

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Shepparton – Wednesday 17 April 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

**WITNESS**

Kathleen Parry, Teacher, Rushworth P-12 College.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee public hearing for the inquiry into state education in Victoria. Joining us this morning is Ms Kathleen Parry from Rushworth P-12 College. Welcome, Kathleen.

I will quickly introduce the committee to you: I am Trung Luu, the Chair; the Deputy Chair Ryan Batchelor, Michael Galea, Ms Melina Bath and Ms Moira Deeming are to my right; Mr Aiv Puglielli, Ms Rachel Payne, Dr Renee Heath and Mr Joe McCracken.

Before we continue, Kathleen, I would just like to inform you that 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 that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same 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. The transcript will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee website.

Welcome, and thanks very much for your time. Could you please state your name and the school you are representing.

**Kathleen PARRY:** My name is Kathleen Parry, and my base school is Rushworth P-12. I am a music-performing arts specialist, so I am also at four other schools. I also teach at Tallygaroopna Primary School and Kialla Central Primary School. I also teach at a Catholic school, and I am doing some work for an organisation called the Song Room, which some of you may be familiar with, doing some music teacher mentoring and some music in schools through the mental health menu program. So I am doing everything.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. That is great. All the schools you actually teach at give a broad perspective in relation to your experience as well. We have got no submission, so I would like to invite you now to make an opening statement, if you like, please.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Thank you. I am sure you have heard this from everyone who has spoken: there are so many things. Even just reading through the inquiry itself, there are so many things, and I am glad that you guys understand that there are so many things. There are too many things to talk about. The complication is that I understand that there are so many problems that affect teachers' lives and teachers' classrooms and students' lives and classrooms outside department control, outside teacher control and outside student control. For example, for some of my kids, how are they supposed to focus on their education when they cannot find housing because of the rental crisis, when they are moving around from school to school because they are sleeping on family and friends' couches depending on where they can get a bed that night? Coming to school and then focusing on learning and making good choices about their behaviour is really difficult. When parents are working multiple jobs trying to feed their kids, they are not sitting at home with their kids and reading with them – lots of them are not. As always, broad generalisations do not apply to everybody, but these are some of the things that we are seeing. We get phone calls from parents saying, 'My kid won't be at school today because I can't afford to fill the car with petrol, and we don't live in the bus area' or 'we move too much to be picked up by the buses.' So many outside problems affect the school. My partner is a nurse, and there is a lot of overlap: outside problems making life difficult for almost everybody, and especially in regional and rural areas.

I could talk about everything, and I am sure you will stop me when I have had enough time to talk about things. Again, everyone has probably talked about the same things. The behaviour management is a big one; it is a really obvious one. It is a vicious cycle of students making really difficult choices to manage in a classroom and extreme behaviours, which then means that teachers leave, which means that students do not trust teachers, which means that teachers leave, because it is this cycle of 'We don't trust the teachers, so why would I do the right thing for you?' Then there is the lack of support from leadership, whether that is leadership of the school or leadership of the department. And I want to be clear: I am not talking about a specific school here. This is not

necessarily a Rushworth P-12 problem. I have taught at I think over 30 schools now. It is not at every school, but it is something that I am seeing at lots of schools and talking about with colleagues from other schools.

Because of a lot of the behaviours that we are seeing, the consequences or the time and space to chat with that kid and figure out why they are making those choices or help them to make better choices – the support is not coming from above and above so their choices keep happening, and so the behaviours are more and more extreme, so the teachers keep leaving, so the kids do not trust the teachers, so the teachers keep leaving. And we are seeing a lot of refusal from kids. I had a year 2 student say – I have been teaching for about 12 years now, and coming from a year 2 this was wild to me – ‘I’m not doing that. You can’t make me do that.’ The thing I wanted them to do was come and sit down in a circle with us. ‘Mum says I don’t have to do what the teacher tells me.’ – like, ‘Cool, thanks, buddy.’ We worked through it. I am an experienced teacher; I have many tools in my tool belt. But it is still wild that that is even coming up.

I am just going to brush on a bunch of things, and then I figure you will ask me questions about the things that you are most interested in me talking about. One of the things that I am qualified to talk about, I feel, is specialist teachers, being a specialist teacher myself. A couple of things: nobody knows how to become a specialist teacher because there is not really a way. You sort of just get the job and then go, ‘Oh no, I’m a music teacher. How do I do that?’ and seek out your own training, which is great. I have done what I think is a pretty good job of it. Being a music teacher mentor has been really great, and it is a really good program, but – what else?

Rural schools – I am at a bunch of different schools because if there are four classes in a school, they do not need me full time. At the moment the system seems to be that I approach the school or I find a job and go to different schools. There are MARC and MACC vans, which are library and art vans that go around to a bunch of different schools and are employed by the cluster. Why don’t we have that for other specialists?

I could talk about teacher retention – I am sure lots of people have. I could talk about diversity and inclusion for teachers. The questions I wrote down are: why isn’t our teacher PD differentiated? It is mandatory that we differentiate in our classrooms. Why do I have to sit through the same mandatory training as a grad when I have done the exact same mandatory training for the past 10 years? Why? And so much training is inaccessible for teachers who have ADHD or dyslexia or any kind of other thing, and there are such teachers out there – lots of them. So much training is through videos, and they are often not captioned. They are almost always not speed adjustable, and you cannot skip them. I understand why, but that is not differentiation. We know all about that, so why can’t we do that for ourselves?

