

TRANSCRIPT

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

WITNESSES

Justin Mullaly, President,

Briley Stokes, Deputy President,

Justin Bowd, Research Officer, and

Alice Thompson, Representative, Virtual School Victoria Sub-branch, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Public School Funding in Victoria. Firstly, what I will do is go through and introduce our committee. I am Joe McCracken, the Chair.

Michael GALEA: G'day. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan, Deputy Chair.

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

Sheena WATT: Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

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

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Just for the Hansard record – and I will just go across – can you say your name, your title and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of, please. We will go with you first, Alice.

Alice THOMPSON: Alice Thompson. I am a VCE teacher and the AEU sub-branch rep from Virtual School Victoria.

Justin MULLALY: Justin Mullaly, President, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.

Briley STOKES: Briley Stokes, Deputy President, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.

Justin BOWD: Justin Bowd, Research Officer, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thanks so much for that. What I will do is hand over to you, Justin, first, and then I will go to Alice. I will give you 5 minutes each just to do a brief introduction, and then we will go to questions. Justin, over to you.

Justin MULLALY: Thanks, Chair. It is with profound disappointment that we appear today. It should not be the case in a place that the government likes to call the Education State that we are actually scrapping for what should be the standard of funding in our public schools. It is a scrap that has been going on for well longer than a decade but has really become quite a challenge in more recent times because of the behaviour of the government. We are deeply concerned that there is something wrong with Victorian public school students, Victorian public school teachers, principals, education support staff and the broader public education community. There must be something wrong with them, because the government somehow thinks that they are not deserving of the resources, the support and the funding that every other public school community in the country is receiving right now. If there is something wrong with them, I would like the government to be clear about that, because at the moment there is an absence of effort, an absence of action, an absence of clarity and an absence of transparency when it comes to school funding.

At the heart of this issue is the duplicity of the government when it came out and the Premier stood next to the Prime Minister in January last year and said that there was to be 100 per cent school funding for our public schools. That was a good day. That was a day for celebration. That was a day when we could finally see that there was a path to get 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard made available to our schools, to our students and of course to teachers, education support staff and principals. But what the Premier did not say that day is that there had already been a decision of her cabinet, of her as Premier, that there would not be any money delivered, no additional money delivered, until 2031. That is duplicitous; that is despicable; it is unacceptable.

As I said, there must be something wrong with all of us if we are not deserving of the resources that are available in every other state and territory. It is the case that when you do that, you are denying our schools funding, and you are denying our schools funding because of the delay in funding. It is well reported that that delay and that denial is to the tune of \$2.4 billion; that is hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars every year. That is the difference between making sure that postcodes are not destiny. That is the promise of public education: that every child can go to their local public school, and they can receive a high-quality education, one that makes sure that they can get onto the trajectory of life that they want to, that we need them to and that they deserve the opportunity to. Without the resources necessary to support students, no matter their needs, and acknowledging that there are a range of significant needs in our public schools, government is not actually delivering on the promise that we make to children and young people, and that is that they can go to their local government school and get a high-quality education.

It is the case that the schooling resource standard that was set around about 13 or so years ago was agreed to by the Victorian government. As I understand it, they have never not agreed to that standard; indeed, when they signed in 2019 a bilateral agreement that provided for funding for the five years from that date, even in that document they set out in a table, as a clause, their commitment to deliver a full 75 per cent by 2028. Clearly, that is not the case, and what is the case today, because of the rollover agreements, is that Victorian public schools in 2026 are funded to the same level that they received in 2023. That is gobsmacking in the Education State.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Justin. Alice, would you –

Alice THOMPSON: Yes. Okay. Thanks for having me. I am really committed to public school as a right, and I believe that they should be a great equaliser. However, I see a growing divide, and I think it is the students in lower socio-economic areas and regional areas whose parents cannot bridge those financial gaps who are suffering. As teachers we are told that school is a protective factor for the individual and for society, and it can lead to better outcomes for individuals, a stronger sense of self, less cost to the state long term because people are able to seek employment and not rely on welfare. And there is less crime when students are connected to community and engaged with school and school programs. It can also be a key factor in social cohesion by exposing individuals to others from diverse backgrounds and being able to meet them as peers. We also know that teacher–student relationships are key to learning, and these are really hard to build when teachers are limited by circumstance and resources. So everyone wants the best, but it is a struggle to provide that.

