

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Public School Funding

Melbourne – Thursday 12 March 2026

MEMBERS

Joe McCracken – Chair

Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Renee Heath

Ann-Marie Hermans

Rachel Payne

Lee Tarlamis

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Gail McHardy, Chief Executive Officer, Parents Victoria.

The CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the public hearing of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I declare the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee public hearing into the Inquiry into Public School Funding in Victoria open. Please ensure that all mobile phones are switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to acknowledge the original custodians of the land, the Aboriginal peoples, and pay respects to elders past, present and emerging.

We will go through and introduce our committee members. I am Joe McCracken, Chair.

Michael GALEA: Good morning. Michael Galea, Deputy Chair.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ryan Batchelor, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good morning. Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: Gail, we might also have some members appear online. Some are having internet issues. If you see some come in, do not worry about it; it is meant to be like 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 the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by that 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 transcripts will ultimately be made public and put on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, Gail, can you please state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Gail McHARDY: My name is Gail McHardy. I am the CEO of Parents Victoria, representing parents in Victorian government schools.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thanks so much. I invite you to make a verbal submission of about 5 minutes or thereabouts, then we will get into questions. Gail, welcome, and I hand over to you.

Gail McHARDY: Thank you very much, committee, and thank you, Chair. Parents Victoria represents families in Victorian government schools. Last year, 2025, marked our centenary as a voice for public education. Our submission makes a simple point: Victorian public schools are being funded below the schooling resource standard, commonly known as the SRS, which governments themselves defined as the minimum level needed to meet student needs. The decision to delay Victoria reaching its agreed contribution to that standard until 2031 effectively removes around \$2.4 billion that had previously been expected for government schools. Just as a reminder to everyone, by contrast with the other states and territories, Victorian public schools do not have their share of the SRS increased; it will remain at their 2023 and 2024 levels for 2025 and 2026 because of the political stand-off. The Commonwealth share will remain at 20 per cent of the SRS instead of gradually increasing its share to 25 per cent from 2025, as for the other states, and the ACT and the Victorian government have refused to increase its funding share. As a result, their SRS funding share will have stayed the same for four years. Four years without an increase is diabolical for public schools.

From a parents' perspective, the consequences are real. Underfunding shows up in staffing shortages, reduced support staff, growing wellbeing needs and a heavy reliance on parent payments and fundraising. The massive underfunding of public schools is a key factor in poor outcomes for disadvantaged students and the huge achievement gap between rich and poor. Significant improvement in school outcomes for disadvantaged

students is dependent on increased funding for public schools, and there have been many research studies over the past 20 years showing that money matters in school education, especially for our disadvantaged students. Parents Victoria is seeking fairness, transparency and delivery of commitments already made so that public school students receive the minimum level of funding governments themselves agree is necessary.

Parents Victoria would like to emphasise these following key points to the committee: the SRS is the minimum standard governments agreed was necessary, yet government public schools are still below it; it is not aspirational. Every year funding is delayed schools have to make compromises that affect school students today. Funding delayed is funding denied, and public schools educate the largest proportion of disadvantaged students, making adequate funding critical. Parents Victoria asks the committee to recommend a clear public explanation of why full funding has been delayed, accelerated progress toward full SRS funding, ending a reliance on short-term interim agreements and transparent reporting on classroom impacts of underfunding. Parents are not asking for special treatment; we are asking governments to deliver the funding standard they themselves agreed to. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Gail. We are just going to run through questions now. I will hand over to Mr Galea first. He will start off, and then I will go after him.

Michael GALEA: Good morning, Ms McHardy. Thanks very much for joining us today. Just at the outset as well, I am wondering if you could just give me a little bit of a quick outline of the role that Parents Vic play, the history of the organisation, how many members you have and where your advocacy has sort of come from, if you can explain that.

Gail McHARDY: Well, a very longstanding history, and all that information is on our website, as you could appreciate. But as you could understand, every Victorian government school potentially can be a member of the organisation, and many of them are registered members, as in either being parent direct contacts or a representative from the school. Just to give you a bit of an example of that, it is a free membership now, because obviously we did not want anything to be a barrier to parents to be able to belong to a state organisation to represent their views in public education. You only have to google our position on this topic, and we have a lot of information on our website in that regard. The only reason I refer to the website is because I know time is valuable here, and I want the questions to be spent focused purely on why the delay and the denial of funding to our public schools.

