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

WITNESSES

Anastasia Magriplis, Head of Humanitarian Operations and Resilience, and

Moin Zafar, Manager, Vocational and Empowerment Pathways Program, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre; and

Dr Michele Lonsdale, Acting Chief Executive Officer, and

Pearl Goodwin-Burns, Senior Manager, Education, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into public education funding in Victoria. I am Joe McCracken. I am Chair of the inquiry, and I am going to go through and introduce our committee members.

Michael GALEA: Good afternoon. Michael Galea, Deputy Chair of the inquiry and Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan.

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

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

The CHAIR: And I think we also might have Lee online too.

Lee TARLAMIS: I am here if you can hear me – Lee Tarlamis, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Lee.

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 necessarily protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript afterwards, and ultimately transcripts will be made public and put on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, are you guys happy to just say your name, your title and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of, please? I will just go from my left to right, so I will start over here with you, Anastasia.

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: I am Anastasia Magriplis, the head of our Humanitarian Operations and Resilience programs at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

The CHAIR: Thanks.

Moin ZAFAR: My name is Moin Zafar and I am the Manager for the Vocational and Empowerment Pathways Program, under which we have education, employment and women's empowerment program streams.

The CHAIR: Thanks.

Michele LONSDALE: Michele Lonsdale, interim CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and also director of social policy and research.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Pearl GOODWIN-BURNS: Pearl Goodwin-Burns, Senior Manager of the Education team at the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thanks so much for that. I will go over to you guys first if you want to have your 5 minutes, and then I will go one, two and then we will go to questions. Welcome. Thanks very much for coming along today.

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Thank you. Thank you for inviting us to this hearing. We are very grateful to have an opportunity to speak to our submission and also speak to the impacts of the reduction in school funding on the people that we support at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. Our clients are people who are on the protection pathway in Australia. They have applied for asylum, and they are awaiting the outcome of their applications. We serve up to 10,000 people each year at our centre. We are a self-funded charity organisation who receives a little bit of our funding from state government for specific programs, which we are also very grateful for.

Our work really revolves around supporting people who face the most complex vulnerabilities, and we seek to stabilise them through our humanitarian work, through providing access to emergency food, social work support, health care through our community health clinic and through crisis housing for people who are facing extreme vulnerabilities and are at risk, through emergency accommodation, as well as some welfare assistance. Additionally, once stabilised, we then we send them to our resilience component, which is where Moin comes in.

Our client cohort consists of individuals and families, and those families and individuals come from a range of countries where it is impossible for them to return. While they are in this period of awaiting an outcome for their asked-for protection in Australia, they have very little access to the social and safety nets that Australia provides to our vulnerable citizens, so they become very dependent on welfare organisations and charity organisations to even exist.

Almost half of the people we support are children, and whilst they are able to access public education in Victoria, which we are again very grateful for, we find that the school system is already so stretched that it is often very difficult for it to provide the full range of supports that our cohort need, in addition to the many other vulnerable cohorts that live in our Victorian communities. So we are very keen to discuss how not meeting our targets around education funding and potentially missing that federal government input into our education system is going to have deep and profound impacts on our cohort and the many other vulnerable cohorts in Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will hand over to you guys.

Michele LONSDALE: Thank you. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is a peak body. We have been around in one form or another for more than a hundred years, and our main brief is to be advocating on behalf of our member organisations who are supporting children, young people and families who are amongst the most vulnerable in Victoria and Tasmania. We have over a hundred organisations who are members with us, and they range from the large organisations that might also be interstate and national through to very small regional organisations with a small number of staff very embedded in their local communities. The services they provide are extraordinarily wide. If you think about early in need, early in help – it might be from a pregnant mum-to-be right through to the statutory system, to youth justice, to child protection – our members work with children, young people and families right across that continuum.