Our school, particularly as an online public school, caters to those who do not fit into other schools. This could be regional students where they only have one school option and it did not work for them, so they are placed with us. It is not necessarily the best fit for them, but it is their only option; I think there should be more available to them in their community.

Anecdotally, at our school the tutoring initiative worked to great success, and we had a successful literacy and numeracy support program. However, with the ending of that funding, that program has had to be cut. We also have really limited IT funding to improve our online programs. For instance, no literacy support and no numeracy support means these students are placed in mainstream classrooms, and as an English teacher I am expected to differentiate and cater for a really wide range of students in one lesson. This kind of means it is either boring for the higher ability students, and that sort of leads to disengagement, or it is too complex for students with lower literacy, and that leads to a real loss of confidence, and it is really difficult to find that middle ground.

Some students, because of confidence or circumstance, will just take the first opportunity to leave school. I really worry about them, because of circumstance. In one example I can think of her mother was not confident

in her being able to get a bus independently, and the mother also did not have money to get disability testing, so there was no funding for her at school. In terms of other anecdotal examples, really large schools mean vulnerable young people fall through the cracks – a colleague has noted that there has been one wellbeing person for a thousand students. We know that there are a lot of reasons that students cannot be successful in school; a lot of it can be brought down to mental health factors and socio-economic factors, and if those are not met, they cannot thrive and learn. Teachers are limited in terms of stationery; a colleague has to beg for lined paper for students. At the start of the year there were not enough chairs because the class was so large. Someone measured a staffroom at 32 degrees, and it is really hard for children to learn in hot rooms with inadequate resources.

There is a bit of a sense of despondency among the workforce; I think people feel disgruntled and disenchanted. It is really important that we retain quality teachers and attract really intelligent, passionate teachers as well. I really feel for families who want the best for their students, and I feel for teachers who want the best for their students but who are just really limited by circumstance at the moment. I think it is up to us to give all students the opportunity to experience what schools can offer.

The CHAIR: I do not know how you did that; you timed it perfectly. Well done, teacher.

Justin MULLALY: Teacher practice, that is right.

The CHAIR: I will hand over to Mr Galea first and then we will just go through the committee members. Michael, over to you.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much for your presentations and for appearing today. Just to begin with, Mr Mullaly, can I get an indication from you – how do some of the various conditions in Victorian schools compare to other states? For example, staff-to-student ratios, curriculum days, teaching time per day; on those metrics, where does Victoria sit amongst our interstate peers?

Justin MULLALY: In terms of student ratios, the department will be your best adviser in terms of the exact details in relation to that. But it is the case that on a ratio basis, Victorian public schools are slightly better off than most other states and territories. The critical thing with ratios is that it actually does not matter – what matters is class size, because teachers do not teach ratios; they teach children in classrooms. And in that context, we have challenges – Alice outlined some of them – when it comes to making sure that the differentiated learning requirements of each child and each young person in a classroom are being met. That means that where you have class sizes that are too high to do that, you are not able to do it as effectively as the students need a teacher to do. In that sense what is really critical is that you actually have an ability for schools to have access to adequate resources so that they can try to best match the number of teachers in the school with the number of students such that they are meeting the needs of the students. Teachers these days are required to differentiate in ways that even a decade ago was not the case. Our profession supports that, because of course we want to see the best outcomes for children. Ratios can be one measure, but what is the real measure? The real measure is the number of children in any given class.

In terms of the other issues, face-to-face teaching – our union is really proud of what we achieved in the last round of enterprise bargaining, and that was a reduction in face-to-face teaching. That means that teaching in Victorian public schools is the lowest in the country, and the government should be commended that they used Gonski funding to deliver that outcome through the EBA. That is a good outcome that makes a difference in terms of creating additional time for planning. But it is not just always about that. One of the challenges that we have, and we know when we survey 8000 teachers, which we did last year, and education support staff and principals, is that the average unpaid hours per week during term time is in excess of 12. So the measures around workload cannot just be a function of the amount of teaching, as important as the investment arising out of the last EBA was.

In terms of curriculum days, there is an arrangement where there are five days in Victoria. There is one professional practice day which is available to teachers to undertake duties associated with their classroom responsibilities, planning and preparation. There are three days available to principals to roll out arrangements for the implementation of new initiatives or other programs that they are seeking to put in place in the school, and there is a day available for teachers to write reports and do assessment.

Michael GALEA: And how important is that time? I think you touched on it, but how important is that time to – obviously teacher welfare is very important but also then better outcomes for students?