Michael GALEA: Indeed. Just quickly then, your membership is based off individual parents joining or school committees or PTAs joining or both?

Gail McHARDY: Both.

Michael GALEA: Yes. Thank you. Can you talk to me about the relationship that you have with the government and specifically the Department of Education and any conversations that you have had with them about this topic?

Gail McHARDY: What we can tell you is that we are very fortunate that, regardless of who is in government, we have got high integrity and credibility; we always want to work with others, and that includes the current government. So there have been numerous conversations; the minister particularly is fully aware of our position on this, and even as publicly as at the VCOSS conference in October last year we made it very clear that we may be celebrating 100-year centenary, but we are still waiting for fully funded public schools, and that is a disgrace.

Michael GALEA: Would I be right to assume that you engage in advocacy with the federal government as well and the respective ministers and departments there, or is it just at the state level that you focus?

Gail McHARDY: We have a national body, which is ACSSO, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, but as their CEO I am usually sent as the representative from Victoria, so there have also been conversations with Jason Clare, as the federal minister, about this topic.

Michael GALEA: What do you hear through ACSSO and through your colleagues and what do you hear from your peers in other states about the states of their public education systems?

Gail McHARDY: I think frustration particularly as to why Victoria is lagging behind in this space and – it is very public – our financial situation in the state of Victoria. But that should not be an excuse. These are commitments that have been committed to for a very long time, these investments, but they continue to be delayed. Irrespective of the political persuasion, either at the federal level or the state level, the students should not be used as political pawns on the chessboard.

Michael GALEA: Indeed. Is it a simple, binary metric of that, or are there other factors as well that you see? I know there are obviously varied degrees of the NAPLAN results that we see our students and teachers have been able to secure in Victoria. I guess the point I am going towards is: what is the best way in which we can actually utilise this funding so that it is not just a case of ‘Okay, here’s filling this financial metric – done’? What do we actually do with that money in the most effective way so that it can further improve the results that we have for our students and for our teachers in the system?

Gail McHARDY: Well, unfortunately, schools do not get that high level of autonomy in that, in some way, because the agreements dictate the expectations on each of the states and territories for what their education systems have to deliver. So even though –

Michael GALEA: What would you like them to deliver, even at a state level?

Gail McHARDY: There is a whole range and list of things. Again, it is on the public record that we would love to see a range of things like family engagement officers in our state schools, particularly in order to assist and support schools in those relationships between families and schools, in order to free up the work burden on our teachers and our leadership. There is also public funding specifically in order to integrate wellbeing. Victoria, on the record, has had a number of initiatives and things that have made great headway, but those things have to be sustained. There may be some initial funding or some investment, but that has to be sustained on a continuum. Depending on the postcode and depending on the school and depending on certain ratios of staff and a whole range of different metrics, that depends on how that plays out in real time. Irrespective, people would love to think that all schools are equally being funded, but there is inequity within the system itself, and I am sure the principals would have a lot to say about that.

Michael GALEA: Indeed. I would like to actually ask you more about the family engagement officers, but my time is up, so I will pass back to the Chair. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Wow, that was very good timing, Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Do not get used to it.

The CHAIR: I will not get used to it. I had a look through your submission, Gail, and I note that you had a number of recommendations that you would want the committee to make. The four of them there were a clear public explanation of the policy rationale behind delaying full funding for public schools, accelerated progress towards full SRS funding, an end to the reliance on interim agreements and transparent reporting. Do you want to talk us through, in a bit more detail, what you mean by those?

Gail McHARDY: Happy to. As far as the public explanation goes, the whole funding formula and the understanding about how it is all worked out is not clear to the general person in the public. We refer to a lot of accounting tricks, with the way we were surprised when we were campaigning around this space, and the reason we do that is –

The CHAIR: Can you provide an example, though? What is an example of that you are aware of?

Gail McHARDY: Okay. For example, with the accounting tricks, people are not aware that the Victorian government can continue to claim a non-SRS expenditure as part of its funding share. It can claim up to 4 per cent of the SRS for capital depreciation as school transport, which is called the 4 per cent allowance. It can also claim expenditure on the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority – rather than talk in acronyms, I will give the full names of those organisations – as they relate to public schools. These expenditures are specifically excluded from the national agreement on how the SRS is measured. Those accounting tricks do not apply to Victorian government funding of private schools, and yet the private sector also utilises those organisations.