As you said, Anastasia, there are very complex needs for many of these children and young people, and there are three points that I want to make in particular, which I will just make now, referring to my notes. The children that our members work with – many of our member organisations work very closely with public schools to make sure that those children and young people are supported to learn. The children and young people they work with often face multiple challenges. A high proportion experience poverty, family violence and/or housing insecurity. There are children and caregivers with mental health or AOD challenges. Disability can be a compounding factor, as can – as you would have thought too – racism and discrimination. In recent years, with the cost-of-living pressures, our members are reporting much higher numbers of families coming to them for very basic needs – so more families for emergency assistance and money for food or emergency packages of food. Housing obviously is a problem right across the state. Money to pay rent, funding to support them to get medicines for their children, funding to pay school expenses – there are a whole range of needs that are quite basic and fundamental that they are requiring support with. The point I want to make there is: before

they reach the public school system many of them are already quite disadvantaged and experiencing hardship or some vulnerabilities.

I just want to make the point about the importance of public school education. They are for all students, but they are particularly important for those families that cannot afford to purchase private schooling for their children. A good public school education is such a critical factor in improving student life trajectories, in empowering children and young people to make informed choices and in creating opportunities for breaking those intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage. We know that children who attend school regularly achieve higher levels than children who do not, which is why resourcing schools to be able to engage these children in learning, regardless of background, family circumstances or academic ability, is so critically important. Every child has the right to the best possible schooling that we as a community can provide, and public schooling, properly resourced, can be a key protective factor in those children's lives as well as setting them up to be productive, happy and healthy members of the community.

The third point I want to make, which is related to that and then goes back directly to our submission, is that insufficient funding of the public school system results in further inequity; it just entrenches that. Public schools, we know, do not have access to the same resources, whether that is access to the same number of teachers or the physical amenities that students who go to private schools do. Delaying funding to public schools actually has a disproportionate effect on those students who are relying most heavily on the state to provide that service. Underfunding of public schools directly affects children who live with disability, First Nations children, children in the care system, those experiencing violence in their home, those living in caravans or tents or motel rooms in Victoria, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and the asylum seekers that you are talking about as well. Public schools teach the majority of children who experience disadvantage, yet in Victoria they receive the least per-student funding nationally. The centre's perspective is that the Victorian government's decision to delay raising Victoria's school funding means that students attending public schools will not receive the resources they need that would enable them to achieve their full potential. These children deserve the very best education we can provide, and public schooling can give them this if properly resourced. Delayed funding is not just an economic decision, and we have made that very clear in our submission; it is a decision that will likely have profound long-term social, academic and other impacts on children who rely on our state education system to give them opportunities in life. That is our statement.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. We will now start with our questions. We will just go back and forth between members, so I will start off with Mr Galea first.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks very much for joining us today and for your presentations and submissions. Just to get to the key issue of the best way in which we can address and counter disadvantage, is it a fair statement to say that the younger the age that we do that, the more effective it will be?

Michele LONSDALE: Evidence shows that, absolutely.

Michael GALEA: Forgive me for conflating, but a couple of us are on a separate inquiry at the moment looking into early education, and that is very much the evidence we have received. Would you agree that measures such as free three- and four-year-old kinder, not just four-year-old kinder, are vital for the earlier side of intervention so that when children start at primary school – obviously it is not like job done or anything – that is more effective at that point than if we are trying to intervene at, say, grade 5?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Our experience is absolutely. Particularly for vulnerable families, where they cannot provide necessarily that stability and certainty in the home, having young children enter the education system or enter that structured learning environment and play environment is critical for them to be able to succeed and navigate their way through the older school education system.

Michael GALEA: Ms Magriplis, you have highlighted a few initiatives, including the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, in your submission, and in fact you have called it essential. What is the experience that you have seen from refugee families in accessing this fund? What difference has it made in a real-world sense?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: In many of the families that we support, the children are actually providing the stability and certainty for the parents. Many of these kids are actually navigating Mum and Dad through a fairly traumatic life and providing the interpreter services, disproportionately navigating their parents through institutional requirements and bureaucracies. They are carrying a burden that is significant, and not many

children in Australia are having to do this. The opportunity for them to be able to remove themselves from home and experience an excursion or an event through the school system that is safe, that is structured, that is age appropriate and that is educational often opens a world to these kids, and they can see the potential of what their life could be like when things settle for their families in the longer term. They would have zero options to be able to attend these things without this program. For children who have not had the opportunity to attend these programs – not just in the cohort we support but we know in the Indigenous community and in many other vulnerable families – the impact of that is that continuing isolation and alienation from opportunity, from thought, from their peers and experiences. We all know when you have a taste of something good and inspiring you want more of that, and if we never give children the opportunity to have that experience, that taste, then they do not know what they are missing and they do not think it is for them.

