

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 12 June 2024

MEMBERS

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WITNESSES

Jo Briskey, National Political Coordinator, United Workers Union; and

Julie Hooper, School Cleaner, and

Mick Lynch, School Cleaner.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the state education system. We are here with representatives from the United Workers Union. I will just read out our brief opening statement.

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All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and 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 and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. I am joined by Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria; Joe McCracken, Member for Western Victoria; Rachel Payne, Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Richard Welch, Member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; and on Zoom, Aiv Puglielli, who is also a Member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

For the Hansard record, if each of you could please introduce yourselves and the name of the organisation you are representing.

Julie HOOPER: I am Julie, and I am a cleaner.

Jo BRISKEY: Jo Briskey, National Political Coordinator, United Workers Union.

Mick LYNCH: My name is Mick, and I am also a cleaner at one of the schools.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks very much. I now invite you to make an opening statement, and then the committee will ask you a series of questions.

Jo BRISKEY: Thank you very much, Chair and committee members, for inviting us here today. I will make some opening remarks and then throw to both Mick and Julie, who are the experts here with me today as cleaners in two of our great local primary schools.

We are here to talk about and help contribute to your deliberations on best practice models around education settings and how to improve student wellbeing, and as the national union for school cleaners we argue essential to learning outcomes and wellbeing are the cleanliness and safety of our schools. If this committee is to consider best practice, it cannot go past how this essential service of keeping our schools clean and safe must be and should be delivered by cleaners who are directly employed by government and thus have the time and resources to do their job. I can assure you that contracting out of this essential service, as has been the model here in Victoria since Jeff Kennett privatised this essential service, is far from best practice and is absolutely not what our schools deserve.

As the national union for school cleaners we are committed to winning and protecting well-paid, secure cleaning jobs across Australian schools. Our members in Queensland, Western Australia, the ACT and Tasmania are all directly employed by their relevant state governments, whereas cleaners in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia are employed by contract companies that government has outsourced the work to. The contrast in job security, in wages, in conditions and, importantly, the quality of school cleaning between those who are directly employed by their relevant education department and those who are contracted

out is stark, and that is why both Mick and Julie here, alongside many our school cleaners across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, are currently campaigning to see direct employment for school cleaners.

School cleaners are at the front line of keeping our schools clean and safe, and to do that, as I said, they need time and resources. But time and resources cannot compete against the central purpose of these corporations who clean our schools. Contract companies are run for profit, not for service. Cleaners are required to do more with less, and this places immense and unacceptable pressure on our cleaners and results in sub-quality services. As you will hear from both Julie and Mick today, to maintain their significant profit margins off the Victorian taxpayer these companies, like Serco, Tradeflex and others, are slashing hours, are limiting the cleaning equipment, are engaging in the overuse of subcontractors and are telling schools that they need to cut back their services, they need to cut back hours, because the government does not fund their contract properly. This is what is happening right now. This is the reality of the state of the contracted-out model of school cleaning in Victoria, and we will continue to fight until we see school cleaners directly employed.

I will hand over now to Julie and to Mick, who can talk directly to their experience, what is going on and why it is so important that we see this essential service brought back in house. Julie, I might throw to you.

Julie HOOPER: I am a cleaner. I have been a cleaner for over 20 years cleaning schools. I love cleaning schools, because you watch the kids grow up. It is at the stage where I am embarrassed to say I am a school cleaner because the standard has gone down that much. We are losing hours. In school holidays we are told we have to take holidays, with or without pay. If you have got no holiday pay, you are not going to get paid. Then we go back, and we have got a week to get the school back up to scratch. It is not happening.

I have got contractors coming in, which is taking my time from cleaning because I have to tell them what to do. The other day one of the cleaners that I was working with – her cord was all tied up, which she had only had for two days and which is a health and safety issue. What do I do? Common sense tells you that if wires are showing in your extension cord, you need a new one. I had to tell her. She has got 3 hours to clean her half of the school, and she is doing it in 2. I know for a fact that just the office alone, if you clean it correctly, will take you an hour. So for the rest of the time what is she doing? For an hour she is sitting doing nothing. I told my supervisor this is what is happening. They said, ‘Well, I can’t do anything about it.’ I have seen what she is doing in the classrooms. There are papers on the floor, which she could use a vacuum to suck up.