I am sure you have had lots of people tell you about workload and how lots of people are teaching outside their subject area and that there is a not a lot of support. For example, I was asked to teach year 8 English. I was an English major, so I have a bit of a background, but that was eight years ago at uni, and I had not taught English after that. They were like, ‘Go for it.’ I said, ‘Okay. Is there a plan from last year or something?’ They were like, ‘There’s probably one on the Google Drive. I don’t know. You’ll find it.’ That was a personal experience. I know that it is very widespread.

The very last thing I have is just that eduPay is a broken website. Can we look into that? That is probably not your problem, but I have to say it to everybody who will listen, because it is broken. Applying for jobs is something that we want people to do, but eduPay is so broken they give up and apply for a job on an easier website. Would you like me to keep rambling or would you like me to stop?

**The CHAIR:** Just feel free. If there is particular point that you think is important, we would love to hear about it. We will butt in.

**Kathleen PARRY:** There are so many things. The things that I personally find most difficult – and the teachers that I have spoken to, because we talk to each other; we are colleagues – are behaviour management and students just not caring and families just not caring. They do not value education. ‘Why would I listen to you when I could drop out in year 10 and after three years of an apprenticeship earn more than you?’ is literally a sentence that a year 9 student said to me. ‘Why are you telling me what to do? My dad earns more than you, and he didn’t finish high school.’ I was like, ‘Okay. That’s true, but also it’s my job and you legally have to be here, so please, let’s just work together.’ I think one thing we forget is that we are a team. Parents forget that

teachers and parents are a team. We are trying to make their kids the best people they can be and give them the best tools they can have. I think a lot of parents see the teachers as the enemy, which is frustrating and difficult.

Those are the highlights. I can go into detail on any of those, but basically, I assumed that I would have 5 minutes and then I would get questions on the things that you have not heard much about.

**The CHAIR:** We have got a lot of questions for you. I will quickly ask one question, and then I will pass it along to the panel. We heard about teachers and parents from the last speaker as well, Kathleen, and the issues regarding behaviour. What is your suggestion? If the parents have the attitude that they pass on to the students that they can do anything they want, what can we do? How can we assist the teachers and with what kind of information so there is more engagement between schools and parents? Can the department assist in any way in relation to information for parents? What do you recommend?

**Kathleen PARRY:** There are a thousand smarter people than me that I am sure have done lots of research into other things, but these are just some ideas from conversations with colleagues that we have come up with. I understand blanket rules are really, really dangerous, especially when it comes to behaviour management and consequences. However, often a student's behaviour is really extreme and there is not really a solid consequence. Maybe they do an in-school suspension. I have had colleagues at other schools hit and punched, and it is a good day when you do not get assaulted at work. As teachers, we do not go to uni expecting to get assaulted and it is a good day when you do not or it is a good week when nobody does.

One of my colleagues, he is very – ‘We should make sure that consequences are severe,’ and I am not sure I go that far. He is like, ‘You know what we need? We need a strict code of conduct like: these are the hard lines – physical assault or racist slurs,’ or whatever it may be, ‘and department-wide if you do these things, you get X amount of warnings and then you are suspended. End of story, no arguments. That is the way it is, and the department backs teachers up on that.’ One of the issues I have is that at another school a couple of years ago a student was suspended because they destroyed a classroom. They destroyed the classroom and then went into the admin building and punched a hole in the wall and then threw a table at a teacher and all kinds of things and caused a lot of damage. His parents were upset with the school, because ‘It’s the school’s problem’, and went to the department and revoked the suspension, because Dad was important and had lots of money and power and could just do that. So Kiddo was like, ‘Well, why would I make good choices if I can just go home a bit early and then come back like nothing happened?’ Examples like that make it really difficult because kids see that and go, ‘Well, if he makes a bad choice and goes to the principal’s office and comes back with a lolly, why would I make a good choice? Why would I do what the teacher’s telling me?’

It is always very complicated. I was trying to prepare for today and reading a lot of things online and going on forums. Someone suggested that if you raised teachers’ salaries, then it would increase respect for the profession. You know, that is a nice idea. Of course I would love to have more money, and it might be a bandaid for some parents, but I think consistency is difficult – consistency from the department when it comes to that concrete, ‘Okay, this is the hard line, this is where we draw it. If you are physically violent towards a staff member or a student, this is what goes.’ However, of course if kids are defending themselves or if there is a long cycle of bullying and then they finally retaliate, what do you do? There are grey areas of course. So the shorter answer is: I do not know. But consistency and support from department when it comes to suspensions and harsher consequences might help.

Of course teacher shortages are a problem because the revolving door of teachers means that students do not trust the teachers. Why would they make good choices for this teacher when they are only going to leave at the end of the next term?

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for that. That is a lot for the panel to take on. There is information there. I will pass on to the panel now, and I will come back to you with some more questions. Deputy Chair.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Kathleen, for coming in today and sharing your considerable experience. One of the questions we tried to touch on with the witness earlier today was: in your experience – I assume you have had colleagues leave the system or probably have colleagues who want to leave the system – what do you think we could do from a policy recommendation point of view from the education system? Noting that, as you said, there are outside problems that make life difficult for everyone. In respect to the state

education system, what do you think we can do to help retain experienced teachers in the system and also to attract the ones who have left back?

**Kathleen PARRY:** I was reading articles and comments on forums about this exact question because I assumed it would be asked. The answers are obviously different for every individual. A lot of teachers leave because of the way they are treated at schools by students and leadership. For example, at a school I was working at in the past we had a really great librarian. She was a teacher librarian. She was a really great literacy teacher. She did literacy tutoring, and she was really great at that. Then the teacher said, 'Okay, there's a shortage next year. We're going to get you to teach humanities.' She said, 'I don't want to do that. My area is the library and literacy.' And they were like, 'Oh, well, sorry. Either take the humanities or don't.' And so she retired. That is probably not a policy thing, but communicating to principals, 'Hey, maybe work with your staff and allow them to teach the subjects that they would like to teach and are trained to teach' would help.