Michael GALEA: Of course one of the most important things in any schooling system is to provide that inspiration and incentive and that opportunity.

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Absolutely. As a migrant from the 1970s in western New South Wales, growing up in a milk bar in a country town where we were the only ethnic family, I know my family relied on these programs. That is where I learned to aspire and realised that I could do things that my peers could do, even though I was so different to everyone. This was back in the 70s – I am very mainstream now – but I cannot underplay how important these experiences are and this access is.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, especially for the personal example too. Would it be fair then to extend that out to things such as free school breakfasts and to removing the requirement to have logos on uniform shorts so that parents can get easier access to those things? Is that all part of the same breaking down of barriers?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Yes, absolutely. Whatever we can do to make things easier for these families absolutely is going to help these kids to feel like they belong.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Dr Lonsdale, would you concur with that in terms of barriers for disadvantaged children?

Michele LONSDALE: Yes, absolutely. Anything that removes stigma. A large proportion of our organisations work with children in care or at risk of entering care or who are care-leaving, and we see the stigma that is associated with not being in a 'normal' family. There are all sorts of ways that schools respond to the behaviours that might be manifested by these students, like through the trauma that they have experienced. Often that is compounded by perhaps being excluded, either obviously and overtly or in more subtle ways.

Michael GALEA: That is what we hear.

Michele LONSDALE: Yes. That stigma is absolutely critical to remove.

Michael GALEA: Thank you both.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Michele, I want to ask you in particular – you mentioned in your opening that you support people that are so busy focusing on just making ends meet in terms of the cost of living, whether it is paying rent or bills or buying food and those sorts of things. I am paraphrasing here, but I think you might have said something to the effect that the thought of education and the costs associated with education are sort of – I will not call it a 'nice to have', but it is an extra thing that is not something that is considered in terms of the cost of living, of survival. Can you talk to me a bit more about that and what you are seeing?

Michele LONSDALE: Yes. We did a survey of our sector a couple of years ago, really when the 'cost-of-living crisis' language was first used, even though obviously for some families daily life is a cost-of-living crisis. We surveyed our organisations and they came back telling us that they were seeing a lot more need and that kids were being excluded from education, in some cases through inability to go on a school camp, for example, or voluntary fees, which are not necessarily voluntary in a practical sense. Priority was being given to food on the table or to rent. School then becomes not a 'nice to have', but it is not seen –

The CHAIR: You know what I mean – it is not a core essential.

Michele LONSDALE: Not in the same way. That is right. Yes.

The CHAIR: I guess people are making decisions based on that. How do you provide support to enable people to make those decisions about education as opposed to literally trying to survive?

Michele LONSDALE: Our organisations work closely with schools and in some cases have got a social worker in a school, and that social worker can – 'intervene' is probably the wrong word, but they can support a child very early on where there are signs of disengagement, if they are not attending or they are leaving halfway through the school day, or there is an early warning about family violence in the home or there is some issue. At that level a social worker from our agencies can be supporting not only the student but also their family early on. So that is one way.

The CHAIR: What I am trying to get to is: we are here to investigate whether there should be a cut or a delay in $2.4 billion worth of funding. Where is the gap that you think that money could go in order to support the education system to make sure that people are not having to make those decisions in a school setting about their options?

Michele LONSDALE: If you have got a public school system that may not have a compulsory uniform that needs to be paid for and that does not have compulsory or even voluntary fees, education is generally free for students to attend. There are systemic things that can be done. I am not sure what else you want me to say.

