

Member	Nina Taylor	Electorate	Albert Park
Period	1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025		

Regulation 6 - Expense allowance and electorate allowance	
Total amount paid to member for electorate allowance	\$12,514.74
Total amount paid to member for expense allowance	\$988.19

Regulation 7 - Motor vehicle allowance	
Total amount paid to member for motor vehicle allowance	\$6,443.43
Member did not receive the motor vehicle allowance in the previous quarter and member has elected to receive the motor vehicle allowance for this quarter	No

Regulation 9 - Parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	
Total amount paid to member for parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	\$0.00
Suburb in which the member's parliamentary accommodation is located	n/a

Regulation 10 - Travel allowance claims					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Town or city in which accommodation was located	Value of the accommodation

Total number of nights for travel allowance claims 0
Total amount paid to member for travel allowance \$0.00

Regulation 11 - Commercial transport allowance claims					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Mode of transport	Value of transport

Total number of nights for commercial transport allowance claims 0
Total amount paid to member for commercial transport allowance \$0.00

Regulation 12 - International travel allowance claims			
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid
21/04/2025	2/05/2025	March of Living tour (Poland) as electorate business representing the people of Albert Park and education meetings Finland (Parliamentary Secretary role)	\$8,586.49
21/04/2025	2/05/2025	March of the Living tour (Poland) and education meetings in Finland (Parliamentary Secretary Role)	\$2,566.51

Total number of nights for international travel allowance claims 11
Total amount paid to member for international travel allowance \$11,153.00

2025 MP Delegation to Poland

Submitted by:
Nina Taylor MP
Member for Albert Park
Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Introduction

This report covers the travel of a delegation of Victorian Labor, Liberal, and National MPs to Poland, followed by the travel in my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Education to Finland.

Poland
21 April – 26 April 2025

The delegation members for the Poland Component were:

- David Southwick MP, Member for Caulfield
- James Newbury MP, Member for Brighton
- Rachel Westaway MP, Member for Prahran
- Tim Bull MP, Member for Gippsland East
- Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan
- Paul Hamer MP, Member for Box Hill
- Nina Taylor MP, Member for Albert Park
- Michael Galea MP, Member for the South Eastern Metropolitan Region
- Ryan Batchelor MP, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region

The purpose of the travel was both electorate and parliamentary in nature. It was undertaken in my capacity as the Member for Albert Park, respecting the historical connection for Jewish constituents within my electorate, but also more broadly with regard to exploring broader state-wide issues relating to social cohesion, and the challenges posed by the rise of antisemitism, both internationally and within the Victorian/Australian context.

Date	Expense	Location of Expense	Foreign currency	Australian Dollars
22/4/2025 - 25/4/2025	Accommodation MOTL	Poland		\$500
22/4/2025 - 25/4/2025	Transport (bus and taxis) MOTL	Poland		\$200

Poland– Purpose of Visit

Summary

The travel was part of a program organised by *March of the Living* Australia – a not for profit organisation that has been established to educate Jewish and non-Jewish Australians about Jewish life in Poland in the centuries before the Holocaust, the circumstances that led up to the Holocaust and the impact that it had – particularly on Polish Jewry. It does this through an immersive, in-country experience for participants. Our tour was led by Sue Hampel OAM, Co-President of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.

While attending the anniversary commemoration was significant in its own right – given that it was the 80th anniversary, and therefore one of the last milestone anniversaries in which Holocaust survivors would be able to participate in the program – the program had particular significance this year given the rise in Anti-Semitism that has been witnessed in Victoria (and elsewhere in the world) over the last 18 months. Given that Victoria is home to the largest Holocaust survivor community outside of Israel, this is an issue that touches communities throughout the State and serves as a reminder of how important it is for community leaders of all political persuasions to stand up and speak out against racism and bigotry, as well as how quickly words of hate can turn into something far more devastating. The program has given members of the delegation the insights to speak to their own communities, and the Victorian community at large, about the dangers of letting antisemitism, and other forms of racism, go unchecked.

Although Australian politicians have previously visited Auschwitz, including on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, this was the first delegation of MPs from an Australian Parliament to participate in the *March of the Living* program.