The toilets are not being cleaned properly, because we do not have the time to do it properly. So even if you lose half an hour – you know yourself when you are cleaning your house that in half an hour you can do a lot. Just think: if you have lost 2, 3 hours from cleaning your section of the school, how bad is it going to be. I have seen rats at my school. Now, which one of you people would like to send their kids to school where there is a rat? I can tell you now, none of you would want that for your child. This is the worst I have ever seen it. As I have said, I am embarrassed to say I am a cleaner, because the school is not clean – because I have not got the time to clean it and because they are taking away half of the school holidays, which we use to make sure the school is spotless and catch up on the things that were not done. Now I have got less time there. If you are looking at it and the schools are not clean, the kids are going to get sick and the teachers are going to get sick.

And with the contractors coming in, when does that stop? Are we going to have doctors that are contracted in to do a doctor’s job? Who is next? I am not guaranteed a job next year. If this company loses the contract, in the new contract there are no guarantees that I have got a job. That is the end for me working. No-one is going to hire me at my age. Then if we keep the same contractors that we have got, we lose again because we are losing hours. I appreciate the time that you have given me to listen to what I have had to say. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, Julie.

Mick LYNCH: I will just follow on. Like I said, Mick is the name, and I will just follow on from what Julie said there. Everything that she said is 100 per cent and way above. With this particular outsourcing to these contract mobs, whether it be ISS in the past or Serco in the future or whatever might happen from here, before I go on to comments, I just want to know, has the government paid this new contract mob, ISS and Tradeflex, exactly the same amount of funds they paid the previous contractor? Am I correct with that? Do you know that? So there has been no cutting of the funding to the school cleaning – would you guys know that off the cuff? Okay. Well, from what I have been led to believe, there has been no cutting, okay? So it is the same funding to the new company that has taken over from ISS, and the only reason they left in the past was because they were

not offered longer term. They turned around and said, 'We're not doing it for 12 months. It's a shemozzle. We're going.' And then the Labor government has all of a sudden grabbed hold of these two mobs, Tradeflex and Serco, which are only in it for the money, no other reason – no care, no consideration for kids, teachers, principals, nothing. I know that for a fact. They are in it for the money.

As is my understanding, there has been no cut in the funds, so therefore this company have come in and all of a sudden they have taken people like Julie, me and every other cleaner we have got and said, 'Youse are doing a great job with your 4 hours, your 5 hours, your 6 hours, whatever you've got at that school,' and they have cut it in half to make money. As Julie said, two weeks to do deep cleans every school holidays, which needs to be done for things that cannot be done during the appropriate times – they have cut that in half. You are taking a week off, whether you like it or not. I know it is in the contract to say they can shut you down, and they are doing it. They are doing everything they can to save a bloody dollar – pardon my French.

But we are getting back to the basics here, and this is all about – and I have said it from day one – the safety of your children, your grandchildren, your nieces, your nephews, whatever. They go to school expecting to go to a clean school. If a cleaner's hours have been cut in half or a quarter or whatever, they have got toilets, they have got classrooms, they have got carpets, they have got all sorts of shit. These companies are not taking into account any little misdemeanours that might happen. They are not allowing for kids throwing up. They are not allowing for kids getting hurt on the basketball court and bleeding everywhere. This has not been thrown into the time given for each particular cleaner to do per night. Three hours is ridiculous. If you take your stuff out of a cleaning room and you go across to the back half of the school, number one, it will take you 10 minutes to get across there with all your cleaning equipment. By the time you get it all set up you are looking at possibly 20 minutes to start on a 3-hour cleaning contract and 20 minutes to pack it all up again and take it back to a cleaning room. There is basically three-quarters of an hour gone before you even do anything.

Now, what my beef here again is in regard to the health and safety of these children. They expect to go into clean rooms. They expect their classrooms to be clean. They expect their toilets to be clean, not blocked because they have not had time to unblock toilets and all that sort of stuff. That should be done in government schools. Kids are people's priority. Then you have got your teachers' health and safety, and at my particular school and every school around the place at the moment, teachers are dropping like ninepins. The lady was saying here before, previous to us, about these relief teachers coming in. We have got them at our school and every school in Victoria, and the kids are not sure who is Arthur or Martha. One minute they have got one teacher, then they have got another teacher and then another teacher. And they will make a mess – kids make a mess. It has got to be cleaned. Now, personally I take pride, and my team at my school take pride, in keeping schools clean for the kids and the teachers. It is very hard to do with limited time.