The CHAIR: I might ask you guys as well, because $2.4 billion over a period of time is significant – where do you think the gaps are and where should that money go to plug those gaps?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Well, we firmly believe that already teaching staff are under pressure and that there is a workforce shortage already. The existing school system is not coping within the current context. So there is the teaching staff and the pressures that that puts on teachers. But additionally, it is those social workers in schools, it is the welfare and the support structures within the school system that could be reinforced, and that would actually assist teaching staff to focus on the academic progress of children, and allowing that support structure within the school system to assist those students who do face these barriers and who do have these vulnerabilities to also succeed within the school system. Further enhancing access to things like school uniforms or the facilities through the already established programs would be amazing. It is educators focusing on education, because right now they are doing it all – they are the social worker, they are the caretaker. They are working well beyond –

The CHAIR: The scheduler – many different things.

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: what we should expect from our educators. Allowing them to focus on that education by having those support infrastructures in the school system – we know that principals are basically this pillar of the community in most of our suburbs. They are holding a lot of pressure and a lot of responsibility that really should be shared across our communities. Schooling is one of the last bastions of compulsory attendance for any citizen in this country, and so any problem you have as an individual, whether you are the teacher, the parent or the child, is going to be found in a school system, so let us give them the structures and the support to be able to manage and assist families and their community through life.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that. Thank you. I will hand it over to Mr Batchelor now.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, all, for coming. Obviously your submission and the evidence you have given us today raise some pretty significant issues about how the system delivers for some of the most disadvantaged in the community and people who have been particularly marginalised. The inquiry itself, though, has been set up to look at an input which is funding; it is important, but it is not an end, it is an input. What I am interested to understand is how you think we can make recommendations about how we know the system is delivering what it needs to. What are the outputs or really, the outcomes, that we want to be measuring across the system to make sure that we know it is delivering what it should? How do we tell the system is working rather than just looking at – we are obviously considering the question of inputs funding, but the ends of the system, what are they and how do we measure those outcomes?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: I can only answer this anecdotally and through emotion, but then I will leave it to others to talk more specifically about the data points. From our perspective or from where I am sitting, it is things like school attendance, results from kids in the school system, looking at the crime that young people might be involved in, the dysfunctional behaviours that are happening in the broader community. From my

perspective, they are very clear guides that we can look at. Whatever we put into the school system, we are going to really reap the benefit in the future. It is very hard in that sort of cost-benefit analysis conversation to be able to show dollar-for-dollar what the benefit is, but we know that in the long term – there is plenty of research, which I am sure you will speak to – about how you create a good society that ends up benefiting all through investment in the right places.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Michele?

Michele LONSDALE: School completion rates have gone backwards, so that is a key indicator. And then also the number of children, particularly from these disadvantaged families, who go on to post-secondary study. The Raising Expectations program, which my colleague manages, was set up because it was something like 1 or 2 per cent of children in care went on to university, so this was set up many years ago, 2015 or 2016, to address that gap. Those numbers have improved; we are seeing children being able to make more informed choices when they get to year 10, 11 or 12. So the number of children going on to tertiary education or via TAFE, that is also an indicator of whether the system is succeeding.

Ryan BATCHELOR: In the minute I have got left, can you tell me a bit more about that program – is it working and why?

Michele LONSDALE: It is working beautifully.

Pearl GOODWIN-BURNS: Yes. The Raising Expectations program is a cross-sectoral collaboration with TAFE and universities and the child and family services sector. What we do is, across education systems like compulsory education, support building aspirations for young people that are in care that quite often have a deficit narrative focused on their abilities for TAFE and uni.

Ryan BATCHELOR: We spend all the time talking about problems; it is sometimes good to talk about excellence and achievement of excellence.

Pearl GOODWIN-BURNS: Yes, and the fact that they are capable of great things. So that is basically a cultural change program, and we have worked with TAFE and universities to establish support systems at the TAFE and university end. We deliver trauma-informed training to TAFE and university professionals so that they are equipped to support them once they are there. But we also work with schools to ensure that children and young people are supported to be having those positive, strength-based conversations at the school level, which we still unfortunately hear is an issue, particularly for children and young people in care. However, it has improved. Things like trauma-informed teacher training would be a good step in the right direction, I think. Just on your original question about what we can measure, I think what might be missing is the voice of children and young people and how they actually view school and what they say. Are they having a positive experience? Are they feeling welcomed? Is it overall a positive for them as well? I think completion rates and attendance are obviously really important, but hearing from children and young people about their experiences, too, I think is really valuable.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

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

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. It is interesting that you say that we need to hear from students, because our prior witnesses were students. It was really important for us to hear their perspectives. Wellbeing – that is huge thing for students in government schools. Public schools mirror the ways our society looks at public education as a public good. How do we challenge the norms of this? This government has decided to cut $2.4 billion. It is more than just numbers, right? You have all spoken to it. It means a disproportionate impact on poverty and a lack of access to resources in order for young people and students to have a chance and to have an opportunity to flourish. I will go to you, ASRC, on your refugee education support program, which supports government schools to support refugee students to provide a culturally responsive and trauma-informed response. Is this being compromised at all by this decision by the government?