Justin MULLALY: The biggest factor in terms of the importance of that time is: what do teachers have available to them to support their planning and preparation? And I am sure all of you know teachers and you all know the amount of work that they do after hours; that is typically when they do their planning and preparation. So time in paid hours, which can be afforded in some instances through days like curriculum days, is absolutely critical, and it is critical to the attraction and the retention of the workforce. We see and have seen a quickening, and we are not the only workforce that has seen this post the pandemic, of people leaving. And a significant part of that is in relation to the excessive amount of work and the impact that that has on people's ability to feel that they can continue to do the job.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. My time is just about to run out, but since it is NAPLAN time once again, as we have all very visibly seen, I will just acknowledge that last year Victoria not only had the best results in the nation, but the best in our state's history, and that is in very large credit to your members. So I want to acknowledge that.

The CHAIR: Very good. Over to me. You made a submission to the state budget for 2026–27, which is in your submission here: a 35 per cent increase in salaries, and improved conditions. I am from Ballarat; I think I saw a protest maybe a couple of months ago – is that right? – which was huge. Obviously given that there is a significant disparity between Victoria and other states in terms of teachers' pay and conditions, you have said that that is resulting in people leaving a profession that is already incredibly stretched thin in terms of good-quality teachers on the ground. What impact do you think this funding situation, \$2.4 billion, is having on the ability to attract and retain good-quality teaching staff for the long term in the system?

Justin MULLALY: When it comes to funding public education, around about 90 per cent, give or take, of the funding allocation is spent on staffing. That is what you do when you fund schools. You employ people to work with young people, either as teachers, support staff or school leaders. So in the context of an absence of the required level of funding, not least in comparison to other states and territories, then you actually put tremendous pressure both on attracting the next generation into the profession but also on retaining folks. In New South Wales they were able to achieve significant pay increases a number of years ago. That has resulted in a reduction of around about 60 per cent in the number of positions that they were unable to fill, so the shortages reduced significantly, and that was because there was a pay outcome that respected the workforce – that remunerated the workforce in a fashion that valued them. It also was partly because there were further measures to help address workload, and in that sense, making sure that schools have the resources that they need is critical.

But it is not just about pay and conditions in that strict sense, it is about the number of people who work in our schools. Where you have full funding, you are actually able to make sure that you have got more teachers, more qualified allied health staff, more people who can assist in classrooms and a better spread of leadership and numbers of people in leadership in schools so that we are spreading the load for our principals. All of those things matter. When you have got a situation where funding is not just inadequate but is drastically inadequate, then you cannot do that. You cannot meet the needs of individual students in the way that you would want to and that they deserve to be met.

The CHAIR: In terms of the administrative burden on teachers – I used to be a teacher myself; I know exactly what it is like – what do you think the extra funding would do in terms of relieving the administrative burden on teachers so they can actually focus on the day job of teaching?

Justin MULLALY: There is an important trial actually going on at the moment, and that is into assistance to support teachers in some of the work that they do. It is a very, very limited trial, but it is showing some promise, and the promise is that where you actually say to teachers 'You don't have to do a whole bunch of the administrative tasks, because there's somebody else who can do it' you actually free that teacher up to do more planning.

The CHAIR: So employing someone else to do that, like a compliance officer or whatever it might be?

Justin MULLALY: Yes, that is right. You have got more planning and more preparation. That is a welcome trial, and it needs to be expanded and needs to be expanded quickly. But I suspect it needs the

resources through a funding deal to enable that to happen. What has happened in our profession and in our schools over the last 10 years is significant, when it comes to paperwork and the requirements of documentation. With the rise of differentiation, there has been an equal rise in the need to have that documented. As there have been changes to the program for the support of children with disability, you have also seen an increase in the documentation on that front. Teachers are not afraid to record the work that they are doing, but the balance is out of whack. We cannot have a system that pretends that if something is documented then it must be being done. We have to have a system that trusts teachers and that actually says to them 'We know that you know what you're doing' and that does not require everything to be documented to the nth degree. It is in that context that we can actually put some measures in place that would significantly reduce administrative burden – let alone for principals.

The CHAIR: Right. My time is up. I am going to pass over to Mr Batchelor now.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, everyone, for coming in. Funding is a means, not an end. The end is improving the educational outcomes of the students. The Chair spoke a bit about the range of recommendations you put in your submission and in your budget submission. When we get to 75 per cent and 25 per cent, what should the priorities for additional funding be?

