

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Public School Funding

Melbourne – Thursday 12 March 2026

MEMBERS

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Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

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WITNESSES

Nastashjia Katu, Manager, Policy and Advocacy,

Student 1, and

Student 2, Victorian Student Representative Council.

The CHAIR: Thank you, and welcome to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into state education funding. My name is Joe McCracken, and I am the Chair. I will just briefly go through and introduce our members.

Michael GALEA: Good morning. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan and Deputy Chair.

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

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Hello. Anasina Gray-Barberio, MP for Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: And we might have some come through on Zoom – maybe, but maybe not, sort of depending on how they are going. But we will see how they go. I have got to read this out.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975*, and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during this hearing today is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, you may not be protected by that privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

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Just for our records here, can you just say your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of, please? Tash, I will go to you first.

Nastashjia KATU: Sure. Tash Katu, VicSRC.

Student 1: Student 1, and I am here with the Victorian Student Representative Council.

Student 2: Student 2, and I am also here with the Victorian Student Representative Council.

The CHAIR: Perfect, thanks. I do not know, Tash, if you want to do like a bit of an opening or if you guys want to talk about anything in particular, but we usually have like 5 minutes or so. Would you like to go first, Tash, or do you want the students to have their –

Nastashjia KATU: The students are taking the shine today. I am here as moral support and backup if they need, but they are very well prepared to lead this themselves.

The CHAIR: Okay, so do both of you want to speak, or –

Student 2: Yes, we have something.

The CHAIR: Oh, you have something prepared. Okay, I will give you 5 minutes each. Student 1 and Student 2, off you go.

Student 1: Student 2 can go first.

Student 2: Yes, we are sharing it.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I reckon they know what they are doing, Joe.

The CHAIR: I think you are well organised. I will hand it over to you and your capable hands, okay.

Student 2: All right, thank you. Good afternoon-ish, everyone. On behalf of everyone at VicSRC, I would like to thank the committee for inviting us today to share and reflect upon the voices of students in Victoria surrounding public school funding.

I also want to acknowledge that today's conversations are taking place on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin nation. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging, and we acknowledge and respect any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here with us today. On behalf of VicSRC, we recognise that acknowledgements of country should not simply be a formality to move through. In a space like this, where parliamentarians, advocates and change-makers have come together, it is a reminder of our shared responsibility to listen to First Nations voices and to ensure that the systems built – including our education system – respect and reflect that history and ongoing custodianship of country.

My name is Student 2. I am a year 11 VCE VM student and I am a member of VicSRC's student representative council. I am joined by Student 1, a year 9 student who is also a VicSRC exec, as well as Tash, who is VicSRC's policy and advocacy manager. VicSRC is the peak body for school-aged students in Victoria. We are a student-led organisation headed by our executive committee, which is made up of 15 secondary school students from across the state. We exist to advocate on behalf of students on the biggest issues according to them. We work closely with students to learn what they care most about and what they see as the most effective solutions to these problems.

Student 1: Hello. As Student 2 mentioned, my name is Student 1. I would like to thank the committee for inviting me here today. One issue that is constantly raised is the inequitable resourcing and funding allocation of public schools in Victoria. Students face the most inadequate funding every day. Valuable and crucial elements of their education are being cut because they are seen as optional extras, like something you would have with health insurance. These things include excursions, camps and extracurricular programs being heavily reduced. Camps provide opportunities for students to create bonds and relationships with peers and, most importantly, their teachers outside of the classrooms. Specialist staff, including counsellors and education support staff, are becoming harder to access because the demand is higher while staff numbers are lower. This is an area that should never be compromised, because now more than ever young people need this support in their schools. Increased pressure on teachers leads to cancelled or merged classes, with less individual support for students. Growing class sizes leads to less one-on-one time with teachers. This also compromises vital relationships that are built between students and teachers. Reduced subject choices in schools and limited learning opportunities are happening because schools cannot afford to run certain classes or programs. Reduced offerings mean students do not have opportunities to study and learn what they wish, and that makes it harder for students to get into universities and post-school education.

