

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Public School Funding

Melbourne – Wednesday 25 March 2026

MEMBERS

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Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

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Sheena Watt

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Tim Warwick, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Education Equity Alliance; and

Lois Knight, Parent, Brunswick North Primary School.

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

Michael GALEA: Good afternoon, Michael Galea, Deputy Chair and Member for South-East Metro.

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

Sheena WATT: Hello, Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan Region.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Hi, Anasina, Northern Metro.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. 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 this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by that privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing to just make any minor changes of typographical errors or whatever, but transcripts will ultimately be made public and put on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can I get you to say your full name and any title and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of?

Lois KNIGHT: My name is Lois Knight, and I am a parent and former school council president at Brunswick North Primary School.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thank you. Welcome.

Tim WARWICK: I am Tim Warwick, or Timothy Warwick, Founder and CEO of the Education Equity Alliance.

The CHAIR: Perfect. Thanks so much. Welcome, Tim. I will now hand over to you guys to do your opening. The floor is yours.

Lois KNIGHT: Thanks very much. Thanks for the opportunity to appear here today. As I said, my name is Lois Knight. I have been part of the Brunswick North Primary School community for 11 years now, including six years as the president of the school council, finishing up in February this year. I have also just joined the school council for the secondary college. I will soon have three kids there at the same time and think that is a good time to contribute.

I am here because over my time on school council I have seen firsthand how funding constraints affect every part of the school: students, teachers, resources and the physical environment. The reality is my children and so many in the system at the moment will go through most, if not all, of their education before adequate funding is reached. As a parent and as a school councillor, I find this unacceptable. It means that whole generations of students are being short-changed by the system, and they really deserve better. My daughter is in grade 6 now, but by the time the funding is rolled out, she will be in year 11 or year 12. My older children will be way out of the system, so these delays impact on a whole generation of students. For a state that prides itself on leading in education, this claim just does not hold up at a school level within our community. I am not an academic or an economist, but I want to convey to the committee here today some lived experience and the experiences of what I hear every day from families in the school community.

As school council president, I hear a lot from families. My inbox is really, really full. What really stands out is that the community believes in public education. They care deeply. There is no shortage of ideas or ambition, and we really want to do more for our kids and our school. But there are some real concerns. An area that I hear the most about is whether the school can meet increasingly complex learning and behavioural needs in the classroom. The other area is ongoing frustration about the condition of buildings and questions about when our run-down spaces will be maintained and upgraded. Even small improvements, things that could be straightforward and should be straightforward, require staff time, and without funding to free people up, they just do not happen. When we bring ideas to school council the response from leadership is often the same: 'We just don't have the staff or the resources to make it work.' And that is not about extras but things most people would consider standard – communications, sustainability initiatives, IT upgrades, maintaining the grounds, updating play equipment, offering enrichment opportunities – let alone something really special like a school play.

Schools are becoming more complex. I have noticed this particularly since the pandemic, and the two principals that I have worked with have also reported this. Schools are taking on a bigger role in the community. They have become community hubs, supporting families and helping connect them with services, and that work mostly falls to the school leaders. Again, the resourcing is not there to support schools to deliver. I have seen principals and assistant principals stretched thin, trying to keep the school running while taking on more responsibility for student wellbeing. Even when there are dedicated roles, like a mental health and wellbeing coordinator, it is just not enough to meet the need, and a lot of that work again falls to school leadership, which pulls them away from other essential parts of their role, like rolling out the latest version of the curriculum and supporting the teachers to do that.

From our community I consistently hear concerns about the need for more learning support, better access to mental health services and long waiting times for assessments and funding, especially if it comes to inclusive education. I really want to acknowledge, though, the progress made there. Inclusive education is a government priority, and recently our school received a government grant to upgrade an inclusive play space, which we also supported as a community with voluntary contributions to the landscaping aspects. This was a really big moment for our school community because we have not received any other upgrades recently. Other recent upgrades around accessibility have been ramps and a stair lift, which have been very well received. But still, there is a really long way to go, and a lot of students fall into a gap where they do not qualify for targeted funding but have significant behavioural or other inclusion needs and need a lot of help to fully participate in their education, and this is tough for students and their families and teachers. In fact the whole class context is really tough.