Moin ZAFAR: Certainly. I mean, I can talk about, as Pearl mentioned, trauma-informed practice and the lack of it.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Sorry. Because of the time and I have got so many questions that I want to ask you, I just want to know if it is being compromised.

Moin ZAFAR: It certainly is.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Really?

Moin ZAFAR: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: How many schools is this program being offered in?

Moin ZAFAR: What we see on the ground working with different schools is they have a triage mechanism rather than a case management, where they have referral pathways for kids with extra requirements or resource requirements. So they do not get the chance to follow through with those referrals.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: But how many schools is that program?

Moin ZAFAR: At the moment, as I said, I cannot give you an exact number.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Would you be able to take it on notice?

Moin ZAFAR: Yes, sure.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you so much.

Moin ZAFAR: I certainly can provide you that detail.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: That would be amazing. That is very concerning to hear, that that is on the line given the government's decision.

Ms Lonsdale, I am going to come to you. In your submission you noted that achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations continue to widen and inequality is entrenched, especially for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds – six times more likely to have lower achievement in maths – largely driven by persistent resource gaps and persistent underfunding of public schools. Why do you think this has become such an acceptable reality for the Victorian government?

Michele LONSDALE: This is a political funding decision.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Correct. That has such wideranging impact.

Michele LONSDALE: It does not take into account what happens to children each day in school.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Have you been able to meet with the Minister for Education to air these concerns that you have written in your submission?

Michele LONSDALE: Not with the Minister for Education, no. But do you want to talk about what you –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Do you plan to on behalf of your members and all the young people that they represent?

Michele LONSDALE: Yes. We will be.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay.

Michele LONSDALE: But we also have involvement with another department. Do you want to talk about that?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: That is okay. I will just stay with the education department. I will ask you another question. How dire is the situation in terms of future prospects, given in 2024 private school students in Victoria were projected to receive $298 more than the SRS for state schools? How dire is it?

Michele LONSDALE: It is dire. Even if you take access to technology, which is so rapidly changing, children and young people in public schools are not necessarily going to be getting access to the same technology opportunities as students in private schools.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: We have heard a lot –

Michele LONSDALE: And that gap will only widen.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Apologies for interrupting. We have also heard a lot of evidence today speaking to the cost shifting that is happening in government schools, with costs moving on to parents and them having to fork out money themselves and having to participate in a lot more fundraising activities. Is this something that you are also hearing quite commonly on the ground?

Michele LONSDALE: Our members are reporting that, yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Very unfortunate to hear that, but thank you very much. Thank you, all.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Now, I know, Lee, you have very generously ceded your time, which I appreciate, unless you have got any other question that you would like to ask? No. What I might do then is just for the remaining five or so minutes, every person on the panel will get a minute to fire a last question at you guys. So I will go over to Mr Batchelor again.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. What do you think the most critical investment we could be making in the education system would be?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Two things. Teachers and –

Ryan BATCHELOR: More teachers or better resourced teachers?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Both. I think there is enough money there for more. If we fully fund schools and get the federal government contributions in, we have got enough to better pay teachers, give them the conditions that help to get the best out of them and build in that support infrastructure within the school system, to your point – to build that wellbeing and welfare support, as we have mentioned earlier, to navigate kids through the school system and have the people with the expertise work within their expertise to support these kids.

Moin ZAFAR: From my perspective, more funding for English language schools, because at the moment there is a wait time of literally six months. Language schools exist regionally as well, even remotely, and even for that, there is a waitlist, and that creates a lot of issues with our clients where the families and their kids have to wait for at least six months to get into the school system. So that is a really important funding gap which exists at the moment.