Students regularly tell us that these issues affect both their learning and their sense of value within the education system. As one student shared in a consultation, 'It is hard to feel valued when our subjects don't even have the resources to learn.' Another student expressed the broader impact simply: 'We can't thrive if our schools aren't properly funded.' These experiences demonstrate that funding decisions are not abstract policy issues, they shape the quality of education students receive every day and influence whether schools can provide the support, opportunities and environments students need to succeed. These are all resources that should not be compromised by limited funding.

Student 2: Given the world's environmental and sociopolitical climate, and considering factors such as the rise of AI, social media and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more important than ever that all students are receiving an equitable and thorough education. We need to be literate. We need to be afforded every opportunity possible, for example, by fully funding schools to 100 per cent of the SRS so that our generation and the next ones can thrive and ensure a good quality of life in Victoria. Students need the knowledge, skills and support to navigate an increasingly complex future. When schools are not fully resourced, the impacts extend beyond the classroom. They affect students' confidence, wellbeing, opportunities and ability to participate fully in society. Education is not only about academic outcomes. It shapes how young people see themselves, their futures and their place in the community.

For this reason VicSRC is calling for a clear and urgent pathway to full funding for all Victorian public schools. This includes a commitment to reaching 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard and prioritising

schools with the lowest index of community socio-educational advantage values with the aim of achieving full funding for these schools by 2027. If we want a strong, fair and thriving Victoria, we must ensure that every student has access to the resources and support they need to succeed. Thank you.

The CHAIR: All right. I am going to hand over to Mr Galea first to ask a few questions, and then we will just go between committee members. Michael, over to you.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Joe. Thanks very much for your presentations and for joining us today. Something in your submission jumped out at me which I would like to dive into a bit more, and that is your recommendation that there should be a mechanism by which there is a student voice in capital works projects. Without knowing the particular settings of the schools that you are in – how new or old or whether there have been recent upgrades – what sort of difference would that make? Are there any particular examples you can give or broader examples of having that student voice in the capital works? What sorts of things would be improved as a result of that?

Student 1: When I first read this, I was a bit stumped as well. I was like, ‘What does this mean?’ But after a bit of clarification I actually understood that, yes, this is probably something that is really important. I am from Wangaratta, and our schools are on big lots of land, so there are heaps of green spaces. But as schools close and student numbers rise, we need more classrooms. Think about a classroom and a school exec team sitting in a room like this, saying, ‘Yes. This is where we want to put it.’ The school council approves it – ‘Okay, so it’s going to be built at this school, in this spot’ – but that spot is right in the middle where the year 8 boys and girls like to play soccer at recess and lunch. The classrooms might not have lighting that is suitable for students. It might not have enough windows. Doorhandles might be too high. It is all about access requirements and, when they are built, what implications that is going to have.

Michael GALEA: Yes, that is a really good point on play spaces, and you made me think back to when I was in year 8, probably playing handball in the part of the school which probably was not the most up-to-date part of the school.

The CHAIR: A long time ago now.

Michael GALEA: Yes, a long, long time ago; thank you, Chair. There is the impact that can have on your student experience from these places that you spend quite a large part of your time in and know perhaps better than anyone else. Is there anything in terms of the actual classroom layouts or things like that that would be improved from having student feedback as well?

Student 2: I have got a bit of a roundabout answer. I just think that student consultation is so important, because students know exactly what they need. When their voice is not heard and the infrastructure is what it is, it sends a message, right? I am trying to think –

Student 1: I think what the Department of Education and what schools need to start thinking about is that students are the key stakeholders in their schools, and it is like any other business, it is like any other industry: you will do what your stakeholders want you to do and you will do that to your best ability, because that is how you retain them and how you make sure that your stakeholders are enjoying their education.