The bottom line also here is when we are talking about the children's safety and all that sort of stuff, I do not think this government realises – and I am being honest here – that these kids are still eating in their classrooms. Since COVID hit, kids used to eat inside if they were at school. Now a lot of the schools – I do not know if it is every school, but in primary schools, the kids are still eating in the classroom, which means a mess on the floor, rubbish bins chock-a-block and food on the tables. These outsourcing companies say you do not have to do tables every day of the week. You do not have to vacuum every night of the week. Twice a week you vacuum. Three times a week you wipe down the table. Try and get your bins emptied. Julie was talking about rats. If you have got rubbish bins full of bloody food, you are going to get rats. I am lucky enough; I have not seen too many, but the thing is kids are saying that they have seen things running around.

The bottom line here, guys – and this is from me on behalf of a lot of cleaners – is we have got to go back to the hours we had. If you want your schools clean and up to scratch and in the right conditions for your kids to go to, you have got to pay the hours to get the cleaners to do the job. There is no point saying, 'Oh, well, do half a job'. That does not work with me. Half a job with me does not work. It is the full job or it is nothing. I will not keep harping on and harping on and harping on, but the bottom line is they have got to do something about it, and at the moment it is a ridiculous scenario. What is really in the gun here is the health and safety of our kids. So you can make your assessments on that. Thank you very much for your time.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks very much for the presentation. I might just start off. Jo, you mentioned things were changed in the 1990s. What has been the trajectory of the policy about school cleaning since that time? How has it changed, and what has been made better and worse over that period? What do you want to see from here?

Jo BRISKEY: Sure. Thank you. Before the decision was made cleaners were directly employed by their schools. They were members of the school community and were seen as an essential part of the school. When it was decided to privatise school cleaning, it then moved to independent contractors, so small independently run contractors, which is still the case in regional Victoria. What we saw over the course of that time, depending on the contract, depending on the school, was a lot of variation around the quality – well, not just the quality of the cleaning but also the quality of the employment and the job and the wages. We saw that in particular a lot of wage theft was quite rife over that time. So in 2017–18 the government moved to a larger scale operation, as we see here in metro Melbourne, directly engaging with larger companies like Serco, ISS, Tradeflex – these are service delivery companies that do a lot of work across a lot of government areas, both state and federal – with the intention of there being larger scale contracts so there was a greater opportunity for scrutiny around the wages and conditions of those workers. However, over that time, despite seeking to improve the conditions of work, we have seen these companies time and time again, as Mick quite rightly said, seek to maximise the profit margin that they can garner off government contracts, and the best way to do that is to cut back on the wages and conditions of those doing the work.

What we have also seen over the course of this period is a significant increase in subcontracting. Julie and Mick will attest to how previously you might have subcontractors come in because they were doing a specialised bit of cleaning that they had the equipment to do and the skills to do, but now what we are seeing increasingly is that it is an easier way to cut, again, back the wages bill for these companies. So they are employing subcontractors who are just bringing in friends of theirs to do the work for less wages, and the quality again is cut in half.

What we are seeing increasingly, and it is on a downward trajectory to be perfectly honest, is that no matter what government can do to strengthen contracts, there is no way of getting around the fact that at every opportunity there is a change in contract. A new incoming contractor will seek to ensure that they can maximise their profit margin. They will look to cut back hours. They will look to cut the resources that they provide to cleaners. We have got experienced cleaners who are being told, ‘We’re not going to replace this particular piece of equipment’ – in particular the equipment that is needed to clean big school halls. ‘You can just mop with a standard mop.’ That is not, one, worth the effort. The time it takes to do that – but also the quality and also the safety for cleaners who are being asked to do that without the proper equipment are just abhorrent.

These are the reasons why United Workers Union has been campaigning and will continue to do so both here in Victoria and also in New South Wales and South Australia: so government actually recognise that this is an essential service that should be delivered by government to take away the profit margin imperative that currently exists by contracting out this service and actually deliver it in-house, and so we bring back the opportunity for cleaners to be properly recognised and valued for the work that they do and actually be seen as integral members of the school community.

Mick LYNCH: And job security as well.

Jo BRISKEY: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Welch, do you want to ask a question?

Richard WELCH: Yes, just a couple of quick questions. Thank you for coming in. I was up in Research on Monday – beautiful school. I went past your school, and it is a beautiful school.

Mick LYNCH: You have been to my school, have you? Okay.