I hear a lot from families about their concerns and whether individual education plans can realistically be delivered when teachers are so stretched. Our school is 100 years old. We are planning a really big celebration, but as I heard mentioned earlier, the maintenance bills are enormous and we are not able to keep up with them, and the standard allocation is not enough to continue the bandaids on a 100-year-old building. The school council spends a lot of time lobbying the VSBA, the department and politicians, trying to work out how we can best maintain our built environment, and it feels a little bit like a lottery or a competition where we do not know the rules as to how we might access that funding. There is also growing reliance on voluntary contributions from parents, and families are being asked to fund things that really should be core funding, I think – standard things like furnishings, carpeting, hallways, resources for classrooms. This all helps, but it does highlight the shortfall in core funding. Schools are doing everything they can but are constantly managing shortfalls, and this compromises the quality of education. This week's teachers strike reflects that pressure. There is a lot of support in our school community for the stop work. The pay really matters, but surely it is not just about pay, it is about funding the whole system.

I hope that I have conveyed to the committee this community perspective – and I think it is a really realistic expectation – on the human cost to underfunding our education system. It feels like it is being carried by our children. This is really urgent. Children only get one shot at their education, and we are not holding up our end of the bargain. I hope that really appealed to the government and to this committee to make education a priority and to choose to fully fund the public education system. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tim, over to you.

Tim WARWICK: Thanks, committee, for this opportunity. I am here today representing thousands of students, teachers and system stakeholders who have contributed to establishing the alliance's work. Just for reference, we are an education charity with a specific focus on low-SES school communities. They represent 43 per cent of all government school communities and there are over 800 of them within the Victorian context. I want to acknowledge that we work with a number of amazing partner organisations and low-SES schools to do this work, which I will share a bit more about. I also bring my own experience. I was a teacher and principal in regional low-SES schools and have also done a stint working with our colleagues at the Department of Education in the policy design space.

To establish the alliance, we undertook a listening tour. We worked with over a thousand students, teachers and stakeholders across low-SES communities to understand how they were experiencing equity. Lots of these young people reflected it was often the first time that they had gotten to talk about how fair the system is. From all those discussions I bring a couple of key messages for the group today. The first is that students and teachers in our low-SES communities are acutely aware of the difference in resources available to them and their peers in more advantaged contexts, and of the injustice sitting behind that. We have got students talking to us about barriers accessing basic materials and not being able to go on camps and excursions. As one student put it, their single mother is doing all they can to meet their needs, and yet they are still getting bullied for their dulled second-hand shirts. I think this shows not only the barriers to access and opportunity, but also ultimately the barriers that present to these young people feeling seen and heard and valued within the education that we are providing them. What this ultimately shows is obviously what this inquiry is all about – that there remains a persistent difference in the resources available to government schools compared to private education, and that has been recently delayed or further pushed down the line by recent government decision-making. Obviously we feel that is unacceptable and that there are immediate needs within these communities that must be met.

We would, though, also point to the fact that there are some broader structural contributors here that probably also need to be looked at. The split between Commonwealth funding, largely of private schools, and state government funding, largely of government schools, and those being the majority of schools, means that significant investment is happening here in Victoria into education and it has not been able to keep pace. So what we would say is that private schools are just structurally much better protected from those kinds of funding pressures, and that has resulted in them achieving their funding standard much earlier than government schools will achieve. Why we think this is particularly problematic is that these government schools are serving the vast majority of low-SES students. They serve 90 per cent of low-SES students, compared to 65 per cent of all students that they are serving. The result of that and the injustice of that is that students with the greatest need are the least likely to be getting the funding that they need – that is our first message.

The second message is a bit challenging in an inquiry about funding, but it is that what we consistently hear is that even when funding or resources are available to schools, it is not necessarily the kind of silver bullet to addressing the equity challenge. There are really persistent conditions in place within our system that are holding us back from achieving this equity, and we have got to be really careful about any narrative that funding alone will be what answers the problem of equity within our system. It is kind of saying to our teachers and school leaders, 'Well, you've got the money now. You can go and fix this very significant problem of inequity we have within our system.'

All of that listening has pointed us to some really important conditions that we believe need to shift. The first is that we have got to get on the same page about what actually will achieve equity. There are a lot of different perspectives, initiatives and efforts happening within our system that are often working in different directions rather than the same direction. We have lots of support happening, but what we hear is that it is quite fragmented rather than coordinated, and that is really difficult for schools to navigate to make sure they are getting the right support to the right students.