Michael GALEA: And getting the best outcome –

Student 1: Exactly.

Michael GALEA: which is the whole point of having a school in the first place.

Student 1: Yes.

Student 2: I was just going to say that, especially when it comes to classroom layout and stuff, I think it is especially important for students with disabilities and things like that to be able to have a say on what they need and to have the appropriate funding so that schools can execute that.

Michael GALEA: Yes. Thank you. With regard to the subject offerings at schools, I know I was lucky enough to have LOTE with Japanese at my school, which I was able to study all the way through, but I know many schools have had struggles retaining – keeping those teachers with the experience to be able to teach a

different language. Do you have any views on that and any particular shortages that you think that we as a committee should be mindful of with languages?

Student 1: I guess I will have a crack at it. I am a German student; I learn German, but I also know that in my area in the north-east we have a lot of German teachers. All of our schools in our area take advantage of having this German population. It is not a very big population – it is probably under 100 people – but there is a

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Michael GALEA: That is news to me.

Student 1: Exactly. A lot of our schools offer German and Indonesian. They are the two languages that our schools offer, and Italian, because every second person in the north-east of Victoria has –

Michael GALEA: I did know about the Italians in the north-east.

Student 1: got an Italian background. Those three languages are the most common that people learn, but they are not what people want to learn, so at my school we have a lot of students after year 8 starting to learn languages via distance.

On what you have said about these staff shortages, my school had our VCE legal teacher leave at the beginning of term 2 last year, because it was not sustainable for her to be a teacher anymore in a school. She has now gone off to work for justice, making sure that education in those places is run well. But that left our VCE students who were studying legal and law without a teacher, and they were learning via distance for, potentially, the most crucial eight weeks of their education. So that was a big thing around that specialist subject shortage last year.

Michael GALEA: Just diving in a bit more on that, from your experience in the north-east, is there much coordination between primary and secondary schools? If you start learning a language in primary school, then is it picked up in high school? When I was going to school – again, a long time ago – it was basically start from scratch at high school, because the different primary schools were maybe teaching different languages. What is it like now?

Student 1: I know that if you go to a Catholic school, a public school or our independent school where I live, all the Catholic schools, they are all in our Sandhurst diocese, so they all follow the exact same list of how they teach their classes – same languages, same things, every lesson, all that sort of stuff. So if you go the Catholic path, you are set, and yes, everyone's going to be learning Italian from prep all the way through to year 12, if you wish to continue once you are in secondary school. But yes, there is that barrier where some students will come into a high school; they might have learned Italian and then they jump straight into German.

The CHAIR: Not quite easily transferable.

Student 1: Yes. I had that issue where I learned German from prep all the way through. And then heaps of new kids came into my school, and I felt actually quite ashamed that all these kids picked it up very quickly when I had been learning it for the last seven years and was still struggling quite a bit.

Student 2: There are a lot of subject disruptions as well.

Student 1: Yes.

Student 2: I remember in primary school, it was genuinely whichever teacher was available. So if there was an Italian teacher, great, we were learning Italian for a year, and then there was a deaf teacher, so we were learning sign language for two or three years, and then in high school, a French teacher; we are learning French now.

The CHAIR: It is what is available.

Student 2: Yes. There is not any continuity really.

Student 1: Back in the olden days when my dad went to school –

The CHAIR: My era.

Student 1: he went to the public school, and they did most of their elective classes with the local Catholic school as well.

The CHAIR: I will start my questions. You guys had in the submission a bit of talk about the teacher workforce crisis. Just from your perspective, you mentioned having the legal studies teacher; they left, and it was really disruptive. I have seen that many times before. Have both of you experienced that aside from the case there you mentioned? Is that a common occurrence in terms of teachers being there for even a semester and then saying, 'Oh, look, I've had enough of this' or, you know, 'The kids might be causing me grief,' – I do not know, whatever the case might be?