The CHAIR: Okay. That is fair enough. Do you want to continue on with the rest of your recommendations as well then?

Gail McHARDY: I certainly can.

The CHAIR: I am interested to hear a bit more detail.

Gail McHARDY: The accelerated process – there was a commitment to 2028. Then that has been pushed out to 2031. We have to bring it back to 2028, if not earlier. We need to see some drip-feeding to our schools immediately. We have already been delayed, we have already been robbed of funds, so that is what that is about. Again, the third one is in keeping with that. It is the inter-reliance on the interim agreements, because if federal and state cannot make an agreement, we are not getting – like the other states and territories, they are getting their five years or their 10 years; we are going year to year or two years. The transparent reporting on the real classroom-level impacts of funding shortfalls is that – one thing the Victorian government did commit to was transparency, and to their credit, they have done a fair bit of transparency in education on certain things that previous governments had not done, which now you can publicly access on websites et cetera. But the public rely on what is reported in the media, and sometimes it is questioned if that is actually really happening or not, and then that has a huge impact on parents' decisions about where they are going to send their children to school. That is not fair and reasonable visibility to our system and to what our schools are trying to do with very, very minimal money.

The CHAIR: What sort of additional transparency reporting would you like to see? I know in your submission you said 'Transparent reporting on the real, classroom-level impacts of funding shortfalls'. What are the sorts of impacts that you would like to see reported so that, as you said, parents can make an informed decision about where they want to send their child?

Gail McHARDY: It is not even about where they are sending their children, it is about the fact that it then makes it very clear to the Victorian voter why it is so critical to fund our public schools – because if our classrooms and resources are not to the level of others, why is that? Why are some doing better with others? There are many conversations. I am sure there will be witnesses today that will be presenting and give some of those other examples. But there is an assumption with the SFO with the economic factors and how a parent, a family is determined in that formula, and that may not necessarily be ongoing. It may be that that parent is in a particular profession and earning a certain wage but in six months time they may not be with that wage. So the ability to contribute or not is not really a fair measurement or a fair reflection of exactly what the school community make-up is.

The CHAIR: I am interested in some of the other transparency things that you would like to see reported on in terms of the key metrics of a school perhaps. Have you got any ideas about what you would like to see publicly reported extra?

Gail McHARDY: I think it is interesting, particularly when students exit a school system – I mean, the data around expulsion and those sorts of things need to be public, but obviously not identifying students directly themselves. Why would there be a higher number of students exiting a school system, irrespective of which sector? But that visibility is: what is going wrong in order for students to not want to stay in education to go on to do the things they wish to do? Joe, that is a huge question.

The CHAIR: Yes, I know it is, and I have only got 5 seconds left.

Gail McHARDY: I am here to represent the parent perspective. The difficulty I think for parents is that some of the visibility particularly is around why are certain – one of the ones in primary school, a very common one, is about: why are we having a composite classroom this year? That could be due to workforce shortages. Or why aren't certain disadvantaged students getting the one-to-one tutoring they need? We had initiatives like the tutoring and learning program, but again, for that to be continued we need the investment and the ongoing funding.

The CHAIR: Of course. That is all right. I am going to hand over to Mr Batchelor now. Over to you, Ryan.

Gail McHARDY: Thank you.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Gail, thanks so much for coming before the committee again – we obviously had you here the last time we probed some of these issues. I want to come back to this question that Mr Galea asked. Funding is a means, not an end, and I am interested in probing more about what we think additional resources should be spent on and what the goal and purpose of them should be. Do you have anything further you would like to say about what additional funding could be utilised for within our schools?

Gail McHARDY: Yes, I do. I made a quick reference to family engagement officers – we do not care what they are called – and just having additional human resources in schools. At the last state election we had a school lunch order, which was part of our funding campaign for these types of things, in order that schools are freed up. We are hearing from our teachers and our school leaders in our system that they do need, one, to be paid equally to the rest of their counterparts across the nation, but added to that, they also need the appropriate time to do the things that are expected of them. But they also need to be able to build those relationships with students in the classroom to do what they need to do to adjust their learning styles and their teaching styles in order to get the best outcome for the student. So those resources, that funding – I think what really frustrates us is if there is any duplication or wastage, and again, that is not just in Victoria, that is across the whole board and a whole range of parts of public funding and public spending. But particularly for our schools, it is in order to have those additional tutors or support people to assist students in where they need to be. Education support – again, the list is quite strong, but we hear all the time from families with students with additional needs that schools just do not have adequate funding to meet those needs.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You mentioned briefly in passing a comment about composite classes, and I know that is on the list of things that riles up parents from time to time. Other ones are pupil-free days and time that teachers are spending outside of the classroom. Do you have any views on the issues around those?