Now, first of all, I genuinely love that we had CRTs from Melbourne being paid a travel allowance and being paid extra to come to rural areas. That was fantastic. It meant that at Rushworth P-12 in particular we had a bunch of those CRTs. They were fantastic. Loved having them there. I think that they should have been paid the amount that they were paid with all of the allowances. I think that is fantastic, because that is the reason they took the job. That is the reason they put up with the behaviour and living in the middle of nowhere, not being able to find a house to rent – all of those things. However, teaching next to somebody who does not have to do planning, does not have to do assessments, does not have to do parent conversations, does not have to do any of those extra things – does not have to attend meetings – and who is getting paid twice as much as the person who does have to do all of those things makes it –

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** This was a feature of the evidence we had earlier this morning. You are sort of caught in a bind though. You have got to have CRTs if there are not enough permanent staff. How do you think we would incentivise people who were doing CRT work to take permanent jobs on staff?

**Kathleen PARRY:** That is really tricky, because that comes –

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Tricky problems are our forte, right?

**Kathleen PARRY:** Look, you are all very smart and well educated people. I read your bios. I am confident that you have much better ideas than some of the ones that I have got, which are: just wave a magic wand and it will fix it, right? I think that a lot of the incentives for CRTs to take those CRT roles and the – I have forgotten the term for it; it is in my notes somewhere, but that would take too long.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** It will be an acronym or something, an indecipherable acronym.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes, the acronym. For example, GSSC, the secondary school here, has the sign-on bonuses and retention bonuses for that. That is fantastic. I think that is wonderful. But the fact that if I still lived in Melbourne and came up to get a job I could get that money but not if I stay here – maybe we could get extra leave at the end of five years or something. I do not know, maybe we work out a dental plan for cheap health insurance or –

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Providing some sort of incentive or reward for people who are staying in schools for extended periods of time?

**Kathleen PARRY:** It used to be that you got a job with a school. My parents, when I became a teacher, were so excited. They were like, 'You're set up for life. You'll never be without a job. You'll get a job at a school. You'll teach there for 60 years. You'll retire. You'll have plenty of money. You'll own a house. Wonderful.' I probably will never own a house, because I live by myself, and covering my expenses – I went on a week holiday with my family, and now I have chosen not to service my car this fortnight. Instead I am going to the podiatrist, because money is tight, and that is not anyone else's problem but my own. However, if there were things like very cheap health insurance or free health insurance or, I do not know, holidays or benefits that you could get at a corporate job maybe offered to teachers – I know there was talk of New South Wales and Queensland teachers, who can access Fitness Passport, which is really cheap gym membership. That does not necessarily work here, because there are not really any gyms in Rushworth, but things like that, so that we could have some benefits for staying in the profession.

Of course making the profession a nice profession to work in – I personally have found a lot of really lovely schools to teach at, and I really like my job most of the time. But that is a luxury, and that is a luxury that I have because I am a specialist and because I have done extra training. I like to talk myself up because I am a music teacher; I have to toot my own horn. Sorry, there had to be one terrible joke. It would not be me otherwise. But I have that luxury of choosing really lovely schools to teach at and occasionally going to a school that is struggling with behaviour management and teaching there for a bit and then flitting off and teaching at a really nice school again.

Somehow helping with those behaviour management and general workload problems and making those lighter would help a lot of teachers come back – and being able to teach the subject you want to teach. That is why I am still here. I get to teach music. In the holidays – no, that is just talking myself up. I have not struggled to find work, because I am a specialist, but a lot of teachers do not have that luxury. They want to stay at a school and want to help the kids, and therefore they teach outside their subject area because they genuinely want to help. They are loyal to the kids and to the school, and then they burn out because they have taken on way too much and they do not have access to support. Maybe free therapy for everybody – I know that there are the 10 sessions, but 10 is not enough for a lot of people – maybe benefits like that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Puglielli.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you for coming in today. You are a music teacher in terms of your specialisation. Do you think that arts and music programming in the public school system is adequately funded, and what would the ideal model of those programs be for you?

**Kathleen PARRY:** The short answer is no, but sometimes it is really school-specific. The wonder of the education system is that schools are very specific when it comes to specialist programs, and you can find really wonderful programs at different schools that have allocated funding to that. At some schools I teach at I have got a budget of \$50, which buys so many instruments. At some schools I have a budget of \$1500, which does buy lots of instruments. I am biased: the music in schools program and the music teacher mentor program through the Song Room are fantastic. They have done a lot I believe to really support music in primary school specifically but also secondary schools. The way it often happens is: literally one of the teachers that I am mentoring was the PE teacher, and he does play guitar in his free time. The principal knew that and, when their music teacher left, said, ‘You play guitar. You’re already a specialist. You can do music, right?’ So now he is the music teacher. Thankfully, they got him into the music mentorship program, and I am able to go, ‘Yes, you do know bits about music. Here’s how you can communicate that to kids. Here’s Arts:Live. Here are a bunch of other resources.’ We demoed teaching in front of each other, I gave him some tips and he learned all my favourite songs and games and activities. That is really valuable. Part of the problem with specialists is that nobody knows how to be a specialist when you start uni, and placement students do not have the option to be with specialist teachers. Placement is a whole other issue, but there is not enough time.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Training in terms of specialisation is one thing you have identified. We have definitely got that noted. In terms of the model delivered in schools –

**Kathleen PARRY:** Oh, sorry. The models.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** what is the best practice for you that we could see delivered statewide? What would that look like?