Student 2: Oh, yes. But it is usually not the students that are causing them grief. It is usually the system.

The CHAIR: What do you mean?

Student 2: Teachers do not have wellbeing support, like enough adequate wellbeing support, either. So I think they experience burnout a lot.

The CHAIR: When you say wellbeing support, do you mean support around managing classrooms and students with different learning needs? Is it disability access? Is it differentiated? What sort of support do you mean?

Student 2: I think I do just mean kind of all-encompassing, as well as –

The CHAIR: Do they have another support person in the class – you know, how you have a learning support officer in classes?

Student 2: Sometimes, going on my experience, yes, but that is because I attend community schools and specialised schools for that. But in public schools, no, that is not a very common thing. It is usually just a bunch of students and then one teacher, and a lot of the work just relies on the teacher, right? So if you have got a good teacher that is very observant, has not let all this burnout get to them, has been more aware of things and has educated themselves – not actually got that training, but educated themselves – great, you are set. For example, if you are experiencing domestic violence at home or whatever, or family violence, you know, they are more likely to pick up on it. But, you know, it is really up to the teacher. So if a teacher just does not have the capacity, which is usually the case, and cannot even go through all that paperwork and time and is just everywhere, that is not a thing.

The CHAIR: There have been studies done that suggest that one of the biggest impacts on educational outcomes for young people is really high-quality teachers. Would you agree with that?

Student 2: Yes. Education just relies on the teacher, I think.

The CHAIR: When you have had a relief teacher come in, and it might be a week-long stint or it might even be a couple of days, have you had instances of that and you've been like, 'Oh, it's really disruptive. It's really annoying. I want to ask my normal teacher a question, but they're not here. This relief teacher doesn't know?' Have there been instances like that?

Student 1: Yes. Last year my humanities teacher decided to leave halfway through, because her job, when she came to our school, used to be two people. When she started it became one person doing more than two people did, so it was sort of a 2½-person role that one person was doing. So she left for a job that she thought she would enjoy more, and our school did not have access to any more teachers, so we went for about three weeks until they found our new teacher and we –

The CHAIR: What happened in those three weeks?

Student 1: We had the same teacher twice over those three weeks. I think that is 15 lessons or probably just over 15 lessons, and we had a different teacher every time, except twice.

Student 2: Yes. And it is so memed as well – students make jokes about it like, ‘Great, it’s a relief teacher, so we don’t have to do any work because nothing’s going to get done.’

The CHAIR: That is what happens all the time.

Student 2: Yes. Specifically for students that are either from migrant backgrounds or maybe they have experienced trauma or they have disabilities, queer kids, whatever – though it is important for every student, but specifically for them – a really strong relationship with the teacher is so important. It can also just be that they have really attached to one teacher that really kind of gets their learning needs and their style, and then as soon as they are gone, there is no learning.

The CHAIR: Teaching is so much about the relationship as much as it is about the imparting of knowledge and understanding. I totally agree with you there. And having the consistency of, say, a regular teacher, as opposed to a series of relief teachers, is so important. Have you found that that is the experience of a lot of the other people your age that you talk to?

Student 1: Yes.

Student 2: Yes, or they just have no connection to any teacher.

Nastashjia KATU: A lot of our submission references our congress reports. Every year we run a congress event, and the goal of that is to bring students together to identify policy issues that are pressing for students at the time. The issue of casual relief teaching and the inconsistencies has been raised for the last five years, and that is inequities around the inconsistencies but also a deviation from learning plans. Obviously, when you have a new teacher there may not be a handover process; it is very different. So there are inequities around just not having those consistencies, but also the learning in and of itself is implicated.

The CHAIR: I guess this inquiry is about figuring out, with that \$2.4 billion, where it would be best spent, then. Do you think it would be best spent attracting teachers so that they stay in the workforce, so that there is consistency there, or do you think it is better spent on resourcing schools so that people like you have access to resources that are of a better quality? Where do you see the gaps in the system? I note that we have got 30 seconds, so I am going to try and be quick. Where do you think the gaps are?