Justin MULLALY: There are a range of things that we think are really important. Making sure that we have got the pipeline of professionals coming into the profession is critical. When you have got shortages, what that means is that there are some classrooms that do not have teachers – or if they do, they do not have fully qualified teachers, or if they do, then they do not have people who are permanent there, long term. So that is critical. That is the promise that we make, that children can go to a classroom that has got a well-supported teacher. That has got to be the first cab off the rank in my estimation.

But it is not just about teachers, it is also about allied health staff. There is a chronic shortage, for example, of psychologists who work in schools and of other allied health folk. They are the people that become more and more important as the years go on, as we know that schooling is not just about academic learning, it is about supporting the wellbeing of young people, and that is critical to making them thrive.

It is also, I think, the case that there is a real opportunity for good investment in different ways. There is a great program that happens currently down at Doveton College, and that is what we would call a full-service school. It is a school that provides a basis for the community to engage not only to support their children's learning but also to support their wellbeing and outcomes and opportunities in life. We think that there needs to be in every low socio-economic community a school like Doveton. That is about capital investment, but it is profoundly about recurrent investment so that you can have the staff that you need and you can have partnerships and arrangements with a whole bunch of other providers, including TAFE, including employment services and including child and maternal health, all of those things that would enable there to be a hub in our communities that can really support them.

When we reflect, our communities over many decades have changed. Our local public schools are one of the few genuine community locations that are left, and we must make use of them, and we must find ways to make that investment. We think that there are ways in which we can address class size. Clearly, when you have got a shortage of teachers, that is a bit of a challenge at this point in time. But we know that there are many, many more students than ever who have required individual education plans. I think of schools like Northern Bay College in Geelong, in Corio, and I wonder about the number of children in classrooms there where they have individual education plans – and they are required to have them – and where a teacher might have half the class that has a plan like that. Making sure that class is as small as possible is critical for those kids. It is critical not just for the kids with those higher identified needs. It is critical because there will be kids in that classroom who are going really well at school, who are really ready to thrive, who are really ready to take the next step in terms of their pathway. Getting the investment in class size so that their education can be best attended to has got to be the case, because equity and excellence mean all of those things for everybody. It is not just about disadvantage; it is about everybody.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Great point; great comment. How do you think the system should deliver for everybody? So obviously we understand we have got to put programs into the disadvantaged communities. What else do we need? There is a full spectrum of support we need to give. What do we need to do in those

areas where, for example, students want to be pushed further, students want to go beyond where the sort of standard is? How do we support the achievement of excellence in the public school system?

Justin MULLALY: One of the things, and it is sad to say that it is not the case, is that not every school is able to offer a full suite of the curriculum at the moment. Curriculum delivery is at the heart of ensuring every child can get access to what they should be able to access, but in that way making sure that they are in a position to be able to get the subjects that will enable them to thrive. The further you get out of metropolitan Melbourne, the harder that gets. And schools like Virtual School provide fantastic support, but we should not have to rely only on an arrangement like that to ensure that every child gets access to the curriculum. One of the challenges is that, particularly in secondary schools, we have got a huge number of teachers who are teaching out of field. Out of field refers to teachers who do not have specific qualifications to teach the subject that they are delivering. We have got to be a lot better as a system over a period of time so that we get the supply of teachers but also teachers with the skills that we need them to have. I do not say that to talk down teachers who are doing that work now; they are doing a fantastic job. But gee whiz, how much better would everybody do if we actually supported people to be able to teach the content that they had training to teach?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: I will hand over to Ms Gray-Barberio now.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. I might come to you, Ms Thompson, first. What are the enrolment numbers of Virtual School Victoria?

Alice THOMPSON: I think it is about 6000. And then a significant portion of that is VCE students accessing subjects they could not access at their home school, so regional students who want to do art or maybe a science or a maths subject that their school cannot offer.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Your submission speaks about – well, first of all, I will just track back. Your opening statement spoke about the tutor program in which you delivered literacy and maths. That has now gone because you do not have funding for that specific tutor program. Then in your submission you spoke about how students in years 11 and 12 have grade 6 levels of literacy and numeracy. What is going to happen to them now that this tutor program has been cut?

Alice THOMPSON: Well, they are placed in the mainstream class, and as teachers we have been told to do our best and work with our colleagues to offer them our best, I suppose. But it is really difficult, as you said, when you have students who are aiming for a 50 English ATAR and they are in the same class as someone with a really low level of literacy. And I would also say that observation of a grade 6 level of literacy is optimistic in some cases. Some people have suffered chronic disengagement and do not have the supports at home and, as I said, might not have had the financial means to get disability testing. So there is a whole piece of the picture missing, I think, for them.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You also spoke in your opening statement about not having enough lined paper and kids learning in hot rooms because they do not have access to sufficient air conditioning or fans, whatever it may be. How would it be different if these students had access to SRS, like 75 per cent? What would that even look like?