The CHAIR: Michael?

Michael GALEA: I will just pick up on the question of more teachers, since we are on the topic. The latest teacher workforce snapshot shows that the projected shortfall is narrowing, which is a good thing, but there is still a projected shortfall. What is working, and what can we be doing better to get more people interested in teaching?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Teachers want to teach, and so having them be educators primarily I think would really assist.

Michael GALEA: So perhaps more support staff in other fields?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: I have had the floor a lot, so I will let others speak.

Michele LONSDALE: We need to publicly value them. It has to be seen, just as doctors used to be seen, as the profession that you aspire to, that you are really held in high esteem for doing. This is such an important job, particularly in public education. So there has to be that. They have got to be paid better. They have to be not

just trauma-informed but technology-informed, so that our children are getting access to the best qualified, best trained teaching profession that we can possibly do. Look overseas to see what the models are overseas; bring them back to invest in them; adapt them to local circumstances. So absolutely, we need to be investing in that profession as a desired, highly valued profession.

Pearl GOODWIN-BURNS: And paid placements for teaching students.

The CHAIR: Good call. Thank you. My question is similar but different: what is the one thing that you think would make the biggest difference in the education system with $2.4 billion? Is it the paid placements? Is it better teacher training? Is it more teachers? I know there is no silver bullet – I understand that – but what are the things that you think would really make a difference on the ground to the people that you work with every day?

Pearl GOODWIN-BURNS: Tutoring programs. We hear a lot from children and young people that are in care or that have left care, and by far the number one thing that young people talk to us about needing in the school is tutoring. There are some great tutoring programs out there, either at the school level or through child and family services organisations, but they are quite limited in their ability to support longer term, and also they are not available everywhere, particularly for regional and rural students. So by far, tutoring. And I think the second thing would be removing the barriers to things like extracurricular activities. We hear from young people that have given us evidence about the cost prohibiting them from engaging in school in general and dropping out because it is too much for them as an independent young person that they are expected to pay the costs of school camps, balls, things like that, leading directly to their exclusion and feeling really stigmatised and isolated from their peers.

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: I cannot spend $2.4 billion on this, but we need to provide an opportunity for children who face vulnerabilities to also participate fully in the subjects that help to build quality of life, like if you have a child who is in out-of-home care or an asylum seeker who has a prowess for music but cannot afford a musical instrument. We as a society tend not to prioritise those things, the creative industries, the talents that people might have as very young people. We are missing out. That really does build culture, it builds connection, it builds belonging and it builds a society that is thriving.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Anasina, I will hand over to you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. Just a question for all of you: what is the consequence of this chronic underfunding and lack of investment for children that attend government schools?

Anastasia MAGRIPLIS: Well, they are not thriving. We have self-funded a schools coordinator because we were not able to work within the school system as it is now to support the students that are part of our cohort. By actually specialising in this area we are trying to assist the people who can come to us, but that is a tiny proportion of the people who need this support. From our perspective that is the consequence. We would rather not be doing that. We believe that this is a duty that we all share as a community. There are duty-bearers here, and that is government. But we as a charity are stepping in to support this community, and many other charities are doing it for the people that they are supporting. We should not have our children and our young people dependent on the kindness of charities and strangers to access and get the most out of something that they have a human right to, which is education.

Michele LONSDALE: Children not engaging is really a critical theme that we see, particularly since COVID, where the numbers of children who are avoiding school have grown. I have not looked at the numbers for homeschooling, but I suspect that has increased as well. How do we get those children to engage? One of the issues we think is there is a lack of social workers in schools to intervene early, a lack of outreach workers who can support teachers, go out to the homes, go out to the residential care homes and try to encourage those children. It might take a lot of different strategies to get them to actually attend school, but if they do not attend, they are not going to learn. They are not going to be going on to productive lives.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you all.

The CHAIR: Lee, do you have any final comments or anything? You are all good. We really appreciate your time and your evidence today. You will get a chance to have a look through the proof version of the

transcript as well in case there are any minor errors or anything like that, but from us, thanks very much for your time today. We really, really appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.