Student 1: I think the gaps are this right now, where this is not happening.

The CHAIR: So the dialogue?

Student 1: Yes, and this engagement is not happening between students and leadership at school. I think that is a really, really big factor. A school in town in Wang, their student rep council has one student on it, and she is in –

The CHAIR: Not much of a council, is it?

Student 1: Yes. She is in year 7, and I think she quite enjoys the cinnamon doughnuts that she gets to eat by herself at those meetings, because no-one else is in there and it is just her and the liaison teacher, probably just having a chat about what they did on the weekend.

The CHAIR: Student 2, just quickly, and then I will pass on to Ryan, what are your thoughts on the gaps?

Student 2: It just feels like there are gaps everywhere. I think specifically if we are speaking about teacher shortages, there needs to be a huge focus on that, especially because as a VM student – I did VCE, though, previously – and is the same for my school, we were not able to choose the actual subjects that we wanted. We were not able to because –

The CHAIR: Choice.

Student 2: I think literally maybe we had three subjects or four subjects and then we had to do VSV online. Same with infrastructure, specifically with bathrooms – I really worry about gender-diverse kids, and there are just not enough bathrooms for them. I think you are really saying everything that I am thinking.

The CHAIR: That is cool. That is fine. I will pass over to Ryan. Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, all. If they had had cinnamon doughnuts on the SRC when I was there – anyway. I sat through a lot of cinnamon doughnutless SRC meetings when I was at school – great innovation. I want to just pick up on this bit of the conversation you were having with Joe about the disruption to student learning through changes in teachers and the use of CRTs. How much of it do you think is being driven by, in your experience, teachers coming in and out of the workforce, and how much of it is, do you think, teachers being pulled out of a classroom to go and do other things? How much is it teachers leaving the school, and how much is the disruption caused by other things that are happening that mean the teachers are still at the school but just no longer in that class for a period of time?

Student 1: I would say a lot more often it is teachers being taken out of the classroom. They might be going to a sport day, or they might be off to do production, or they might be going and doing a PD day or anything like that. I would say that is the most common, yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And when that sort of thing is happening, do you guys get told? Do you know that, for example, on Tuesday next week your teacher is going to be out of the classroom because they are doing a PD day or they are off?

Student 1: You would probably get told the day before, or in the lesson before they would be sitting back in their chair and saying, ‘Oh, yes, that’s right, guys. I won’t be here next lesson.’ And then that is it.

Ryan BATCHELOR: That is it. What could be done better in that regard, do you reckon?

Student 1: Do you have anything?

Student 2: I thought you were going to say something.

Student 1: I think a strict foundation for teachers on what is to be left when you are away, so very clear instructions. It is so common when we have a relief teacher that the teacher will say on Sektor, the in-house learning system we use, ‘The students know what they’re doing.’ We do not know what we are doing. If you said that to half my class, I can tell you they would just be sitting playing Minecraft on their computers.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What sort of notice requirements do you think we should have? I feel like if the school knows the teachers are not going to be there, they should be telling you about it in advance. How much notice?

Student 1: It is not like if we found out two weeks before it would make any difference to our lives, in complete honesty, like we do not really care. I do not really care when I get told a day before, because I know that we are going into this lesson and you just get the work done if work is left. But, yes, I think there needs to be really sound understanding and a really strict outline on what is expected for a class.

Ryan BATCHELOR: A bit more preparation and planning for known absences. Obviously people get sick and stuff, but for when you know things are coming, it would be better to have a more structured system.

Student 1: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. That is really good. Student 2, you mentioned the role that the VSV plays in making sure you have got enough subject choice. When schools cannot provide, particularly at senior school, the sort of breadth of curriculum offering that the students are looking for, the VSV is offered as the solution to getting you into a class that you want to do. How well does it work? From your perspective and from your friends’ and colleagues’ perspectives, how well is the VSV working as an option for delivering subjects that you want?