Gail McHARDY: Again, referring back to any of the commentary we have had so far on those topics, it has always been specifically around people's level of understanding that the Victorian government schools do have a level of autonomy about how they do their timetabling et cetera. But again I will take you back to the agreements, the statement of expectations from each of our individual state and territory governments on their systems in their own jurisdictions of what they have to deliver. Sometimes administration and compliance and all those things – all that policy and all those processes – create an additional workload to the workforce, right. That then takes away from the workforce being able to have those very embedded relationships and time. Often when you speak to an educator or a leader, people are saying, 'Look, I need to talk to you about these issues my child's experiencing,' and they do not physically have the time. This is where, if we have more education support, we have those family engagement officers and those other added resources in schools to support the workforce, they can get on with the teaching and the learning with their students.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So what do you think we need to do on that front to reduce that administrative and out-of-the-classroom burden so that teachers can spend more time teaching, being in the classroom, helping kids to learn? What do you think we need to do investmentwise and what do you think we need to do policywise to give teachers more time to be back in the classroom?

Gail McHARDY: When policy decisions or initiatives are decided upon, you have to look at the practical impacts they are going to have on the workforce directly and to the students and the families that those students are connected to. Because we all know, that even with those flexible work days – and again I think just in recent days in the media about some things that have been trialled in other states – it is not just about the school. We are part of a system, like the public transport infrastructure. Students all live in different family settings and locations. How do you then coordinate getting those students to school at that particular time? If it is a later start, if we are talking about a flexible beginning of the day, they have a later time start for their wellbeing, particularly for the teenage adolescent cohort. It is not just about giving them the flexibility to do the learning and the time. Some of the experts have said around the research around this, about young people needing more sleep – well, again, there are a whole lot of other things in there in relation to all these other things that are being put in place around social media bans and people spending so much time on devices, adults included, I will qualify. But the other part of that is: where do we all take some personal responsibility in order to engage and be committed to our education and working with the people that teach us to learn?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now pass over to Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Ms McHardy. When did you first hear about the government's decision to cut \$2.4 billion from public schools here in Victoria?

Gail McHARDY: In the media.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: When it broke? As it broke? You were not told in any other way?

Gail McHARDY: As it was reported in the media, sadly, yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: When was the last time you met with the education minister or any senior government representatives since this announcement?

Gail McHARDY: Since the announcement?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes.

Gail McHARDY: The end of 2025, with the minister directly, for a number of different reasons, including that.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Was one of those reasons the \$2.4 billion cuts or delayed funding?

Gail McHARDY: Whenever there is an opportunity to remind the minister about that commitment, we take that opportunity.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And what was his response?

Gail McHARDY: The response was, 'We're still working on it.'

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You were not given a timeline of when they were going to come to a decision?

Gail McHARDY: No.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Because 2031 is five years away, right – this delayed \$2.4 billion.

Gail McHARDY: Correct.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: The Productivity Commission stated that government funding with regard to Victorian students was \$3600 less than their New South Wales counterparts when it came to funding gaps. This is so unacceptable, because the ripple effect of this, as your submission states, is the cost shifting on parents. In your submission you are here representing parents' voices. Parents are having to cough up money, having to fundraise, just for basic necessities. How often are you hearing this from your parents?

Gail McHARDY: All the time.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: All throughout the state?

Gail McHARDY: I mean, this has been going on for years, and it just continues to get worse. We have said even when government have made announcements about trying to give more investment to support families in need because of the cost of living, those other things of cost of living will take priority over school costs, and yet schools, because they are not getting this funding, have to ask families to cough up extra money, which often many do not have.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: On average, how much money is a parent having to fork out in a cost-of-living crisis to pay for necessities for students that the government should be footing?