Statement of Objectives

- Participate in the March of the Living program in Poland to deepen understanding of Jewish history, pre-war European Jewish life, and the Holocaust.
- Commemorate Yom HaShoah at historical Holocaust sites and reflect on the legacy of genocide, antisemitism, and the importance of remembrance.

- Build relationships with key government and community stakeholders in both Poland that may offer mutual benefits for Victoria, including in education, innovation, multicultural policy, and social resilience.
- Identify and investigate relevant programs and policy initiatives that may inform Victorian policy development, particularly in areas such as integration, security, and social cohesion.

Recommendations

Following this trip, this delegation calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Support Holocaust and antisemitism education by strengthening curriculum content in schools and funding community-based education initiatives, including partnerships with organisations like March of the Living.
- Promote social cohesion and resilience by increasing support for interfaith and intercultural dialogue programs, particularly in response to global conflicts that impact local communities.

Hosts

Poland - March of the Living Australia (MOTL)

March of the Living Australia Inc. is a values-based, community-orientated, for-purpose NFP organisation and prides itself on best-practice governance in line with its core values of respect, inclusiveness, tolerance and social justice.

The March of the Living itself, a 3-kilometre walk from Auschwitz 1 to Birkenau, is a tribute to all victims of the Holocaust, their memories and their legacies. The March contrasts with the death marches, which began towards the end of World War II and continued virtually until the Third Reich's last days.

The uniqueness of the program is highlighted by the distinctive experience of visiting Poland over Yom HaShoah, followed by a special visit to Israel over Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut.

MOTL assisted by facilitating the visit to historical and significant sites and providing transportation, accommodation and meals. The cost of the program for the delegation was \$1500 per person which included accommodation from Tuesday 22 April through to Saturday 26 April and most internal transport connections.

DAY 1 - Tuesday 22nd April 2025 - Krakow

Krakow was the historic capital of Poland and the residence of Polish royalty. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, Krakow was established as the capital of the General Government, a Nazi-occupied administrative region. The Nazi Governor-General, Hans Frank, took up residence in the city's historic Wawel castle. As a result of this history, many of Krakow's historic buildings remain, including a large old city.

Introduction to Krakow - Walking Tour

The delegation took a walk along King's Way, which stretches through the city of Krakow, to Wawel Castle. Today, the walk remains a central avenue for the city, that includes a number of key buildings, squares, and shopping districts. Notably, parts of the walk still include original medieval fortification. After crossing over the originally placed drawbridge, the walk commences with Floriańska Gate, which was erected shortly after 1300. The gate originally was the starting point for royal processions. Beyond the gate, a bustling strip is now in place, before the street opens into main market square, known as Rynek. The square is one of the largest market squares in Europe.



During World War Two, the Nazi's used the square for a rally that was attended by Adolf Hitler. The square includes a number of prominent features, including the Town Hall Tower, a seventy-metre tower, Cloth Hall, which is a bustling market, St. Mary's Basilica, and the thousand-year-old Church of St. Adalbert. After leaving the square, the royal route continues, until it reaches Wawel Castle. The Castle was built under order of King Casimir III the Great and comprises a number of buildings including the Wawel Cathedral. Many visit the castle because of the myth surrounding Smok the dragon who lived under the castle. Today a large fire breathing statue is a heavily visited tourist attraction.

DAY 2 - Wednesday 23rd April 2025 - Krakow

Jewish Krakow

The first recorded presence of Jews residing in Krakow dates from the early 13th century. In the late 1400s, the Jews of Krakow were forced to move outside the old city, with many settling in the

neighbouring village of Kazimierz. For the next 450 years, Kazimierz would be the city's Jewish quarter and a major centre for Jewish life. On the eve of the war approximately 60,000 Jews resided in Krakow, almost one-quarter of a total population of about 250,000.

While today the Jewish community of Krakow is small, the history of Kazimierz is kept alive through an annual festival of Jewish culture, which has become one of the world's largest Jewish festivals. In the heart of Kazimierz is the childhood home of Helena Rubinstein (now the Rubinstein Hotel). As a young adult, Rubinstein moved to Coleraine (in the Lowan electorate) where she would establish an international cosmetics business.