I do not need to remind anyone today that we have a workforce under significant pressure. Obviously pay and conditions are front and centre at the moment, but what we would say is the overburdening of teachers is what we consistently hear, and that the tasks required to be a good, effective teacher now are beyond what they have the time and capacity to do.

I am just going to take one more minute to finish off. The final thing I want to just talk about is to achieve the change in these conditions that I am sure everyone in this room would love to see, what we believe is most critical is a more collaborative system. We need true partnership between the different parts of the system.

Through all that listening, what we hear is that students and teachers in these communities are the most likely to feel disempowered or disengaged from the system itself. We have been working really hard to set up some structures to enable that – that is the school network. We have got over 40 low-SES schools working on shared priorities. We have got our collective impact initiative, which brings together 25 peak education equity stakeholders, who I want to acknowledge have said, ‘We want to work differently to shift this problem.’ And then we have also got a first-of-its-kind intergenerational leadership council, which brings together students and teachers from low-SES communities to work in partnership with the NGO sector to drive real change.

I just want to finish off. I do want to acknowledge our DE colleagues, because tomorrow actually we have a workshop between the leadership council and a group of the executives of the department. That is exactly the kind of partnership we think is most important to really shift some of these quite intractable problems. We are super excited by what is possible when we come together as a system around this objective of equity, and I look forward to chatting more about it with you today.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. I will now go to questions, and I will go to Mr Galea first.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for your opening statements. I might start with you, Mr Warwick. You actually touched on this just a moment ago when you said it is not just a question of how much funding. For this funding amount that we are talking about, how should it be put to the best use? How do you actually make it get those outcomes that we are looking for?

Tim WARWICK: Great question – almost the \$2.4 billion question, perhaps. What we would say is that we actually have relative clarity as a system about a lot of what the high-leverage kind of improvements are. So that is a mix of really good-quality teaching and learning. Obviously there has been a big focus on that within our system over the last few years, and we are very encouraging of that kind of clarity around the teaching and learning that will make a difference. That then needs to get put alongside really effective wellbeing supports and social/emotional learning, and what we often struggle to do as a system is understand that it is a balance between these things. We actually have a number of the levers in play is what I am trying to say, but it is then empowering school communities to get the balance right of those things and to get the consistent messaging coming from all the different parts of the system about ‘We’re going to give you the space to make sure you’re working towards really good-quality learning outcomes, as well as really good-quality wellbeing outcomes’ – Ms Knight here talked about the enrichment opportunities and all those kinds of things around that that need to exist. It is about how we are bringing those pieces together and giving really consistent, clear advice about, ‘These are your best bets when it comes to what you can do in this space.’ And yes, as I said, we have a number of those pieces on the table already; it is about getting clear about how we are doing that in practice.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Your submission talks about a number of the programs and initiatives that you organise, and it does look very impressive. I might just ask you about the schools network one, with 40-plus Victorian low-SES schools, and you spoke about your background as a regional schoolteacher. In broad terms, what is the geographic spread of these schools that you work with?

Tim WARWICK: Great question. It is largely out of metropolitan Melbourne, as you would probably anticipate, and there is probably a good ring across the west and up into the north-west and then quite a cluster down in the south-east, so Cranbourne and Frankston, those kinds of communities. And then we have a smattering of regional colleagues joining us, and we are hoping to grow that because there is significant need in the regional areas.

Michael GALEA: Indeed. And you spoke about the empowerment, I think, of school communities. I think something that a few of us have reflected on is, I guess, the social space that different school groups have to advocate in, and every school is hugely important. I will take your example, from my electorate, of Cranbourne where people are probably a bit more likely to be extremely time poor, more likely to be mortgaged. All of these compounding factors mean that they are not able to invest as much time into their school community or indeed advocate for their school community. Is that the sort of thing that you are talking about with that?

Tim WARWICK: A hundred per cent. And I think the challenge that we have as a system is that the work of leading in a community like that and effectively bringing that community together around that shared purpose of education is quite different from that community to the community that you work in. And so we

have to empower leaders to be able to have that space to do that particular work. Again, I think we struggle as a system – sometimes we treat that as one and the same, that work, and it really is not.

Michael GALEA: Yes, thank you. Food is obviously a very important part of this conversation too, and obviously we could talk about the school breakfast club. There is an organisation that actually appeared the last time this committee looked at the education system, and that was called Eat Up Australia. They were founded in Shepparton, and they have spread out to do –

Tim WARWICK: I know them well. They gave us lots of sandwiches.