Richard WELCH: Who in the school is responsible for the cleaning standards? Is it the principal walking around and observing the standards? Who monitors?

Mick LYNCH: With the previous subcontractor, they had leading hands. The new contract mob now do not believe in leading hands, but they will appoint someone. In my particular case I am the leading hand of the school I am at. I foresee the cleaning of the particular school. There are three of us. Our particular management in the company do not come near the school. They have left it to me. So basically, if the school has got a problem, the principal will speak to me and I will speak to my guys. Luckily enough, we have not really got that particular problem. But in house you will probably find there is a senior cleaner that will actually look after the actual potential cleaning of the school.

Richard WELCH: But the principal is your point of contact in that –

Mick LYNCH: The principal, yes.

Richard WELCH: if the principal is unhappy with the quality of the cleaning, they should be escalating the matter or –

Mick LYNCH: Well, if the principal is unhappy with the cleaning, they will get in contact with our management. They have got what they call a communications book, and they can write down anything that is not right and all that sort of stuff. At the moment there are a lot of things – and it is not the cleaners' fault, because they just have not got the time – not being done that should be done with the school cleaning.

Richard WELCH: And are you at the school all day and then other contractors come in in the evening, or is it all evening?

Mick LYNCH: No, at my particular school there are three of us. We have got our shifts. We do that so we are there in the afternoon. We clean when the kids finish. We have got a cleaner, and that is it. That is it now until we come back the next afternoon.

Richard WELCH: Is that typical of all schools?

Mick LYNCH: Well, as far as I know, it is, yes.

Jo BRISKEY: Yes, probably.

Julie HOOPER: With my school, we have got two cleaners, and one of us has got 3 hours to clean their half of the school. It is a contractor, but she does it in 2 hours, so I do not know how she does that. With my section I get 3½ hours, and that is it.

Richard WELCH: This is after school hours, not through the day.

Julie HOOPER: No. When school is finished, I have got 3½ hours to do half of the school, which you cannot do. It takes you an hour just to clean the toilets. I cannot take that hour. I have to cut that back so I can do everything else. So nothing is being done properly.

Mick LYNCH: Just on that one, Richard, as they said, because we do not come back until the following evening, if anything happens during the day in that particular school, unless one of the teachers wants to leave a class and go and mop a toilet, guess what happens when we walk in? The kids have got to walk through all sorts of stuff.

Richard WELCH: So what do they do? Do they close the toilets at that point, or what do they do?

Mick LYNCH: Well, they have got their classrooms, mate. We have got a maintenance man, but this is a completely different ball game, and he reckons it is not his department.

Julie HOOPER: It gets left.

Mick LYNCH: It is basically not being controlled.

Julie HOOPER: I had vomit in a classroom that happened in the morning. I had to clean it at 3:30 in the afternoon, and it was just left there with sand on top.

Mick LYNCH: Put some sand on it and put a chair over the top of it and wait until the cleaner comes in, which is really not hygienic in anybody's standards.

Julie HOOPER: Mind-blowing, isn't it?

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Payne.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Thank you for coming in and talking to us today. I think, Julie, you summed it up by saying common sense is not prevailing here. I am trying to understand: with the contractors coming in, it seems like contractors are moving around different schools as well. There is no continuity there. You mentioned that you are having to oversee or train people and give directions to different contractors.

Julie HOOPER: Well, I will put it to you this way – a contractor does not have a uniform, but the contractor that was with me wears a Serco uniform. But they are not Serco, they are a contractor.

Jo BRISKEY: A subcontractor.

Julie HOOPER: Yes, a subcontractor. So why are they wearing that uniform? Why haven't they got their own personal uniform? The office say to me, 'Who's this?' No-one has rung me up and said, 'Expect this person,' and given me a name. They just come to me and say, 'We're from Sunrise. I'm here to clean.' 'I have no idea who you are, mate.' They have not even got a card with 'Sunrise' on there saying that they are an employee, so it could be anybody.

Rachel PAYNE: Yes, and there is no continuity there if you do not know who is turning up.

Julie HOOPER: Like, if I have got a contractor, why haven't they got a uniform so I can say, 'Okay, well there's a uniform, there's the ID. It's safe to let this person near the kids.'

Rachel PAYNE: You talked about, obviously with union representation, how you are trying to be directly employed by the school again. I really appreciate that that creates not only a good working relationship but that assurance of your job security. What are the schools reporting back to you? Is that something that they are saying that they are wanting to advocate for as well?