On its visit to Kazimierz, the delegation visited three of the five synagogues remaining in the city:

Remuh Synagogue (Orthodox) – The oldest synagogue in Poland and one of the oldest in Europe. The present buildings were built to honour plague victims following a severe outbreak of plague in 1551. Many of the tombstones in the adjacent cemetery were pillaged by the Germans and used as road bases and building foundations. Surviving fragments were used by the synagogue after the war to construct a moving exterior wall, where you can still see many of the inscriptions on the tombstones today.

Tempel Synagogue (Reform) - Built in the 1860s. It is the newest synagogue in the city, and was noted for pre-war preacher Rabbi Ozjasz Thon, who typically (and unusually) gave his sermons in Polish, not in Hebrew. This approach attracted congregants who favoured Jewish assimilation with Poles, however rising antisemitism in the pre-war period started to drive its members away towards Zionism, which was building strong support amongst Galician Jews. The synagogue would be used by the occupiers as horse stabling during the war.

Izaak Synagogue (Orthodox) – Currently being restored, this synagogue was used by the occupying Germans as paper storage. During the war, the Gestapo ordered the Jewish official on duty to burn the Torahs. He refused and was shot. The building was a high school campus until a few years ago.



Jewish Community Centre Kraków

In 2008, the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) of Krakow was formed, with the centre formally opened by Prince Charles (now King Charles III). It aims to rebuild and support Jewish life in Krakow. The JCC is

95% funded by foreign donations and holds a close connection to Australia as previous Australian *March of the Living* delegations were the first to visit the centre.

With 1,100 active members, the centre's reach remains strong as too is their social contribution. Last year, 100,000 people visited the centre. For example, as the group visited, we met with displaced Ukrainians who fled from the Russian invasion and are fed each day by the centre. The centre provides between 800-1000 meals a week and has provided support to 400,000 Ukrainian refugees, 98% of whom aren't Jewish (A total of 7 million Ukrainians have passed through Poland since the full-scale invasion commenced in 2022). In that time, the JCC has invested approximately \$14 million USD in aid, roughly \$2,000 USD per day. The delegation also crossed paths with Bernard, a Holocaust survivor who comes in every day to make use of the centre's food pantry.



At the centre, the delegation met with its director, Johnathan Ornstein. Johnathan noted that Poland has not seen a rise in antisemitism, as many other nations have. He reported that Jews feel very safe in the country today. As with many in Poland, he reports that the main concern is the threat of Russia, noting that US posturing regarding NATO has also undermined confidence.

Galicia Jewish Museum

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Galicia Jewish Museum. The museum opened in 2004 with investment from the UK. Galicia is a historic region of south-eastern Poland and western Ukraine that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to World War One.

The delegation was shown the exhibits by curator Dr Katarzyna (Kasia) Suszkiewicz. The main exhibition shows images of Jewish life in Kraków and wider Galicia before the war, the horrors of the Holocaust, and how Jewish life has since revived in the region. The photos in the final section are the only to show people in them, a poignant symbol of Jewish culture coming back to life in the region.

The Galicia Jewish Museum has also played a major role supporting Ukrainian refugees. At the start of the war the museum was used as a daycare centre, with Ukrainian speaking teachers supporting the

children whilst their mothers were arranging their affairs. It was also used as a job finding service for adults, with one senior gallery official from Ukraine now working at the museum itself. More recently the museum has been used as a support service for senior Ukrainian refugees.

There is discussion about a forthcoming exhibition the museum will put on about Australia and the Holocaust, focusing on survivors' stories in Australia. There will be an opportunity for this exhibition to tour Sydney and Melbourne at some point.



Kraków Ghetto (Podgórze)

Following the museum, the delegation crossed the Vistula River to the suburb of Podgórze – historically a poor suburb, home to light industry. It was in Podgórze that the Nazis established the Krakow ghetto, forcing 15,000 Jews to live in extremely cramped conditions. A *Judenrat* (or Jewish Council) was established under the strict control of the occupying Nazi forces.