Michael GALEA: Excellent. Well, not the sandwiches, but that was going to be my question. What sort of work do you do with them and groups like them, and how important is that work?

Tim WARWICK: It is vital. I think there are a lot of amazing NGOs doing essential work across this system to kind of top up some gaps. I guess the exact work we are doing with them is around how we get as strategic as possible to make sure the right supports are accessing the right communities and the right students. One of the issues at the moment we have is that it is quite patchy, and that is because there are some challenges around how information is flowing and who ultimately holds that coordination role. That is what we are very interested in exploring. But yes, organisations like that are doing essential work within our system.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. You are in a very interesting position, Tim, because you have had a number of different experiences which give you a pretty unique perspective on education. As you would have heard, we just had the department come in before and they have the SRS that they are working with and also the SRP. Do you have a view on whether the SRS is a good way of measuring what schools actually need, given that states have different contexts and different variabilities that might have a bigger impact in one than another state? Is it a good measure? I guess you could reference the SRP as well if you want to.

Tim WARWICK: Just to be clear, you are asking about the SRS set by the federal government as opposed to the SRP?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Tim WARWICK: Look, I will be really up-front. I have not gotten into the fine grain as much as our department colleagues, but I would say from a school leader's perspective, all of this is potentially more complicated than it needs to be. The current kind of breakdown of funding within the schools and the multiple lines and how you account for those lines and acquit those lines is quite challenging. We consistently hear that from schools, especially when it comes to this topic of equity. The cohorts that this funding is for, often within the SRP version, which is what I am most familiar with, are broken down into – you will get a top-up for students with an EAL/D background, you will get a top-up for students with a Koori background, all of that kind of stuff, in addition to your equity funding. The nature of these communities where there is a high level of need and significant intersectionality of those challenges, makes all that quite an administrative task, more than it probably needs to be when we kind of know that the vast majority of the community will benefit from a core set of things, and our outcome should be to deliver on those.

My final comment about the SRS and the SRP would be that we would see the inclusion of the equity component and this needs-based funding as a really positive step forward, which does seem to be getting low-SES school communities a decent amount of extra funding, which we need to make sure continues. But obviously the point of this inquiry is to look more holistically at how funding is flowing within the system, and there are some other needs there as well.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is fair enough. Thank you for that; I appreciate it. Lois, I was going to ask you as well. You spoke about the fact that your kids – I think you said your last one is going to be in either year 11 or year 12 before the funding actually hits the system, and that is a really big concern for you. Can you explain what your experience is as a parent having kids going through the system, what they are experiencing now and what your expectation is as a parent?

Lois KNIGHT: Thank you. As a parent in the public system, you expect it to be delivering all that it is held up to be, and yet most of my experience in this public system has been in a scrap for funding through my school council role. My children are receiving an education, and I really love the school I go to –

The CHAIR: What sort of funding are you talking about? Is it paying teachers? Is it getting buildings fixed?

Lois KNIGHT: From a school council perspective, the sorts of things that we get involved with are particularly around funding for school buildings and maintenance and upgrades, that type of thing. We do not get involved deeply in the operational aspects, for instance, teacher related –

The CHAIR: The reason I ask is because we have had other people come through and say they have done fundraising to get resources for teachers. Is that something you have had to do?

Lois KNIGHT: Yes. Fundraising and the parent contributions increasingly fund what we consider to be the gap. Some of our fundraising over the years has been to fund a part-time school nurse because we have had a lot of kids with a range of health issues and it has exceeded what the staff in the office or their teachers can cope with. That has been something over the years that we have fundraised to support. That is that type of funding. But the school community is really well aware of the different areas where our school is struggling and indeed all public schools would be struggling. Whilst they may not know at the community level all the technical aspects of which budget funding is coming from, it is well understood that funding has been put off and our schools are not being funded to the level to which they ought to be.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is fair enough. Thanks very much. Sadly, my time has run out, and I will pass over to Mr Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Lois, Tim, thanks for coming in. Tim, it is always challenging and confronting when witnesses force you to think about what you have been doing. I just went back and had a look. We get your point about equity and how we make sure that the system is dealing with it. We have had, at my count, seven different schools come and give us some evidence before the inquiry. For three of them teachers or the principal came, and there were four where there were parent reps. The four parent reps all came from schools with VICSIA scores above 1000, some of them over 1100, which says a lot, I think, about how social capital helps schools. What do you think we have got to do as a system and as a government to better support the other schools, to help their communities? It is just a reflection point that what we have heard has been skewed really. How do we overcome that?