**Kathleen PARRY:** I am hesitant because the thing that I love about music is that it is really individual. A lot of people do not like the music curriculum because it is so broad, but that is why I love it. At one school I am teaching ukulele with the 5–6s because they love ukulele and I can use the ukulele to teach a bunch of the curriculum requirements, which are about making music, composing music, performing music – all those things – and using notation to transcribe music. But at another school the 5–6s hate ukulele. They just do not like it, so we are doing xylophone, and I can do that because of the curriculum being so broad.

Arts:Live is great but there is a lot there. Teachers are time-poor as it is, and it is very time-consuming to go through everything. There are lots of curriculums there from the Orff and Kodály methods of teaching music that are very easy to follow. Music Room also has really good ones. It would be good to see a suggested scope and sequence that is really accessible for non-music trained teachers, because it is often non-music trained teachers who end up teaching music – but suggested so that teachers who do know what they are doing, like me

and a bunch of other colleagues, can go our own way and do ukuleles with the kids who love ukulele but not with the kids who do not. Does that make sense?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, definitely it does. Would you support an increase to sort of standardise arts and music funding in the public school system generally? You talked about the content and the variations, but funding to deliver all of that, would you support an increase?

**Kathleen PARRY:** It would be wonderful. At the moment I am not a principal, I do not allocate funding, I do not know how it works, but I believe that it is up to the principal where the funding goes for different subject areas. Of course if there is not a music teacher, how do they spend the music money on something music related? But there are lots of ways to spend money. We all find them. So yes, in increase in 'Okay, this money is for music,' and even a website, 'Here are some things you can spend it on if you don't know what to spend it on' – that would be awesome. And being connected to things like the MSO, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and the Arts Centre and things like that, which are all really good. They offer really great educational programs. Yes, even based on the school. A lot of those programs are really great because they have subsidies for rural schools to get to Melbourne, because that is a huge cost – 90 per cent of the cost of an excursion is the bus. So the kids at the schools I teach at often cannot see live music, live concerts, live plays. Local ones are great, but professional ones are really good. It is really valuable having professional musicians come to the school, things like that. So yes, some sort of standardised funding: this money is for your school to allocate for instruments or allocate for performances. That would be fantastic. I do not know what that would look like, but it would be great. No matter what it was, I think it would be great.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. This is very interesting indeed. While I am listening to you I am following up on the Victorian education website about teacher resources, because one of your comments looked at just resources for education. You come in, you are a graduate teacher, or even if you are not, you have got curriculum there. You are time poor, and there are a lot of behavioural issues. You need some help, and I guess the education department is there to support your classroom teaching. What is missing, and what would you like to see?

**Kathleen PARRY:** Okay. This is on the Victorian curriculum website?

**Melina BATH:** Just in general. I have just been sort of trying to see, if I was a teacher and I was looking for a resource, what is there. What would you like to see?

**Kathleen PARRY:** There is so much, and it is wonderful, but it is so hard to find what suits your school and what suits you. Arts:Live has done a lot in categorising what they have when you are looking for something on, you know, composing. There is a whole section tagged with that. So we are making progress towards that. I would love to see that either expand or more of that – things that are really well tagged so that you can find specific units of work or specific lessons or specific videos.

Here is the thing, actually. Sorry; I looked at my notes – what a concept – and now I know what I am talking about. Networks: I really want networks back. There are music teacher networks, but because we are remotely, rurally, so far apart –

**Melina BATH:** Under the pump.

**Kathleen PARRY:** My network often meets in Echuca, and if I am teaching at Rushworth that day, Echuca is nearly an hour away. If they are starting their meeting at 4:30 and I finish school at 3:30 – and no teacher is walking out the door at 3:30 – there is no way I am getting there. I have been to one network meeting. And that is not the network's fault. But maybe online teacher networks – I do not know – or some sort of networking tool that makes it really easy to collect teachers together. Or even when you get a job, when you are listed as a music teacher, you could get an email that says, 'Hey, here's a list of all of the music teacher networks that meet.'

**Melina BATH:** So recognition of that to enable that better support for you to collaborate – it could be with varying abilities or varying levels of experience – to add to your efforts and therefore keep you in the job longer rather than being burnt out.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes. The other thing that is really valuable that we never have time for – we have our PPDs, our professional practice days, which are often used for whole-school training, which is really important, and I love that. I love not having to come in in the holidays to do my first-aid training. Wonderful – I love that. However, one of the most valuable things I have ever done as a music teacher is go and watch other music teachers teach. So we could have professional practice days or some sort of system for that or even a website where you we can go, ‘Okay, I’m a music teacher here. I would like to see other music teachers.’ And people put their names up – some sort of matching system, I do not know.

**Melina BATH:** Some linking – sure. That cross collaboration and learning is really key.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes. That is how I got my job at Tallygaroopna. I was ringing around trying to find music teachers to go and observe, and they said, ‘We don’t have a music teacher. She’s quitting. Would you like to be our music teacher?’ So some sort of system to go and watch other teachers teach.

**Melina BATH:** Which should be in place, one would think – but the recognition of regional Victoria as well, the distance issue. You said before, Kathleen, eduPay is broken. What is it about it that is broken? This is a technology, a back-end technology, that should be serving teachers, you said, to work in the state system rather than go away into different independent schools. What is broken about it?