A year after the ghetto was set up, more than half of the population were seized off the streets and taken by train to the Bełżec death camp. The entire ghetto would be liquidated in March 1943.

The delegation visited three significant sites within the ghetto precinct:

Eagle Pharmacy (Apteka Pod Orłem)

The central square has a monument of 68 chairs. Most are facing the famous Eagle Pharmacy, which during the war was run by Tadeusz Pankiewicz. The pharmacist would provide support the population in various ways which helped them to survive. Open 24/7, the pharmacy was the secret meeting place of the underground, and a contact point where food and medications were delivered to the people living in the ghetto. He would supply hair dye to Jewish girls so they could pass as blonde Poles and offer medicine to put people to calm those who couldn't cope with their situation.

In 1983, Tadeusz Pankiewicz was recognised as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem on for rescuing countless Jews from the Holocaust. The pharmacy is now preserved as a museum.

Schindler's factory

On the outskirts of the ghetto, the delegation visited the factory Oskar Schindler moved his business to during the war. Whilst he profited off slave labour and has a flawed and complicated story, his efforts in rescuing 1,200 Jews from their fate in the ghettos by relocating them to safety have set his legacy. His story was relatively obscure until Australian author Thomas Keneally immortalised him in *Schindler's Ark*, which was adapted into the film *Schindler's List*.

On the side with the factory there is a plaque (in Polish) commemorating amongst two others, John P Liversidge, an Australian RAAF pilot who has a connection with East Gippsland. They were part of an aerial bombing unit who supported the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

The inside of the factory has a wall with a small portrait of each of the people who Schindler saved – including a number who later migrated to Melbourne.

Ghetto wall

There are two remaining sections of the ghetto wall in Kraków, of which the delegation visited one. The wall was deliberately topped in the shape of tombstones as macabre symbolism by the Nazis. The buildings abutting the walls had their windows bricked up, so inhabitants could not see or interact with the outside world.



Dinner with Professor Mark Spiegelman and Rachel Spiegelman

Professor Spiegelman is an accomplished Australian who is a retired surgeon and archaeologist. Born in Poland in 1940, he is a survivor of the Holocaust. He told us of his many remarkable survival stories from his childhood, including how his parents dressed him as a girl to avoid German officers checking to see if he was circumcised, and how he and his mother narrowly escaped detection and capture whilst on a trip to the market to buy essential food.

He also shared with us the harrowing conditions he lived in concealed in the ground in the ghetto. He was forced to live underground for an extended period, as a result of which he and only a small number of others avoided capture during the ghetto's liquidation.

Professor Spiegelman was in Poland as part of the *March of the Living Australia* delegation.



Day 3 Thursday 24 April 2025 – Auschwitz/Birkenau (Overnight in Warsaw)

In 2025, the Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) fell on 24 April. It coincides with the date in the Hebrew calendar that marks the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, when Jewish resistance fighters defied the Nazis and fought for freedom and dignity.

Auschwitz

In the morning, the delegation was given a tour of the Auschwitz camp complex:

Crematorium – Near the entrance to the camp, a rudimentary gas chamber and crematorium was built. Victims were transported in cattle trucks, and then those selected for death had to experience the indignity of having to undress publicly ahead of being led to extermination by poisonous gas and their bodies cremated. The gas chamber and crematorium used in Auschwitz served as a prototype for the mass extermination that occurred at Birkenau.

Site of hanging of Rudolf Höss– Rudolf Höss, a German [SS](#) officer and the [commandant](#) of the [Auschwitz concentration camp](#), lived adjacent to the camp very comfortably with his family, simultaneous to his leadership of the camp (the home is visible from inside the camp). After the defeat of [Nazi Germany](#) and the end of [World War II](#), he was convicted in [Poland](#) and executed for [war crimes](#) on the Auschwitz camp site.