Tim WARWICK: Yes, it is a fantastic question. I would start by just saying I think we have to be really clear that we have got two separate problems. We have got the problem I am really invested in, which is low-SES communities in particular that are very complex and are increasingly complex due to the nature of poverty, cost of living, homelessness, all the things. They have specific needs, and they deserve more funding. I just want to acknowledge that I think an underexamined problem within our system is that probably because those schools are getting equity funding, they have access to a bunch of resources that they can use to meet the needs of those cohorts. Potentially one of the challenges that we have is that the communities that Ms Knight represents here are the most squeezed within the system, because they are not receiving that equity funding. They also actually have the most experienced staffing profiles. That might sound great, but it is actually really challenging from a budget perspective because they are the most expensive staff, so it leaves them very little additional resourcing to do anything with. It results in family communities having to really bear that brunt, even though you are expecting this is a public school, this should not be your role. They have chosen exactly what we should want parents to be choosing, which is to send their kids to public schools rather than investing the money into private schools. It results in some of these behaviours that are quite challenging as a system.

Ryan BATCHELOR: But can the system fix that?

Tim WARWICK: Again, we focus –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Can a funding system control for that?

Tim WARWICK: I would say that the premise of the Gonski reforms was to provide additional funding to the students who need it most, but it did bake in our private–public divide. And it did not challenge the fact that we have private schools receiving significant amounts of government money and being able to then also take in

significant additional contributions from families, alumni – the pots of money that they sit on. We did not challenge that at all. As a result we have got middle-class communities that want to believe in public education, want to do what the vast majority of other countries do, which is send their kids to their neighbourhood school, but they are squeezed as a result of it. And all this pressure that we are talking about here is a manifestation of that. Should government schools be funded to the full amount of SRS within the Gonski arrangements? Yes. But that does not mean the Gonski arrangements are right or will fix all of the problems that we are here talking about today, because it still bakes in that structure within our system. I do not know if I answered fully your question.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It was a very good answer anyway. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Ms Gray-Barberio, over to you.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for appearing before the committee today. Mr Warwick, can you just give us a breakdown if possible? You represent 40 per cent of low-SES schools?

Tim WARWICK: Forty. Just 40 low-SES schools.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Forty. So not 40 per cent?

Tim WARWICK: No, 40 of 740.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. All right. No worries. That is fine. What percentage of those 40 schools, if you even collect this data, are students from a multicultural background or students with disability or First Nations students?

Tim WARWICK: We do not collect specific data on that. That is a great thought; let us do that. But I would say what we understand of these school communities and the nature of low-SES communities generally is that there are higher proportions of students from those backgrounds represented in those communities. And that certainly is what these schools talk to us about.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What else do they talk to you about?

Tim WARWICK: They talk to us –

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I know it is a long list, a big question, but you just answer it how you want.

Tim WARWICK: Look, something that I have not spoken about today, because the challenge we have as a system is not a quick fix – it is not like a program that we can all kind of go out and support – is that what we really consistently hear from students and teachers in these communities is that their relationship is the key to unlocking equity. We phrase it as the student–teacher relationship is the pathway to equity. However, the challenge that we also hear is that in these communities, these relationships are most under stress because of lots of the things that I am sure you have heard about over the last two days: that the conditions are not in place to protect – or enable to thrive really – these relationships that are so critical.

We can talk about school breakfast programs. There will be lots of students who do not want to go to a school breakfast program because of the kind of stigma attached or what that looks like. The person who is going to get them to the school breakfast program because they need food is their teacher. And often that is going to also look like the teacher bringing a plateful of food direct to the student at their desk because they are going to have seen as soon as that kid walked in the room that they have an empty stomach and they are not going to do any learning on an empty stomach. Often we have got teachers out there that are probably preparing some of their own food to top up that. These teachers are critical, and we have a real challenge in these communities about making sure that they are all they can be to achieve the equity.

We would love to have a systemwide taskforce about ensuring every student has a great quality student–teacher relationship. That would be great. It is sounding pretty good to me now that I say it. But I think there is an element to which it is assumed, or it is like ‘Of course the student has an adult in front of them, so therefore a strong student–teacher relationship.’ Unfortunately it is much more complicated than that, so we would love to see that change.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. Thank you. Ms Knight, can I just come to you, please. How much are parents having to make in terms of voluntary payments? Do you have a figure?