Gail McHARDY: Look, that will vary from one family to the next, as you could appreciate. But it is not just hundreds; in secondary it could be thousands. This is the other thing – we have a system that is around a national and Victorian curriculum, like a standard curriculum framework, but there is a variance of cost of education from one school to the next. There is a variance, so that is also questionable.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What are the sorts of things that parents are having to fork out money for? Are we talking about toilet paper, tissues, pens, papers? What are you hearing from your parents?

Gail McHARDY: Even in early childhood education, there has always been the discussion – and also in our preparatory or foundation year at school – about having to donate tissues. So that is an interesting one. It is not as far as toilet paper but certainly tissues. In the school landscape it can be a range of things. There are things that they will ask for that we would challenge as being things that should be standard things that should be supplied. It is things like when you have to pay for locker fees and when you have to pay for supporting the first aid funding. There are things like apps or particular programs and products that the schools are utilising because they have chosen to do that – and the BYO devices, things like that. Again, that is all ranging. Now, again, government has recently made some announcements about device provision going forward from 2027. But again, for some families even now –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Some families need that relief right now, right?

Gail McHARDY: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Families need relief right now, not next year.

Gail McHARDY: Correct.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: So what has the mental health cost been on families who are your members – parents, carers, students?

Gail McHARDY: Look, the most powerful insight I can give you in an example in that regard is when I have met with other community organisations and agencies that are supporting families in these diabolical situations. When you hear a mum having to express that they are homeless, they are living out of a car, and their child goes to school – this is a state school, and again, it is not to be disparaging to the school – a student not presenting in a clean school uniform and has to go to the sick bay to get changed, what are we doing? This is ridiculous. I think people forget that there are certainly families that are doing it extremely tough, but then the ones that do have a little bit more disposable income have an expectation on other families that they should be doing the same. And that is not the real world we live in, sadly.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Absolutely. You also quoted in your submission the economist Trevor Cobbold and his independent analysis on Save Our Schools. What other imbalances are you hearing on the ground from the parents and families that you represent? And have you made a case for this to the Minister for Education?

Gail McHARDY: In numerous conversations at any given point over a number of years with this government and previous governments it has always been very much the same conversation. That is what is so disturbing and disappointing, that it is always around the same things about ‘Why do schools feel obliged to do the cost shifting to families when their budgets are not meeting what they need to cover off on?’

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you so much, Ms McHardy. My time has expired.

Gail McHARDY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We have got a little bit more time for some extra questions if you are happy to take them, Gail. Is that all right?

Gail McHARDY: Yes. That is fine.

The CHAIR: I will ask you guys. Do you have any questions, Ryan or Michael, that you want to ask?

Ryan BATCHELOR: I just want to clarify something, Gail. You talked about some of the ways that non-SRS expenditure is included in the calculations of the SRS, with particular reference to the 4 per cent for maintenance and capital funding. It was a topic that came up in the last inquiry that this committee did. I want to say it was in 2024, but time is –

The CHAIR: It might have been 2023, I think.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Oh, my Lord, Joe; do not tell me we have been here for that long. But my understanding was that that was being phased out under the terms of the new agreement. That was one of the conditions of change in the new agreement. Is that something you are familiar with?

Gail McHARDY: No, I would not be able to speak to the detail of that, Ryan, because it is quite complicated from what I understand. This is why we use that terminology of ‘accounting tricks’, because of these sorts of things. Why is it different from one jurisdiction to the next? In some of the agreements, from what I understand, I think in one of Trevor’s recent papers – Trevor does some extensive work, and it is really a shame he could not appear today. Being an economist and being a former employee of the Productivity Commission he is incredibly important because he can provide clear transparency in all the figures, which are all publicly accessible on his website, Save Our Schools.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sure. Do you think the Commonwealth should be contributing more to capital funding of public schools?

Gail McHARDY: Oh, most definitely.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What are the consequences of it not?

Gail McHARDY: Well, then of course our state has to make up that shortfall. It is interesting because obviously the minister has come out, even again recently this year, about Labor’s commitment to capital investment and what they have been doing. And that is fantastic – we wanted to see those new builds and we needed those new schools – but equally we still have to keep lifting up our existing schools with their maintenance et cetera. But also, we still have to staff those schools and we still have to attract and retain our teachers in the system. If the funding component was sorted and settled, that would be a huge relief to the workforce, because then schools could get on with doing what they need to be doing and some of those other things that are compounding those other problems – why teachers are not being attracted to the profession or are leaving the profession – could be remedied.