Exploration of Buildings – Former camp barracks have been converted into a museum, with each providing physical evidence of how prisoners lived, ahead of extermination, save for the few who managed to escape and/or survived following liberation. Exhibits include:

- Individual, itemised photos of early prisoners (this was only undertaken in the early phases of the camp), as well as other photographic evidence, some taken without authority, to provide important evidence of the inhumane treatment. For instance, photos of sites of murders committed and mass graves ahead of Auschwitz being implemented e.g. in countries such as Lithuania, Belarus, Romania & more.
- Huge quantities of human hair extracted from victims – extremely disturbing.

- Large quantities of items formally owned by victims of the camp: clothing, suitcases, disability-aids, toiletry items (shaving brushes, hair combs), shoes etc
- Details regarding the completely unethical experimentation conducted on children, especially twins.
- Examples of the completely inadequate rations provided to prisoners, noting that starvation (and torture) was a pivotal and frequent cause of death in the camp.

March of the Living

Each year since 1988, Jews and non-Jews from across the world have come together on Yom HaShoah to participate in the March of the Living – a 3 km walk from the concentration camp at Auschwitz to the extermination camp at Birkenau (or Auschwitz II)

Approximately 12,000 people from 40 countries participated in the march **President Isaac Herzog of Israel** and **Polish President Andrzej Duda** opened the march, greeting the participating Holocaust survivors and released hostage Eli Sharabi, who was representing an Israeli delegation of released hostages and hostages' family members. The delegation marched together with other Australians (including Professor Spiegelman and his family).



As we reached Birkenau, out of respect for the millions of people killed, many from our group (and others) placed wooden paddles between the rails of the train tracks that led to this place of extermination.

Yom HaShoah ceremony

The walk culminated with a ceremony on the grounds of Birkenau to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe. Owing to a huge storm with torrential rain and hail, the ceremony concluded earlier than originally planned.

Day 4 Friday 25 April 2025 - Warsaw

Warsaw is the capital and largest city in Poland. It was almost completely destroyed during World War II. The delegation spent the day in Warsaw learning about Jewish life in the city, and the experiences of the Warsaw Ghetto.

ANZAC Ceremony Warsaw

The delegation observed ANZAC Day in Poland and was pleased to be the guests of the **Australian Ambassador Benjamin Hayes** at the combined Australia – New Zealand service at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Piłsudski Square. This event was also attended by both the New Zealand and Israeli Ambassadors to Poland and a representative of the Turkish Embassy in Warsaw.

One of the more pleasing elements of this service was the level of participation from the Polish Defence Forces, a country that has no direct history of entering combat alongside troops from other countries and had no representation at Gallipoli, which the date commemorates. Representatives of the Polish Land Forces, Air Force and Special Forces formed the official guard at the service and impressed all in attendance.

Our delegation was well received and laid a wreath on behalf of Victoria, later attending an official reception at the Australian Embassy.

Warsaw Ghetto

The delegation undertook a walking tour of Warsaw to learn more about the Warsaw Ghetto, and the fate of the city's Jewish population following the Nazi invasion in 1939.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of the Nazi ghettos, established in November 1940 and imprisoning around 460,000 Jews in an area of 3.4 square kilometres. This represented about 30% of the population of the city confined to around 2.4% of the metropolitan area. Conditions were extremely poor, with few rations and severe overcrowding. Disease was rampant. Communal prayer was banned. Around 100,000 inhabitants died in the ghetto from disease and starvation before the deportation to the death camps began in 1942.

The tour included a visit to the Monument to Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish Jewish pediatrician and children's author. He was also an early children's rights advocate, in 1919 drafting a children's constitution, and hosting a radio program during the 1930s promoting the rights of children. Goldszmit operated an

orphanage in Warsaw, which was forcibly moved to the ghetto under Nazi occupation. Despite offers of sanctuary by underground organisations in the ghetto, Goldszmit would not leave the nearly 200 children in his care. All of the inhabitants of the orphanage were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp and murdered in 1942.