Student 2: I think for my school, the people that we are, it worked actually quite well. I really fought tooth and nail for my choice – I think a lot of the other students decided to just pick up art or maths, but I was not interested in that – to get at least two VSV subjects so I could do health and human development and politics, even though I wanted to do more.

Michael GALEA: Good choices.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Were there limits on the number of VSV classes that you could do at your school?

Student 2: Yes. I think it was a rule from VSV. It was a worry about becoming a full-time student.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Like at some point you click over into becoming a full-time VSV student, do you?

Student 2: Yes. And it is making sure I am still engaged with the other school, so there was that. But overall, like in general from other students that I have heard from, online schooling does not work for them, usually. It is really hard to engage. We were speaking about the COVID pandemic. I do not think anyone really did their work during COVID, and it is definitely the same with online learning.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Do you think it is inherent to the model, or do you think it is the way the model is being delivered? Do you think it is just not possible to make it work properly, or do you think that it is just not quite up to scratch at the moment?

Student 2: For me, it is really hard to say, because again, in my actual experience, it is fine, and I have not learned enough about everyone else's experience.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Maybe I will reframe it. What do you think makes it work well for you?

Student 2: I think specifically the way that the lessons are planned out. They did it really well to keep it engaging. Even for someone with a disability or whatever, it is actually quite engaging, and they kind of lay everything out that you need to be doing, like the whole rubric, and it is easily readable, so you can actually access it and apply it to your work. Usually with VCE exams or whatever they will give you a rubric, and it is like, 'How am I supposed to take this advice and put it into my work?' At VSV I think they did it really well.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So it is the communication of the rubric, and the learning expectations or learning outcomes, or whatever they call them, are a lot clearer. Is that it?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. I might leave it there. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Okay. Anasina, I will pass over to you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. First of all, I just want to acknowledge your presence here today. Thank you for your submission and your opening statement. I think you are in a very powerful position as students and also as panellists on the council. I just want to acknowledge that power. Please continue to use it for good. With the advisory panel that you are on as part of the council, you are supported by the Department of Education. Is that right?

Student 1: Correct.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You and other members get the chance to, I guess, speak to the Department of Education or its representatives. Is that right?

Student 1: Yes. Is it quarterly?

Student 2: Yes.

Student 1: Yes, quarterly.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Have you ever met with the minister in any of your meetings?

Nastashjia KATU: Not yet. This exec committee is new, so they were onboarded this year. This is their first year. Previous committee members have in other years – but not this year for 2026.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Last year there was a different committee. You are part of the new committee?

Student 1: Correct, yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Are they scheduled in to meet with the minister at any point during their time?

Nastashjia KATU: We have tried to ascertain meetings. We are in the process.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What has the response been? Why not?

Nastashjia KATU: No response – just, ‘Come back later.’

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Do you feel like your student voice is actually centred here and privileged? Given that we are in an inquiry and \$2.4 billion has been robbed from your education – your future – I would love to hear your honest thoughts. I have really loved listening to you both because it has been very candid, and it is really important for us as committee members to hear what the experience is like for you on the ground. What do you think about the question I have just asked?

Student 1: To be completely honest, I think it is a bit ridiculous that we are the Victorian Student Representative Council and that we do not get many opportunities to speak with our decision-makers, because how are we going to make any really effective changes if the stories and these sorts of things are not getting through to these people with the highest power in our education?