Mick LYNCH: First of all, in my particular school I am a lucky person in that I have got a very good relationship with the principal. We are basically classified as a family at that school, so we have got a good working relationship, which helps under the conditions. On that question, you said there – sorry, what was the question again?

Rachel PAYNE: Are the schools willing to advocate for that position as well? Do they want to take back those contracts and have that direct working –

Mick LYNCH: The previous principal that was there was where I am and the principal today. When we did the advocating for going back to be direct by the government, they were all for it because they thought there would be better security for their cleaners, who are a big part of the school. They were looking at our job security because they had good cleaners in the school and they wanted their school clean. So they were trying to do the right thing, have the perfect circle, as in a family-type school, and personally I am lucky enough that I am in one of them. My school was for it, and I presume a lot of the other schools are all for the direct employment.

Julie HOOPER: Yes, my school was for it.

Jo BRISKEY: Just to offer in terms of overarching, we have been doing a lot of work and participated as part of the review that the Victorian government did last year into school cleaning, where it was clear both from representatives of teachers and of principals that the quality of cleaning that is happening right now is subpar at best. They all recognised a need to bring direct employment and for the provision of this cleaning service to be done by government, taking, as I say, that profit margin motivation out of it. Everyone recognised that that is the only way that you can ensure a quality service. I should say I am very fortunate that Mick is actually the cleaner at my kids' school, and the difference that it makes having someone like Mick and the interaction with the school community is significant. But I know, speaking to Vassie, as a school parent talking with the principal, she is like, 'I find it so difficult dealing with Serco and the amount that they are telling me that they need to cut hours. That's just their position. It's impossible for me to ensure that this school remains clean.' As a parent, that makes me leave feeling really concerned at the prospect of our school not getting the cleaning service that it deserves, notwithstanding that Mick is a brilliant cleaner.

Mick LYNCH: Thanks, Jo.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you.

Mick LYNCH: No worries.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. When I taught at a state school, the three most important groups of people were the librarian, the lab tech and the cleaners. They were the people that I always wanted to make friends with, because they would help you out on all those different levels. The cleaner would often put the heater on in advance of you going in there, and that was very, very important. So thank you very much for the work you do – thank you literally for the work you do.

A question to you, Jo. It would be good for us to understand a profile. You mentioned that the city has X contracts and then the regions are different. Probably as a question on notice, could you provide to the committee a profile of cleaning in this state?

Jo BRISKEY: Yes, absolutely.

Melina BATH: That is my only on notice question.

Jo BRISKEY: I can do that, yes.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Great. Thank you, Ms Bath. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Thank you for everything you have shared with the committee today. It has been a really clear picture that you have painted of what is going on in terms of cleaning schools right now. At the end of this process we are going to have a report with recommendations for government. Just so we can have it explicitly clear, to check off: cleaning jobs should not be outsourced?

Jo BRISKEY: Correct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Correct. Good. You should be hired as school staff, ongoing?

Jo BRISKEY: They should be directly employed by the education department, so managed through Victorian education, yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Perfect. Okay, great. Thank you. You should receive proper pay and conditions for what is essential work for the school community?

Jo BRISKEY: Correct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay.

Mick LYNCH: And the correct hours.

Jo BRISKEY: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I am going to say: anything less than that being in the report, would that be a failure in your eyes?

Jo BRISKEY: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Perfect. I think that is quite clear. Thank you, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Easy. Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you all for your contributions. Mick and Julie in particular, on the front line, you strike me as very salt-of-the-earth, no-rubbish sorts of people, straight shooters who will say things as they are, and I have really appreciated hearing directly from you guys about what you are experiencing on the ground. I guess my question, if I can ask both of you, is: you have raised these concerns about the issues that

you are experiencing in schools, and it seems to me you have raised them in a very considered, thoughtful way. It seems to be pretty reasonable to me. Why do you think the government continues to ignore you, though?

Mick LYNCH: Can I answer that?

Jo BRISKEY: Go for it.

Mick LYNCH: Sorry for taking over, but I do not think they have ignored us. My personal opinion is they have put it on the back burner. They have put the blame on insufficient funds; Victoria is in a dire state regarding coin. But what I cannot get my head around – and I was not born yesterday – is if they are willing to pay outsourcing contractors X amount of dollars to do a job and the job is not being done, why wouldn't they pay direct through the government to cleaners and get it done properly?