**Kathleen PARRY:** It only works on Chrome most of the time. Sometimes it works on other browsers, but often it does not. It does not work on mobile unless you twiddle your nose in the right way and stand on one – I do not know why. Sometimes it works on mobile, but most of the time it does not. If you are looking for jobs on Recruitment Online, then you do a search and you put in all your filters. You are like, ‘I want to teach music. I want to teach in north-western Victoria.’ It spits out the results. If you click on a job and then hit the back button, your search is gone. You can shortlist jobs and you can sort of compare them, but you also cannot, because that is often broken and does not work.

**Melina BATH:** So an update of that technology to support your time management to be effective in utilising that service, using that platform.

**Kathleen PARRY:** That would be great, yes. I have spoken with placement students who are just starting out as teachers and who are applying for jobs, and they are like, ‘How do you work with Recruitment Online?’ Because it is just not very intuitive and because sometimes it just does not work, they are like, ‘Am I using it wrong or is it just not working?’ It is very hard to tell.

**Melina BATH:** Part of our terms of reference is about retention and recruitment, and you are saying it is difficult to recruit if you cannot actually access a service, an effective service.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes. And who do you talk to when eduPay is down? The department’s IT maybe, but how do you contact them when eduPay is down and you cannot get the details?

**Melina BATH:** Sure. Thank you. I think my time is up. Thank you very much.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Payne.

**Rachel PAYNE:** Thank you, Chair. Kathleen, thank you for coming and speaking with us today. One of the things that I found most alarming about your introduction was the relationship between teachers and parents. You described it as parents seeing teachers as the enemy. I would like to delve more into that, reflecting obviously on your experiences. It seems as though you have taught in both city and regional schools. Have you seen that this relationship has changed? Is it relative to the pandemic? What is your experience with that? Let us delve into that a bit more.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Sure. It is sort of summed up – there was a comic that went around a while ago. Have you seen it? There are two panels, and the kid is in front of the teacher. One of them is the parents yelling at the

kid, 'Explain these bad grades!' and the second one is the parents yelling at the teacher, 'Explain these bad grades!' That sort of sums up the attitude that it is the teacher's fault if students are performing poorly academically. I have often been told by parents – I have called home, I have said, 'Hey, I'm worried about your kid. They are making silly choices in class. Here are some of the behaviours I've seen.' – 'Well, why are you telling me? It's not my problem. They're at school. You see them more than I do, so fix it,' or, straight up, 'Well, they wouldn't do that. You must have the wrong kid.'

**Rachel PAYNE:** So there is no accountability there from parents in many respects.

**Kathleen PARRY:** And that is not all parents, of course. There are some wonderful parents that I deal with, and as the music teacher I have the immense privilege of being able to call parents and say, 'Hey, your student did the coolest solo today' or 'made up the coolest song.' I just want to make sure there is some positive in there, because there is absolutely a lot of positive. There are a lot of fantastic, wonderful parents, but a lot of parents are struggling and therefore do not have the emotional bandwidth to be kind to teachers and do not have the emotional bandwidth to even be kind to their kids sometimes. It is that prevailing attitude of if they believe the teacher – which is a big 'if', because parents are often just saying, 'Well, you must be lying; my kid would never do that.' It is like, 'Well, I was there. They did.' First of all, it is having that trust in the teacher to tell them the truth. Why would we lie? Why? There is just not that, 'We are a team helping your child.' It is, 'You are punishing my child; you are picking on my child.'

I understand that a lot of families, lots of people, have had a bad experience with a teacher. I think everybody probably has. As humans our brains protect us by focusing on the negatives, so we avoid the negative experiences in the future, which means we forget about the positives. If you remember one bad teacher from your primary school, there were probably at least a dozen great ones that you do not think about because they were boring. Your brain does not want to think about that – that is boring. So yes, the disbelief and then, 'Well, it's not my problem. Why should I fix it?'

**Rachel PAYNE:** Obviously, as a committee we are to make recommendations about improving the state school system. Do you think there is any opportunity there for education for teachers and potentially more emphasis on parents to sort of see you two as working as a team around how best we facilitate this child's education?

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes, it is definitely worth a shot. Education is a really big thing. The literacy levels of a lot of our parents are pretty low. I know that for at least three parents across the various schools we call home and read the newsletter to them because they cannot read it. And access to information is very difficult for a lot of families – again, not most of them, but it is the loud minority, often, that is taking over. Yes, some sort of education that, 'Hey, we're a team. We've got this.' But it is hard for parents to trust the schools when they hear stories of what teachers are doing. Maybe we are supervising two classes at once because there are not enough teachers, or a teacher did not turn up and nobody realised that there was not a teacher for the first 15 minutes of the class, or the teacher is leaving at the end of the term, so why would the parent trust the teacher? So it is all that –

**Rachel PAYNE:** Yes. It is a two-way street.

**Kathleen PARRY:** A vicious cycle and intertwined issues, I think, and 'Why would I trust you when you can't even control your class? That's a "you" problem.' It is great that teachers are teaching things like manners and teeth brushing and toileting and that sort of thing, and washing hands. Also, if parents see that teachers are expected to teach their kids to wash their hands properly and teach their kids to use 'please' and 'thank you' and all of those things: 'Well, you're the babysitter. You're mostly a parent. You see them more than I do. Why should I discipline my child? Because it's your job.'

**Rachel PAYNE:** Especially if parents may not have capacity as well. Thank you for your reflections.

**Kathleen PARRY:** I am sorry, that is not very helpful.

**The CHAIR:** It is. Thank you. Michael.

**Michael GALEA:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks for joining us today. I want to actually pick up on that. How do we fix it? How do we make parents – not all parents, but those parents – accountable for raising their own children?

