we hear this again and again when we go into secondary schools – you will have some children that are genuinely excelling and some that will still be working at a grade 2, grade 3 level. We need to bring that group up because that means there will be children in that group that can excel and we give them the chance to excel, but that also allows that year 7, that year 8 teacher to keep their expectations high, which is important for those children that have a lot of potential to keep being pushed through that curriculum.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Welch. Mrs Deeming.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for that fantastic presentation. I have enjoyed your work. I was just curious about the role of university degrees and if you have any suggestions about that input into this whole system and also the current professional development model. I have a background in teaching, and as teachers we all used to laugh about being forced to get our hundred hours and going to this mishmash of insane unevidenced professional development days from people who would put a presentation up on spelling that was full of spelling errors. It was completely unregulated and insane, and I just wanted to get your feedback on those two elements if you have any.

Jordana HUNTER: Thank you for that. Certainly initial teacher education needs to improve. There is work happening on that. Mark Scott chaired a review, and the recommendations from that review at the national level have been supported in principle by education ministers. I think we should see some improvements to the quality and rigour of ITE, and that is a positive thing. That will take a while to work through the system. In the meantime, unfortunately for some teachers maybe, we still have a strong view that professional development is

really important. But we have heard similar concerns about professional development. Teachers will say often it is a waste of time, particularly some of the workshops, where it just feels very disconnected to their practice.

I think there are two ways of addressing that. The first one is making sure that professional development is genuinely high quality and connected to the evidence base and to actionable insights that teachers can take with them to the classroom. The professional development market is very mixed. There are a lot of different providers out there. Some of them are offering great stuff, some of them not so great stuff. We have made some recommendations in the past that it would be helpful to have some quality assurance guidelines around professional development so that schools can be more confident that the money they are spending is actually going to deliver something that is of value.

The other piece, though, I think is really around school in-class coaching, so school-delivered professional development where teachers have the opportunity to work with, ideally, instructional specialists, master teachers who can observe them in their classroom, can coach them and give them feedback and also can demonstrate the use of different techniques. That is much more tangible for teachers. The other thing in this space actually is the role of really high-quality curriculum materials. We do hear that particularly for out-of-field teachers, beginning teachers, perhaps primary school teachers who maybe do not have a background in sciences or the humanities or a strong background in mathematics, high-quality curriculum materials can be a very powerful source of professional development for them as well. Just thinking about those different levers I think is important.

Moira DEEMING: Fantastic. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Mrs Deeming. We have got a minute, so I thought I would take the liberty. We had a discussion with the principals earlier today about workload and the administration workload. You have done some work on teacher workload in the past. What do you think the best strategies are to relieve some of the administrative burden on teachers and principals so they can have more time to teach?

Jordana HUNTER: I think the administrative burden question is a really interesting one. You do hear examples of just basic things, where different parts of different government departments are effectively asking for the same information. That is just a straightforward double up. An audit of those administrative requirements I think is the way to tackle that issue. When Grattan looked at this area previously, what we actually found was that teachers do spend less time on strictly administrative jobs than they do on preparation for classroom teaching. So they spend about 8 per cent of their time on admin tasks and about 33 per cent of their time marking, curriculum planning and giving feedback to students. We should get admin down to a minimum, but I do not think we are actually going to solve the workload challenge just by looking at admin. We also need to look particularly at curriculum material planning. That is a huge time sink for teachers. It is a really big challenge for them, and if we could support them to get whole-school established curriculum plans in place, we could save the average teacher about 3 hours a week. So I think that is a really important thing we should be looking at.

The other piece that I think teachers really struggle with is the support – the mental health, wellbeing and health needs of students and meeting those. We need to, again, get better at bringing together the multidisciplinary team, the allied health support workers et cetera, that can take some of that burden off teachers, because teachers are not trained generally to do that work. They do not have the skills and they do not always have the confidence to do it, and it is a real risk that we distract them from the important work of teaching and learning. Of course teachers are great human beings and they want to alleviate suffering, so we have got to help them find other ways of doing that that keep their workload manageable.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Dr Hunter, thanks so much for coming in today. You have got an impressive body of evidence to share and we only got a small sample of it today, but there is more, I am sure, we can read. Thanks a lot for coming today. We will take a short suspension.

Witness withdrew.