Resistance in the ghetto to German incarceration grew, and underground organisations and movements formed including ŻOB, the Jewish Combat Organisation. The delegation visited the Anielewicz Bunker, at Miła 18, a ŻOB command bunker that includes a memorial to the Warsaw Uprising and the resistance fighters who died. The Warsaw Uprising in May 1943 was an act of resistance in the ghetto to oppose the Nazi's final efforts to transport the remaining ghetto population to the death camps in 1943. Armed resistance began in early May, and continued for 29 days. At Miła 18, when their command bunker was discovered, the ŻOB leadership committed mass suicide via poison rather than be captured by the Nazis. Around 13,000 Jews were killed in the ghetto uprising. Once the uprising was defeated, the remaining residents of the ghetto were deported to the death camps.

Several hundred bunkers were built throughout the Warsaw Ghetto during occupation, for protection and to aid the armed resistance. The delegation visited an archaeological site curated by the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. A park near the Anielewicz Bunker was chosen in 2022 for archaeological research, and excavation work later that year discovered basements from two nineteenth century tenement houses that formed part of the Warsaw Ghetto. The sites uncovered an extensive collection of fragments of equipment and infrastructure used as part of the resistance in the ghetto. The delegation heard from museum staff about the historical significance of the find and the plans to preserve both the site and the remnant artefacts.

POLIN museum

On Friday afternoon the delegation visited the POLIN Museum in Warsaw. The POLIN museum in Warsaw is a Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Its core exhibition covers the 1000-year history of Jews in Poland, from the Middle Ages to the present. Prior to the Second World War, Poland was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the world, estimated to be around 3.3 million before the Holocaust.

In addition to a museum of history, the POLIN Museum's mission is to "be a place of meetings and discussions for all those who want to better understand the past and contemporary Jewish culture, draw lessons for the future, confront stereotypes, and face today's threats such as xenophobia and prejudice. Our values are openness, tolerance, and truth. In our activities, we strive for a mutual understanding and respect between Poles and Jews. We aim to serve as a guide on the path to building a multicultural community."

Polin is the Hebrew word for Poland, and sounds like 'rest here' which legend tells was told to Jews fleeing persecution in the East. This began a millennia of settlement in the lands of modern Poland. The museum explores the role of Jewish traders and merchants, and the charters that gave Jews the right to settle, practice their religion, engage in certain occupations, and be protected from harm.

The museum traces the long history of the Jewish community in Poland – from its periods of relative stability and prosperity through to times of anti-Semitic violence and State sanctioned restrictions. The museum also documents how the prevailing conditions, particularly in the late 19th century and early 20th century gave rise to the establishment to a range of Jewish political organisations.

In addition to documenting the experience of Polish Jews during the Holocaust (90% of whom were murdered), the museum also has a focus on the fate of the some 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the war, most of them in the Soviet Union. The vast majority left within a few years. For those who remained, so did antisemitism.

This became heightened in 1968 as part of the socio-political crisis and student protest and uprisings against the communist regime. In an effort to discredit student protests, the communist government launched a propaganda war that blamed Jews. While not expressly using the word 'Jew', instead these anti-semitic campaigns included the organisation of "anti-Zionist" rallies in towns and cities. In the wake of this campaign, around 13,000 Jews left Poland.

The fall of communism in 1989 has begun a revival of Jewish life, albeit on a small scale. While the number of Jews in Poland today is small, there has been a renewal of Jewish life and a celebration of Polish Jewish traditions, history and culture.

Reflection from Nina Taylor MP , Member for Albert Park

It has been very disturbing to see the marked rise in antisemitism. The cross-parliamentary 'March of the Living' tour to Poland, presented an excellent opportunity to get a much deeper understanding of the catastrophic impact of hatred, and the impetus to ensure such destruction never repeats.

The tour greatly enhanced my understanding of the integral nexus of Polish Jews to Poland over centuries, and hence delivered a profound appreciation of the devastation that must have followed as the ghettos were mobilised, and the systematic destruction of Jewish people (predominantly Polish) was manifested.

It was an incredibly emotional and moving experience and I am very grateful for the opportunity. I feel it has ameliorated my capacity to tackle hatred and bigotry – knowledge is power.

We have a beautiful, multicultural society in Australia, and there is direct imperative therefore to foster kindness, harmony and respect always.