Student 2: Not to mention that when we kind of are afforded dialogue – maybe just in different spaces, not with VicSRC – it is definitely the case that whoever we are speaking to is feeling quite defensive, or I think it is just very inherent tokenism, almost, that kind of comes with being a student representative council but not actually being able to get these opportunities because they just say, ‘Come back later.’ It is so disempowering and invalidating. It is like, ‘Do our voices really matter? Do they actually care?’ I remember sharing it with my friends, ‘Oh, my God, I got this good opportunity. I’m so excited,’ and my friends were so sceptical. All of them, all 10 of them, were just so sceptical about it: ‘Well, are you really going to be able to do anything, because I don’t think committee members, the Parliament or the DoE are ever going to be actually receptive to what you say?’

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. I appreciate your responses there. In your opening statement, you talked about funding decisions being not just policy decisions. What are they in your mind?

Student 1: It is puzzle pieces that shape a young person’s life. Education is seen as the most important, one of the most really important parts of a human being’s life. It is where you make many of your friends that potentially will see you through all the years. It is where you gain new skills. It is where you develop as a person, and it is where you spend the majority of your life. You do not really live in – you might not live in the same house for 13 years, or you are most likely not to work at the same workplace for 13 years, but there is a good chance you go to the same school every day for 13 years. So I think it is not about policy, and it should not be about cutting really essential parts of a young person’s education. It should be actually thinking, ‘Okay, these are things that are really important to not only these people’s futures, but our state and our country and our world’s future.’

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. We heard from a witness earlier this morning, and they really spoke a lot about parents having to fork out a lot of money themselves or participate in fundraising for the schools in order for some of the government schools just to have access to basic necessities. Is this something that is common in your communities, and also other members on your council? Is this a regular thing?

Student 1: I will give you an example.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes, please.

Student 1: Do you reckon you would be okay with you having to buy tissue boxes for your kids’ classrooms? Because that is an example that has happened in schools in my area where at the start of the year, you get your stationery list with your greyleads, your blue pens, your red pens, your glue stick. And then over the last few years, the parents have noticed, ‘Oh, I have to buy two boxes of tissues per student to take into school for the other members of the class to use.’ To me, that seems a bit ridiculous that parents and that families are having to take money out of their pockets to buy tissue boxes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Absolutely.

Student 2: I agree, and also my experience is different, being at community schools where they provide you with that stuff. But piggybacking off that, because we are provided with that stuff, I remember, when we get our books, usually if we need to get another one, we have to just go through a pile, and they have already been used. So that is just another example.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes. Other states are already at 100 per cent of their SRS. Victoria is yet to even get to 75 per cent of their SRS. You spoke about vulnerable children, children with disability, children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, First Nations children. What happens to them? What are the consequences of the government ripping off \$2.4 billion to their education and their future?

Student 2: I am trying to word it properly. I think it is just very intrinsic in every single angle because for a student, education is not just – education is their whole life. So it is not just education that it affects, it affects their whole life. It affects their wellbeing; it affects their home life. It affects everything. I cannot really say one specific thing, because it genuinely just affects every single part of a human being when they are not funded. And specifically I think there is just not much research as well on the actual effects of disabilities and trauma and being from a migrant background or being Indigenous; there is not enough research on it. And so they are just inherently – it is inherently inaccessible. I am not really sure how to word it; you are better at wording things.

Student 1: Yes, I agree with what Student 2 said, and I think we need to understand that we once thought, ‘Okay, every student needs to be equal.’ But no, all of our education needs to reach equity for our students. We need to have every student getting what they need to succeed the best in their education. It seems pretty commonsense, and it seems like it should be on the list of human rights because – yes, I reckon it is pretty straightforward.

Student 2: Yes.

The CHAIR: What I might do – we are about to finish up, we only have about 5 minutes left – is each of us, I will just give a minute to ask final questions and then we will wrap up from there. Is that all right?

Student 1: Yes, definitely.

The CHAIR: I will go to Mr Batchelor first and I will just go along again.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What do you think would make the biggest difference to your school?

Student 1: I will say more funding involved. We have mentioned this \$2.4 billion figure. Why is there only \$2.4 billion? I think there needs to be more funding in that pool to be able to succeed, to be the best for students’ education.