Alice THOMPSON: It might mean school would be a place you would want to go. We know that we cannot focus and learn if we are not comfortable in a space. A colleague has said they tried to start up a breakfast program for underprivileged students, but they did not really have the funds to buy the food for that. So if you are a student who has not been able to have breakfast and the heater is broken or the aircon is not working and the classroom is unbearably hot, it leads to disengagement or thinking, ‘Why would I go to school?’ Or it leads to behavioural issues because of that discomfort.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And it just has ripple effects. In the AEU submission, the ACT is already at 100 per cent of SRS, Tasmania and Western Australia will reach 100 per cent next year. Victoria cannot even get to 75 per cent, at least for another five years. Justin, can I just come to you – Mr Mullahy, sorry? The impact of curriculum: I just want to pick that up, because that is more than just access to subjects, right? There is also access to experiences and learning for so many students that perhaps would never have those opportunities –

subspecialised subjects like chemistry, biology. How much of an issue is this on the ground with the lack of \$2.4 billion? What does this mean for students who perhaps want to become doctors or scientists?

Justin MULLALY: Our profession is wonderfully good at making it work for students. In that way every student who goes to a public school is going to get access to at least most of what they need. But to your point, that is not enough, and in that way it should not be the case that a school cannot offer physics because it cannot find a physics teacher. It should not be the case that a primary school cannot offer a language program because they cannot find a language teacher. We have to have a system that is built to ensure that is not the case, and at the heart of that is having the funding that will enable it to be resourced.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Unfortunately, I have run out of time. I had more questions. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will now hand over to Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for coming today. I did have the good fortune of reading your submission, and I did note that you have some remarks in there about the shortage of First Nations people working in public schools. I would like to provide you an opportunity to perhaps talk a little bit more about that and, if you have any suggestions as a union, how we might be able to grow the First Peoples education workforce.

Justin MULLALY: We have got a really strong view that is born of our engagement with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members about the level of investment that needs to be available to achieve educational justice for Aboriginal Victorians, and partly that is about making sure that our workforce, to your question, is representative properly of our community. At the moment the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who work in the teaching service is far, far below the percentage of Aboriginal students in our schools – if that is one way I guess to measure what inclusion looks like and what making sure our schools are representative genuinely looks like.

We think that there needs to be a whole range of different measures that would enable Aboriginal Victorians to consider working in our schools, no matter what the position, and of course that could be teachers or it could be people working in education support roles. It could be about expanding the existing roles – the Koori engagement support officer roles, the KESO roles – so that there is actually much more one-on-one support for families. We have come to understand that unless we have the right number of employees with suitable backgrounds and cultural and family connections then the relationships that are at the heart of the success of Aboriginal children and young people doing well at school will not be there in the way we need them to, so that requires a significant boost. When you look at the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, when you look at what has arisen out of treaty, when you look at the promise of self-determination in the context of public education, these are all questions that we must address in terms of the answers themselves, but I am pretty sure that none of those answers can actually be made and come to fruition unless there is the right level of funding.

Sheena WATT: I am particularly interested in the virtual school model with respect to First Nations students, because you are saying that so many of your students are in regional areas. Are there any particular recommendations around the virtual school model with respect to First Nations outcomes you might want to share with us, because I imagine you would have a large cohort of First Nations students? I am interested to understand.

Alice THOMPSON: Amongst that cohort, there is – I guess I only teach a small portion, so I do not know in terms of that, but –

Sheena WATT: 6000 is a rather large –

Alice THOMPSON: Yes. What I have noticed is particularly for the Koori students that I have taught I guess they face a lot of difficulties because of circumstance, and then that limits what they are able to achieve. Particularly I have had students who have had to be carers or live in regional areas where maybe they feel culturally not safe and things like that, or who I think could have really – I do not know, I am thinking of one particular student who was an amazing writer and things like this, but because there was not the support at home to help her complete her VCE – because her sister, who she was living with, had to care for her other

siblings, she did not end up completing her VCE because there was not the family support. I think it speaks to having more community support and more resources in terms of finances and people to support, because I do not think that virtual school is perfect for everybody. I think having those social connections is really important, and that is why there needs to be funding in the community to make it really targeted and appropriate, particularly for vulnerable groups, I think.