Conclusion

The delegation's visit to Poland provided a deeply meaningful opportunity to engage with the historical, cultural, and contemporary dimensions of Jewish life. The program in Poland offered a profound exploration of the rich heritage of European Jewry and the devastating impact of the Holocaust. Commemorating Yom HaShoah at historically significant sites reinforced the enduring importance of remembrance, education, and the fight against antisemitism.

This visit enhanced understanding of how global events affect local communities and underscored the importance of promoting interfaith dialogue and inclusive education. It also fostered international relationships that can support Victoria's ongoing efforts to strengthen multicultural harmony and community resilience.

Day 5 – Saturday 26 April 2025 – flight to Helsinki, Finland.

Finland Education system – policy and practise tour 2025

Summary

We are always striving to deliver the best educational experiences and outcomes for Victorian students, as well as nurturing and supporting excellence in teaching through our fantastic teachers. As Parliamentary Secretary for Education, it is within my remit to seek useful insight and information to objectively assess global advances in education that are relevant to our Victorian education experience.

To sustain objectivity with regard to the Victorian education system and outcomes, there is merit in critically evaluating and learning from other education systems, and Finland purports to present whole of community mechanisms which have fostered the evolution of the model which exists in Finland today.

The trip was beneficial from a parliamentary perspective, as we are driving significant educational reform (literacy, numeracy, teaching excellence and support, disability support, managing AI, optimising use of technology & more), and hence there is an imperative with such a dynamic evolution in the educational environment, to find synergies with strong educational performer(s) globally, to compare, contrast, evaluate, share knowledge and always seek to ameliorate the wholistic educational experience of Victorian students.

Moreover, Finland is at an interesting juncture in terms of acknowledging tremendous success in building a strong educational model over 50 years, now seeking to reboot in light of changing rankings with PISA, and contemporary challenges of the education sector.

Table of expenses

Date	Expense	Location of Expense	Foreign currency	Australian Dollars
27/04/2025 – check out) 30/4/2025	Hotel Accommodation	Finland	656.88 Euro	\$1154.85
26/04/2025	train from airport to hotel Finland	finland	13.49 euro	\$23.66

Statement of Objectives of the Finland educational system tour

My objectives for the tour:

- To meet with eminent educational experts in Finland, to better understand the ethos and implementation of the Finnish educational system
- Gain a deeper understanding of the esteemed qualifications and conditions of Finnish teachers
- Compare the global challenges experienced with respective teaching and learning models (behaviour, literacy, numeracy, equity, AI, technological distraction/assistance & more)
- Discuss and evaluate current and future global directions in teaching and learning, gaining the unique insight and expertise of eminent Finnish educators, and representatives of the Finnish Education Department
- Examine policy directives and solutions proposed/in implementation
- Share experiences and learnings from Australia to Finland and vice versa
- Collate and distil useful information to (where relevant), to further enhance the educational experience in Victoria

Preparation ahead of tour:

Finland has a longstanding reputation for excellence in educational outcomes, having transformed its' educational system over a period of 50 years. In preparation for the tour I met with **Pasi Sahlberg** a Finnish educator, teacher, and author, and currently Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He has worked as a schoolteacher, teacher-educator, academic, and policymaker in Finland, and he has advised schools and education system leaders around the world. He stated that it is important to understand the entire societal construct of the Finnish education system – i.e. to appreciate what happens both in and outside schools.

The Finnish education system consists of:

- [early childhood education and care](#) which is provided for children before the compulsory education begins, (at the age of seven normally)
- [pre-primary education](#) which is provided for children in the year preceding the beginning of compulsory education,
- nine-years [of primary and lower secondary education](#) (comprehensive school), which is compulsory
- [upper secondary education](#), which is either general upper secondary education or vocational education and training, and
- [higher education](#) provided by universities and universities of applied sciences.

- Furthermore, [adult education](#) is available at all levels. Liberal adult education offers non-formal studies.
- Basic education in the arts is goal-oriented education in different fields of art

Day 5(continued)- Saturday 26 April 2025

Meeting with William Doyle, a Fulbright Scholar and a Visiting Scholar at University of Eastern Finland (UEF).