Student 2: I completely agree.

Ryan BATCHELOR: For what? What do you reckon? We have got to spend money on something. Money in the bank is –

Student 1: You have mentioned both of them: teaching – getting teachers attracted to working in the state of Victoria, getting teachers attracted to working in our schools; and resources – making sure that we offer as many classes as we can and that students are equipped fully to learn.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Great. Thanks.

Student 1: That is okay.

The CHAIR: Michael.

Michael GALEA: I am just curious. You both, I assume, would have been at school when the ban on mobile phones was brought in about five or six years ago now. What is the impact of that? Is it working?

Student 2: Well, I am at a school where we can have our phones, actually. But the schools where we have not had phones have been quite a terrible experience. Like every morning, honestly, it is very loud – lots of

tantrums. I think it is just a safety thing as well and something to hold and have. It is almost like school, honestly, just does feel like prison sometimes. You have a connection to the outside world still.

Student 1: I do not fully agree with that, but I think it is a really good opportunity for students to get off their devices. At my school, everyone is taking it pretty seriously because they know as soon as you are caught with it, Mum and Dad are getting a phone call from our head of sub-school.

Student 2: I actually do agree, to make my point clearer. The ban is actually helping and is good for students and retention.

Michael GALEA: Even if it is frustrating as a student at the moment?

Student 2: Even if it is frustrating, yes.

Student 1: The one thing that is not helping is Apple's new function to screen mirror your iPhone on your laptop screen. You will be sitting in the back row of the classroom and there is a sea of little phones on people's laptop screens.

The CHAIR: I have got a couple of quick questions. One, what do you think is the attribute that makes the best teacher?

Student 1: Being able to see students as people, not –

The CHAIR: Not a number?

Student 1: Yes. And being able to build a connection with them.

Student 2: It is just respect, like actual intrinsic respect where they accept every single part of you – you never have to leave part of yourself outside of the classroom – and being able to accommodate for you.

The CHAIR: The second part of my question is: is it fair to say not all teachers are like that? How would you think that we could get to a place where all teachers could be that?

Student 1: I will say this, and this might be a bit of a rogue statement, but the teachers that are not like that are the teachers on the higher end of our age range. So I think it is about ensuring that the new teachers are getting experiences to be able to be their own person and not necessarily have to follow in these people's footsteps, because I know that is an issue at my school.

The CHAIR: Sure. Student 2.

Student 2: That is a rogue statement. I disagree. I think younger teachers are more progressive, which I appreciate. I just think it is proper training in everything to be more, for example, culturally responsive, and more training when it comes to students with disabilities or trauma backgrounds or just anything that is not really typical, I guess you could say.

The CHAIR: So less about the teaching and more about the other stuff, so to speak.

Student 2: The training and the support.

The CHAIR: The communication skills, the empathy.

Student 2: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I just want to acknowledge the power imbalances that do exist between students, teachers, student representative councils and government decision-makers and encourage you to continue to stand in your power. My question to you is: if you have the opportunity – I am hoping that opportunity will arrive – when you do get to speak to government decision-makers or perhaps the Minister for Education, what is one consequence of this funding cut you will say to him is having an impact on your schools, on your families and your communities?

Student 1: Student wellbeing; families not being able to do the things they might have been able to do, I am going to say, pre- COVID, because it is too expensive and they are buying tissue boxes for classrooms; and just, yes, people not enjoying going to school every day.

Student 2: Yes. Student wellbeing is just – it is the biggest one as well, I agree.

The CHAIR: All right. Well, that concludes our time. I really want to appreciate and thank you both particularly for your time and your evidence today. Tash, thanks obviously for your support as well.

You will get a proof version of the transcript of what has been said today. You will get a chance to look through that, and if there have been any omissions or errors, you will have a chance to correct them. But from us to you, thanks very much. We appreciate your time.

Witnesses withdrew.