The CHAIR: Are you happy if I jump in now, Ryan? Thanks. I will just ask a quick question. I know in your submission at point 4 you have got the consequences for the teaching and school workforce. You just touched on it then about underfunding and the impact it has on the likelihood or not of attracting good staff and retaining them. You also spoke before a little bit about the comparative pay of Victorian teachers compared to those across the nation. I guess I just want to get your thoughts on the impact that has on the workforce from a parent’s perspective. There is a lot to go into there, I know, but I have got a couple of minutes, so I will hand it over to you.

Gail McHARDY: I appreciate the question. I think, knowing who is on the witness list coming up after me, you will get a lot more detail on that. So I will leave that for the AEU to go into depth on in that respect. But to just give you a bit of a snapshot, in just the day-to-day conversations – be they at the weekend barbecue or at the supermarket, even in your own family and friends networks – education and schooling and all those sorts of things always come up. Again, without sort of identifying people, there was a recent conversation I had earlier in the year where a parent asked me straight out, ‘What can we do to keep good-quality teachers in our school?’ and I said, ‘Well, what are you comparing that to?’ The reality is that our teachers all go into the learning institutions where they learn to be a teacher, and then they are employed in the respective school sectors where they gain employment. But it relies on that employer – on the experience that they will have in that profession to be the best teacher they can be. The funding is key to that, because if teachers are having to buy resources for students in their classroom because their families cannot afford what is expected of them for the children to learn – teachers often do, because this is why they are attracted to the profession, because they are caring and very passionate individuals. That again is not a good reflection of the system overall about the funding failure. And there are so many other things to that, Chair, in relation to why all those other added things – the expectations on teachers to deliver in the classroom – are determined by governments of the day with certain commitments they want to see delivered in their term of office. But the practicalities of doing that do not come for free, and you cannot rely upon exploiting their goodwill to do that forever. We have teachers in the classrooms that are heavily fatigued and they are trying to do their best, but then there are certain expectations raised in the public arena that they will never meet because the expectation bar just keeps rising and the money is not equal to that expectation.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think as society has changed as well, the view of teachers and what they provide has certainly changed, even from when I was in school. I agree with you. I am going to hand over to Ms Gray-Barberio to finish off and then we will go from there.

Gail McHARDY: Thank you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Chair. Ms McHardy, the SRS is a needs-based funding model based on the needs of children, and in your submission you state that the government have not provided a clear and evidence-based explanation for their prioritisation and also for their decision to delay \$2.4 billion that should be going to Victorian students in government schools. So 75 per cent is not going to the schools, and you are not getting a clear explanation from any government representative, let alone the minister. I want to talk about the voices that are not often represented or heard in these discussions, and I want to talk about the kids that are most disadvantaged. They are the ones who are going to suffer the most consequences as a result of this government's terrible decisions. I am talking about children with disabilities. I am talking about First Nations kids. What happens to them? What are you hearing from their parents?

Gail McHARDY: Well, as a state parent organisation we talk to other community agencies so we make sure we hear those voices and are able to raise those voices in various forums, as you would expect us to do. I mean, particularly leading into the last state budget, there were a couple of parent focus groups that the minister attended and we talked about with parents, and it was really good to hear that the minister heard that firsthand about how that impacts on those families –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: It is all well and good for the minister to hear it, Ms McHardy – and apologies for interrupting – but he is not taking action, is he?

Gail McHARDY: No. So where I was going with that is that – and please, I am not saying this to be an apologist for the minister – I think the fact is there should be more conversations. Both Minister Blandthorn and also Minister Carroll did make a commitment to going out and having those conversations over the last –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Is that just more of a talkfest?

Gail McHARDY: Well, the thing is, some things have shifted, I have to be clear about that – some things. But the reality is for some of those families, they do not get, as you say, that opportunity to speak up. They rely on the agencies and people like us to be their spokespeople. I would say that it is really important for all politicians of all political persuasion. They need to be more representative of the people that they are serving in regard to what are the needs that they need to be prioritising, because I think that is where the priorities go – in very different directions.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: All right, Gail, thanks so much for your evidence today. That brings an end to this part of the hearing. You will be provided with a proof transcript at the end to have a look and see if there are any mistakes you want to correct or anything like that. But from us to you, thanks very much for your time today. We really appreciate it.

Gail McHARDY: Thank you, and have a good day for the remainder.

Witness withdrew.