Lois KNIGHT: Well, we make 60 per cent at our school, but it is declining. Our school has been able to make voluntary contributions over the years, but we are seeing that go down. I think there is a really flawed baked-in assumption about what voluntary contributions are going to be possible into the future.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: We heard the secretary of the department say that that should not be happening, and then we have also heard contrasting evidence that this is really just a norm to fill the gaps.

Lois KNIGHT: Yes. I think schools assume it is the norm.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: And it is becoming more each year according to parents that have appeared before the committee. What is your take on it?

Lois KNIGHT: Well, I think there are big assumptions about what parents will be able to do. But I think at the school level there is an understanding of the community quite directly and that that is going to decline. There is also a lot of pressure on communities to fundraise, and our school works very hard at that. It is usually to fund grounds upgrades. But it is a big community effort to fundraise, and it is all coming out of the same families' pockets. The ones that are spending the money at the fete or baking or putting up products for silent auctions; they are the same people that are also paying the voluntary contributions. Not everyone in the school can do that type of heavy lifting.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

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

Sheena WATT: Thank you. Thank you very much, Chair. Can I just declare, firstly, that I have in fact met Lois at Brunswick North Primary School. I have visited the school and seen firsthand what you have talked about, including the recent upgrade to the –

Lois KNIGHT: Our inclusive play space.

Sheena WATT: Yes, that is right – inclusive play space. And it truly is quite an exceptional space. I just wanted to talk about the advocacy required to build up something like that, because it is not an easy project to get off the ground, and it is a point that was made earlier around advocacy and effort by parents. I am just keen to understand then, from an equity perspective, what we can do to improve access to the sorts of upgrades that Brunswick North has been able to enjoy.

Lois KNIGHT: Yes. Good question. We are conscious of a level of privilege in what our community can mobilise, and that is particularly in social capital. So it is not enormous in the contributions, but in terms of what we are able to do as a community to make something happen is not insignificant. But in order to land that grant, that was an enormous school council and broader community effort. I said earlier that it feels like you are playing a competitive game, without knowing the rules of engagement, to access funding for a grant or maintenance or indeed a full upgrade – or indeed, maybe it is a bit like a lottery. So the amount of time the school council spends focusing on basic maintenance things, hoping for grants, strategising about how we might get them, lobbying politicians – I mean, it is a lot of effort, and that is not necessarily a good use of all of our time. But of course, not all schools have the ability to do that. Of all the efforts we have made, we have had one grant drop, and it happened to be this inclusive play space area, which was wonderful. And then our community also co-funded that with some money we raised and also voluntary landscaping. But yes, absolutely. I think it highlights an equity gap, because not everyone can do that type of advocacy, and then we do rely on the system being more equitable and easier to navigate for others that cannot put in that type of effort.

Sheena WATT: No, I appreciate that. Mr Warwick, do you have any contributions on perhaps our lower SES schools and their efforts around being able to get grants and grant applications? I mean, I understand it is enormously challenging for school communities to put these together, and I am keen to –

Tim WARWICK: Yes. I think I just want to challenge the premise that it has to be a game at all – like, we know we have lots of money in play. We know lots of the needs of these communities, both the ones we

represent and the ones that Lois represents, and how we cannot just get those resources in place and we have to rely on things like grants to do that baffles me. I understand you can zoom out from a budgetary perspective and stuff like that, but I think we should not accept the premise that we have to rely on things like this to make sure communities have what they need. We know a lot about that, and we also have quite considerable resources at play within the system. So how are we making sure they get to where they need to go?

Sheena WATT: And is that a piece of advocacy that your organisation has been working on?

Tim WARWICK: Yes, definitely. I think that goes to our work to help stakeholders get on the same page about what is really needed and be on a shared page. We know lots of bits of it, but it is how it comes together. We are actually running a big visioning process at the moment, bringing together 50 stakeholders from across the system, which will define a more shared vision of education equity, yes.

Sheena WATT: I believe that is me. I might pass back to you, Chair, if I can.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We are just on time. Thank you very much, both of you, for your time today. We really appreciate that and the evidence. You will be given a proof version of the transcript to have a look over. But from us, thanks very much. That brings an end to the hearings today.

Committee adjourned.