Joe McCRACKEN: Well, that is what I am trying to tease out – why is that situation being ignored?

Mick LYNCH: I think they have put it in the too-hard basket, mate, to be honest. That is my honest opinion. It is too hard. It is too difficult. It is too hard to sort out. It is a lot easier just to flick it around the corner to a contract mob and say, 'Well, if it backfires or it bites us on the bum, that's your problem.'

Joe McCRACKEN: I get the sense that this is not necessarily about money, because as you say, the funding has not changed.

Mick LYNCH: No.

Joe McCRACKEN: So it is about practice – how things actually happen.

Mick LYNCH: Yes, exactly. See, what happens is the money situation, the pay rate, is the same as the previous company; there is no doubt about that. But they have chopped the hours in half. What they have been trying to do is get the same work done in half the time. So whereas it would take someone 5 hours to do a job – in Julie's case, getting 3; I get 3½ in mine. I have got a 5-hour job. I do the security and all sorts of stuff around the school. What they have basically done is they are paying the cleaners half what they should be getting and they are pocketing the other half. Now, if the government are quite willing to let a contract mob do that and they are paying them to do that, mate, something has got to be looked at.

Joe McCRACKEN: Well, that is what I am sort of trying to tease out too, because the government obviously know what is going on – or they should. That seems to be a situation that is being ignored as well, and you would have to ask the question: well, why?

Mick LYNCH: This is one of the reasons why we are here, to find out why.

Joe McCRACKEN: Exactly. It seems to just be quite bizarre. I can see both of you are incredibly committed to the work that you are doing, because ultimately it impacts the terms of reference that we are talking about, in particular about supporting young people having a safe environment to learn in that is clean and not full of rats, for goodness sake.

Jo BRISKEY: Yes.

Julie HOOPER: The way I look at it is like this: I have been there nearly four years. I have watched the kids grow. They come up to me. They call me Julia – my name is Julie, but for some unknown reason, I am Julia – and I answer to that, and they will hug me. It is like my grandkids are there, and it breaks my heart to watch it, knowing we cannot do anything.

Joe McCRACKEN: Poor thing. I feel so sorry for you. What is your one message to the government?

Julie HOOPER: Fix it. Just fix it.

Joe McCRACKEN: Thanks for your work, Julie. It really should be valued more than what it is.

Julie HOOPER: Sorry.

Joe McCRACKEN: Do not apologise at all.

Mick LYNCH: It definitely needs to be fixed. I am sorry for pinching the last line, but we're all human. We have all got kids. The bottom line is the kids are suffering. They are the ones that are going to suffer in the long run. They are the ones that are – well, they are not growing up in the dirt, but they should be in a lot cleaner rooms. The money is there to get the cleaners to get the classrooms and schools clean.

Joe McCracken: And as you say, Mick, it is a matter of a practice rather than the money itself, and it is the way is allocated and the way it is spent that could be a lot better.

Mick LYNCH: I have seen some of the cleaners that have actually tried to get everything they can get done in the limited time they have got, and you see Julie there is crying, because it is hitting home. It is emotional stuff. I have played a lot of footy; I am a pretty hard sort of a bugger, and it gets to me too, seeing some of these kids. They cannot get in the toilet because it is flooded.

Joe McCracken: Or vomit on the ground or other horrible things that you do not want to see.

Mick LYNCH: It is just the little things on the side that they do not take into account when they are paying the hours to do the job. They just do not take into account the things that might happen in a playground.

Joe McCracken: And this is 21st-century Australia.

Mick LYNCH: A hundred per cent.

Julie Hooper: You try and tell the company, 'We haven't got enough time.' The big boss – I spoke to her, and she went, 'What's the problem? Why do you need more time?' I started to tell her, and all she did was talk over the top of me. And I lost my temper, and I used the F word, and I said, 'You're not listening. You don't care. Why did you ask the question if you don't want the answer?' As an employee, I do not want to swear at anybody, but if you get pushed that much where that word comes out of your mouth out of sheer frustration, there is something wrong – seriously wrong.

Joe McCracken: Yes. I think my time is up, sorry. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Yes, we are out of time, but Julie, Nick and Jo, thanks so much for coming in today. It has been a really important contribution to the deliberations of this committee. You will get some transcripts of evidence to review shortly. With that we will take a short break.

Witnesses withdrew.