Sheena WATT: I appreciate that insight. Thank you. Back to you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We have about 5 minutes left. I thought what we might do is give each member a minute to ask a final question. I am going to be fairly strict so we all get the same treatment. It is like going back to the classroom – rapid round. I might start up the end again. Ms Watt, do you want to start off? Then I will just go right down the line. Ms Watt, over to you again.

Sheena WATT: I wanted to ask about school camps actually and other excursions, if you could talk about the funding impacts on school camps and excursions, because I am particularly interested in those experiences and how they really do round out the student experience and if there are any funding concerns or recommendations to us around that particular element.

Justin MULLALY: It goes without saying that for the vast majority of students getting access to extracurricular activities, like school camps, certain excursions and sporting activities beyond the classroom, is a critical part of schooling. Like a lot of other jurisdictions, teachers and other staff in schools have been taken advantage of, in my estimation, for a very, very long period of time, with an expectation that they will volunteer their own time in order to avail students of those sorts of activities. That is no longer the case. What it means is that we need to resource our schools so that we can maintain to the level that we want to those extracurricular activities.

Sheena WATT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The teacher workforce snapshot released at the end of last year showed that we are improving on the retention. What is working? And what do we need to do more of?

Justin MULLALY: We are improving, but gee whiz, we were bad, and now we are only a mite better.

Ryan BATCHELOR: There are steps that have been taken, things are improving. What is improving? And what can we do more of?

Justin MULLALY: There is no doubt that providing financial support for students who are completing teacher qualifications has got more people into the pathway of teaching. Making sure that they actually get there and start is critical. Paid practicums I think make a difference. We know that for students losing money whilst they are on practicum makes completing teacher education very difficult in some instances. That has made a difference. The biggest difference will be actually getting salaries that are internationally competitive.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Just touching on what Mr Batchelor was asking about before with means and ends of funding, you have advocated for a reinstatement of the tutor learning initiative. Do you have any comments on the VAGO report of 2024, which found it to not be significantly effective when compared to non-tutored students? Should we be focusing money on projects that have been found not to have been as effective as they were expected to be?

Justin MULLALY: My concern with the VAGO report is that I am not sure they actually talked to anybody in a school. I would have thought that that was kind of critical. To that degree I will note also that in all of the bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and other states and territories small group tutoring is a central feature of every one of those agreements in terms of a listed reform measure.

Michael GALEA: You are suggesting it might be a question of methodology rather than principle with the TLI?

Justin MULLALY: There is no doubt that when you have students with higher educational needs giving them an opportunity for more one-on-one time with a teacher will deliver better educational outcomes.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. I guess we have seen a lot of rhetoric from the government about being the Education State. That is not often backed up with funding, with the \$2.4 billion in cuts. Do you believe the government when they say they want to be the Education State versus Victoria actually being the Education State? Because I just worry that it is not the case.

Justin MULLALY: The government deserves credit in a range of different ways. Fifty per cent of all capital expenditure in Australian public education has been in Victoria, and that is a good thing. It might be the case that that is what governments are there to do, make sure every child can access a public school in their local community, so a bit of a tick. At the same time it is the basics, but that is a good thing. It is also the case that there are a whole bunch of issues with the funding, and it does make you question whether Victoria can be called the Education State. Indeed we might have said publicly on multiple occasions that we do not think it is because it does not reach those benchmarks. Unfortunately the opposition has not actually got a position on school funding, so I do not know that they actually have a way in which they can articulate anything better.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. This inquiry is about this Victorian government cutting \$2.4 billion from government schools. If the government continues to cut and run from public schools, what is going to happen? What is going to happen between now and 2031?

Justin MULLALY: We will not be meeting the needs of children and young people. That means they will not get the academic and wellbeing outcomes that they deserve to get, which means that, sadly, some of them will not get on the pathways that we need them to get on and that they deserve to be able to get onto. The impact that that has on our community is significant in the long term. We invest in children so that we best support outcomes for all. This is how it works. In the absence of the resources we will not have the kind of community that we need. We will have too many children who are disengaged and too many children who are not able to complete schooling, and those who are ready to complete schooling will not be able to get the support that they actually deserve.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you.

The CHAIR: That brings time to an end. Thanks so much, everyone, for your contribution and your evidence today. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript before it is put on the committee's website. But from us, thanks very much. We appreciate your time.

Witnesses withdrew.