**Kathleen PARRY:** Universal basic income so they do not have to worry about money.

**Michael GALEA:** Is that the issue, though? Because things like please and thank you, they are not based on income.

**Kathleen PARRY:** I know that absolutely it is not. The thing is, money does not fix it. Money does not fix a lot of things. But if parents are worrying about money and working a lot or partaking in illicit substances to deaden the worry, because that is a lot, they do not have the time and emotional capacity because they are so worried about, ‘Well, where are we going to sleep next week? Because we’re getting kicked out of our council house and the waiting list for council housing is five, 10 years.’ When I moved to Rushworth – I did not actually end up moving to Rushworth. I live in Tatura, which is 25 minutes away. I have the immense privilege that I do. I am white, I have the support of my parents financially, I had an ongoing contract for four days a week, I had a pretty impeccable 10-year rental history, and it took me over six months to find a rental. A lot of our families do not have this privilege. There are just no rentals because it is a rural area.

If you are worrying about where you are living next week and giving your kids something to eat, it is very difficult to even care about your kids’ manners and care about your kid not being on their iPad 12 hours a day, because you do not have time to think about that. You are too busy worrying about putting food on the table, if that is helpful. Absolutely, it is all intertwined, and money will not fix manners and money will not fix behaviour management. But everything adds up, and when you pile on problems, the least important ones, or the ones that are seen as least important, do not matter. At the moment I am seeing a lot of families everywhere that I teach at. They are worried about housing, they are worried about food, they are worried about, like me: ‘If we service the car, then we can’t go to the dentist or go to the doctor’s.’ Worrying about that, I am not going to worry whether my kid says please and thank you or says nice things to the teacher or tells the teacher to eff off: ‘I don’t care if the kid tells the teacher to eff off, I’ve got bigger problems to worry about.’ That is my personal perspective.

**Michael GALEA:** You touched on substance abuse as well. I would like to ask you, given you have such a great experience of schools in this region – Rushie, Kialla Central, Tallygaroopna and others: again, just to touch on an earlier topic, two days ago we had an inquiry in Shepparton into vaping and we heard from some high school students. One of the interesting things for me that came out of that was how some of these kids that are vaping are starting in primary school. I would like to know from you if you are seeing that, and at what age, what year level is this starting?

**Kathleen PARRY:** The answer is yes, I am absolutely seeing that. In the primary schools that are straight primary schools I am not seeing it half as much. Not all of my P–12 experiences are from Rushworth P–12. I want to make that really clear, because I have a lot of colleagues who teach at P–12s around the region, because there are a fair few of them around here. In preparation for this I talked to everybody. I was like, ‘Right, tell me everything.’ We are seeing it in P-12s because the older kids have vapes at school, because the older kids are selling vapes at school. They do not care who they are selling to. They will sell it to the year 3s. It is often not the prep–1s, because the prep–1s are often insulated by their teacher, and prep–1 teachers are often really good at that. They have their separate playground, they have their separate toilets – all of that. I have colleagues whose parents at the school are sending their kids with packets of vapes to sell to kids. We have year 9 kids turning up to school with a backpack full of vapes and selling them at lunchtime to whoever has got money for them.

**Michael GALEA:** I know my time is up, but you said not prep–1s. Does that mean as early as grade 2?

**Kathleen PARRY:** Sometimes. I have not heard it very often, but I know of at least one kid who was caught with a vape who was in year 2.

**Michael GALEA:** Just a few is very alarming at grade 2 especially.

**Kathleen PARRY:** It is really alarming.

**Michael GALEA:** For those that do take it up, what is the typical grade that they start doing it, though?

**Kathleen PARRY:** It is usually the high schools or late primary school –

**Michael GALEA:** So 5–6.

**Kathleen PARRY:** like year 5, year 6, because they see the year 7s and year 8s starting to get into it. The students that I see vaping the most are the 9–10s, which is still alarming because they are still, you know, 14, 15.

**Michael GALEA:** Absolutely.

**Kathleen PARRY:** It is still alarming, but not as alarming as year 7, year 6, year 5, year 4, year 3. But it definitely happens. It is not ‘Everybody’s doing it; we’re all panicking’. But if a colleague texted me and said, ‘Oh, yeah, I caught a year 4 student vaping,’ I would be like, ‘Oh, no,’ but I would not be surprised.

**Michael GALEA:** Very interesting. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you. Thank you so much for your presentation. One of the things you said was that it is a good day if you do not get assaulted at work. That is horrific. What you said then is that there is no clear consequence. Then if there is a consequence dished out, and this is I guess what I want clarified, you do not feel supported by the department.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes. That is really dependent on the school. Again, some of the things I am talking about are stories from my colleagues, because I do not want to just talk about me. Of course this is a widespread thing that you are inquiring into, so I texted everybody saying, ‘Tell me everything.’ Yes, for some of my colleagues at some schools in the region it is a good day when nobody gets hit. That is mostly high schools. However, at one of the schools I was teaching at in Melbourne we developed a reputation for being really good at helping kids with autism, which we were. That is fantastic. But then we started getting a lot of enrolments with really extreme behaviours, and for a short time there it was a really good week for me when I did not get hit. That is not necessarily because the kids were malicious. It was just because the school was not equipped with the resources and the staffing and the training to help all those kids with such a wide spectrum of needs. We are really seeing that with the closure of a lot of specialist schools for kids with really specific needs.

Public schools are great and generalist schools are great, and we do great things for some kids with different needs, especially things like neurodivergence and specialist health conditions and that sort of thing. There are a lot of great things happening, but also as a generalist teacher I have a lot of training and experience with kids with autism because my stepson is autistic and my brother is. But I also have 20 other kids in the class, and it is really difficult to manage those extremes. Some of the violence in high school is because of just general behaviour management, all of that, but some of it is that kids bully kids who have other needs. They know which triggers to poke at, and they deliberately provoke those kids to have meltdowns. That is a whole other issue.

**Renee HEATH:** If a teacher is assaulted by a student, what is then the process? Do they get sent to the principal’s office? Do they get sent to a counsellor?

**Kathleen PARRY:** It depends a lot on the school. In most schools that I have taught at and colleagues have taught at, if there is an incident in your classroom that is an extreme behaviour, like someone getting hurt, the student is either asked to leave the classroom or someone is sent to the office. In some schools you send an email to a group of leadership who come and retrieve the student having the issue, depending on the behaviour management policies that that specific school has. If the school is already overwhelmed, which a lot of them are, and if the school is experiencing a staffing shortage, which a lot of them are, you send out that email, you send that kid to the office, and sometimes there is nobody there. Sometimes the principal comes in half an hour later, when everything has already either escalated way out of control or the teacher has managed to calm everything down. Then, depending on how overwhelmed the teacher is and how overwhelmed the school is – and that is probably the problem, because we are all overwhelmed filling out the documentation. ‘This is what happened. This is how it happened. This is what happened afterwards. This is how the person got injured,’ – if

you have time for that, awesome. Then there is often a specific consequence based on the behaviour management policy. Great. But if you are like, 'Okay, it happened period 1. Someone threw a drink bottle and it hit me in the shoulder. I mean, it's just a little bruise; it's fine. I can't be bothered. I've got three other classes to teach. Little Johnny over there is already having a little problem. I need to go put that fire out. I have got yard duty. I need to eat some lunch. I'm busting to go to the toilet.' Sometimes the reason the incident is not followed up is because you are like, 'It's not that bad. I'm just going to live with it.' I understand that that is not the school's fault. That is not the department's fault necessarily. It is all of the other things.

Thank you for asking. It sounds really horrific, and it is really horrific. But also part of it is, and I do not want to blame – I have done it. I have been hurt at school and gone, 'You know what, it's not that bad. It's fine. I'm just going to let it go.' You impact your own behaviour management consequence on that student. Maybe they do not get to participate in something that you are doing. Maybe they have to sit out. Maybe they have to –

**Renee HEATH:** But maybe we need an easier system of reporting.

**Kathleen PARRY:** There is a lot of paperwork. At Rushie P-12 – this is not a school that I am talking about for a specific incident – if something happens, I get on to our learning management system, Compass, I click on the class, I click on the student, and there is a form, which is like a page long of 'Here's the triggers, here's the tick box of where it was and when it was and what time it was and who was there'. Then you search for the student and you click on the student, and then you type the incident. Then you type that, and then that gets sent to leadership. If you do get injured, you also have to get onto eduSafe, and then you log it on eduSafe, where you have to log in – if it is working. And it becomes too hard. You are like, 'I already have to do all of the other things.' Maybe that is something – an easier way of really quickly logging or even somebody whose job it is to log it. You have a quick 5-minute phone call: 'Hey, this happened. Here are the details,' and they take notes and they log it for you. That is a suggestion that colleagues have said: 'Hey, maybe we could outsource this paperwork.' Even disability inclusion stuff, if we can outsource some of that paperwork – maybe there is a person in the school whose job it is. Maybe there is someone from the department whose job it is that we call up and say, 'Right, here's what I'm doing,' and they take notes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I am mindful of time, but we still have got two members who would like to ask some questions. Ms Deeming?

**Moira DEEMING:** Thank you so much. It is obvious that you do not actually look down on parents, even though you see this.

**Kathleen PARRY:** No. Parents are amazing.

**Moira DEEMING:** That is right. Some do, and you have got a lot of sympathy for them. You have got so much respect for your students and their families, and I think that is wonderful. I really enjoyed listening to you. I was going to ask the same question everyone else has about what the best policy settings are that you could see that could help schools deal with this, because there are all these outside issues that come in that you cannot change. You cannot change any of that. You might not even be able to get better help from the department. You know how sometimes when you are a teacher there is no point sending your kid out. You might as well just use your own tools and your own tool belt, because it is just not even worth the hassle and it is going to backfire, because you will look even less in charge, because they will get a hot chocolate or something or whatever.

I was wondering: what do you think can be done about that, and what do you think about setting standards like they have in other workplaces where teachers have a right to a safe working environment? We know that making teachers safer will actually make all the students safer, because none of the students feel safe when the reasonable adult is not actually in charge, because if the teacher is not safe, they cannot keep you safe. What do you think about starting from that kind of an approach, like a principles-based approach? Do you have any other ideas about policies for that at a school level, so not relying on anybody else?

**Kathleen PARRY:** The short answer is yes, and that is why I brought up my notes. One of the things that we just mentioned was someone else doing the paperwork. There is immense value of course in me being the person who was there for the incident doing the paperwork, filling out the incident form; that is obviously the best practice. However, if I am trying to calm down a prep student who remembered the bad dream that they had last night and 12 other things, doing that is another thing. So if I can tell somebody about it really quickly, because I am sure you have noticed I am very good at talking very quickly and rambling on – thank you for

your patience – that might be a good solution, just to have somebody that you can go to and say, ‘Hey, can you fill out this for me?’ ‘Done.’ It is having enough staff and, even in a small school – you have got your principal; great – having an assistant principal who can be called on for incidents like that, even to help with the paperwork. Maybe it is the assistant principal whose job it is to fill out the paperwork and go deal with ‘Such and such is having problems’.

**Moira DEEMING:** So like an allocated staff member actually whose job is not to teach; their job is not to do these things but to be there to support the teachers maybe.

**Kathleen PARRY:** At Rushie P–12 we have a social worker. She is fantastic. We love having her, and that is one of the things that she does. But in primary schools we do not have that. We have a social worker that comes around who services a ridiculous number of schools. We might see her once a term maybe. So having more support people like that who can –

**Moira DEEMING:** On the ground.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Yes. That would be fantastic, and that is maybe something that is easier to recruit because it is not teaching.

**Moira DEEMING:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Mr McCracken.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** I have just been listening to your evidence. It is really powerful, and I can tell that you are a passionate, caring teacher. That just comes through really clearly, so I want to congratulate you on that.

**Kathleen PARRY:** Thank you.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** I will try and fire through a few quick things.

**Kathleen PARRY:** I will try and be quick.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** As you said, there are so many things to talk about in limited time. I apologise. I would love to talk for hours. I am sure you might as well.

**Kathleen PARRY:** I am very good at talking.

**Joe McCRACKEN:** The first thing you talked about, differentiation in PD – I think the PD system in itself is not really effective in the way that it helps teachers. It does not really individualise – individualise, that would be beautiful, but even differentiating is a good thing. A lot of school-based PD, in my experience, is a waste of time. Would you say that?

**Kathleen PARRY:** A waste of time is really strong, and I am incredibly biased because I am a specialist teacher. But the amount of maths PDs that I have sat through and maths planning meetings that I have sat through, and I am like, ‘I love this maths program. I can see that it is a great maths program. I love that I now know about this –’

**Joe McCRACKEN:** You are never going to use it.

**Kathleen PARRY:** ‘but this is not relevant to me.’ And that is really school-dependent. For example, the school I was at yesterday were looking at their maths planner for the term. So we talked about general business, and then they were like, ‘Right, we’re going to look at the maths planner. See you later, Kat.’ I am like, ‘Excellent. I love you guys.’

Rushie P–12 did visible wellbeing, which is a great program. I loved it; however, I have been to therapy more than twice, and therefore I knew everything that was discussed. I say that with all the respect in the world, but couldn’t I have taken a pretest and tested out of it? Some of the conversations were really valuable for me to be part of. And me having a lot of experience in the wellbeing space – because I am in the arts space and queer spaces and all those spaces – is really valuable for the other colleagues, but could we do that at the start and then I go home or even go to my classroom and do planning and then be called back for discussion time?

**Joe McCracken:** And part of that issue too – because I have seen it – is meetings for the sake of meetings, and sometimes it is just incredibly frustrating. Is that fair to say?

**Kathleen Parry:** The new agreement is fantastic in a lot of ways, but a lot of schools have seen that and gone, ‘Right. Okay, we are allowed to have this many meetings, so we will fill that meeting time.’ That is not all schools, but some schools have immediately gone, ‘Right, we’re allowed to have this many meetings, so therefore we will make this many meetings, whether we need them or not.’ I do not know what the solution is there.

**Joe McCracken:** It is usually a school.

**Kathleen Parry:** Yes, it is really school-dependent.

**Joe McCracken:** The last thing I want to talk about is that before you were talking about the relationship between teacher, parent and student. My experience as well has been that a lot of functions that a parent might usually undertake have been essentially outsourced to a school. I know that is a bit of a crude way of saying it, but that is essentially what it is. So teachers are not just teachers; they are social workers, they are mental health professionals – everything else. And that is a lot.

**Kathleen Parry:** It is.

**Joe McCracken:** Let alone all the administrative burden that teachers often have to take care of as well. I guess the question that I am trying to get at is how do you take away some of those things that teachers have to do? Is there a sense that you have to perhaps give some of those administrative functions to another separate role, or is it that we just stop doing some things?

**Kathleen Parry:** Yes, we could stop doing some things. Honestly, that is probably not going to happen in the next five or 10 years – short term. My suggested solution is to employ those people. I did not go to uni to become a counsellor or a speech pathologist or a physiotherapist, so can we please employ more speech pathologists and physiotherapists and OTs?

**Joe McCracken:** That is according to them too.

**Kathleen Parry:** Yes, there is a shortage. So how can we attract more of those guys? How can we make the referral system so that people actually get those services – more counsellors, more social workers, more OTs, more physios, more speechies?

**Joe McCracken:** Because taking that workload away from you would mean that you can actually focus on the thing that you are passionate about and you are good at.

**Kathleen Parry:** That would be great. The dental van and the glasses van came to us, and a bunch of our kids needed glasses, and now they can see the board and they are doing okay – wow! So programs like that, where kids get free dental care and optometry care and that come to the school in remote areas, are really valuable. Funding for things like that is really valuable because that is one more thing that schools are expected to provide, and making it actual professionals, not teachers, is great.

**Joe McCracken:** I am sorry; my time has run out, but I reckon we could talk for a lot longer.

**Kathleen Parry:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Kathleen. I am sure we could sit here for much longer. I know we have gone a bit over time, but I think it is important that we actually get as much information from you as possible given the time – we have another panel coming up. But it is fantastic that you have given us great insight with all your knowledge. I would have gone further in several respects – on codes of conduct and reporting incidents and stuff. There is a lot of information that we can generate in relation to our recommendations, so thank you very much for your time. It is much appreciated.

**Kathleen Parry:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Witness withdrew.**