Preparatory articles ahead of our discussion:

- <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0318-doyle-finnish-schools-20160318-story.html>
- <https://hechingerreport.org/how-finland-broke-every-rule-and-created-a-top-school-system/>
- <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/secrets-of-the-worlds-best-schools-fifteen-minutes-of-play-every-hour-20170116-qtrztp.html>
- <https://thetyee.ca/Analysis/2023/01/30/Shine-Off-Of-Finnish-Education/>

- <https://hechingerreport.org/how-finlands-youngest-learners-obey-the-rules-by-fooling-around-in-school/>
- <https://hechingerreport.org/finland-can-teach-betsy-devos-thing-two-valuing-teachers-school-choice-thats-real/>
- <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/08/opinions/international-womens-day-finland-sanna-marin-moriyama-doyle/index.html>
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-mom-in-finland-no-bad-weather-naomi-moriyama-2021-9>
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/finlands-key-to-success-from-a-foreigners-perspective-is-women-2021-9>

We discussed the key strengths of the Finnish education system, along with some evolving challenges associated with the intersect/interruption by technology and children's attention in school.

Overall approach

- These practices include early learning through play, equitable school funding, highly professionalized teacher training, a research-based and whole-child approach to school management, warmth and respect for children and teachers, learning environments of low stress and high challenge, strong special education, and treating all children as gifted and cherished individuals without sacrificing their childhoods to overwork or cram schools.
- Finland offers equal educational opportunities for all and is free of charge from pre-primary to higher education.
- A general ethos around supporting childhood
- Supportive and caring environment
- Learning through play
- Compulsory outdoor breaks
- A strong vocational training system (and respect for the system)
- Light homework compared to other oecd countries
- Lunch supplied for all – egalitarian
- Regular testing of progress as opposed to national testing (eg Naplan)
- High expectations of achievement when compared to many other European/US countries
- A general high level of trust of Finnish parents in the state to take good care of their children which has meant traditionally minimal parent directiveness over schools.

- William's own son is a student and has experienced the step up from his European school experience in terms of the level of complexity expected (positively) of students.

Esteem for teachers – how has this manifested

- 1970s Finland reformed the system to specifically target an elevation of
- Masters degree of education is required
- 2 year in class instruction
- Intense 2 day interview to monitor how people interact with each other to select those most suited to teaching
- As a result it is highly competitive and highly sought after to be a teacher
- Salary in line with OECD countries
- 'The appreciation of the teaching profession has continued to increase for decades. The academic education of the profession and the improved international reputation of the Finnish education system seem to have significantly boosted the appreciation of class teachers in Finland.' <https://okm.fi/en/-/the-bildung-review-describes-the-development-of-finland-s-education-and-culture-sector-over-the-past-decades-up-to-the-present-moment>

Challenges

- Finland has dropped down on international the **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** is a worldwide study by the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) in member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science.
- William's perspective: Finland launched into an expensive, high-risk national push toward universal digitalization and tabletization of childhood education that had little basis in evidence and flies in the face of a recent major OECD study that found very little academic benefit for school children from most classroom technology.
- Despite the notable decline, young people's achieved learning outcomes are still good in international comparison, as indicated by many international assessments.
- There is a bigger divide of rich and poor, especially immigrant families. William attributes this to inadequate Finnish language education for immigrants (the method, not the intent), and also a default to technology at home to occupy children's minds rather than sport.
- Finland has one of the most decentralised education systems where some 300 local governments (municipalities) are responsible for running schools. Declines in recent international student assessments have called Finnish policymakers, local education authorities and school leaders to consider new approaches in school improvement for the future.

- The governments of [Jyrki Katainen](#), [Alexander Stubb](#) and [Juha Sipilä](#) cut education funds in Finland over 2011–2018 by a total of €1.5 billion. The number of university and college employees was cut by more than 7500.

Day 6 - Sunday 27 April 2025

Meeting with William Doyle, a Fulbright Scholar and a Visiting Scholar at University of Eastern Finland (UEF)

Further discussion undertaken:

Computer technology and the Finnish education system

- [Finnish Students Go Back to School with Books, Not Screens](#) – One district of Finland has diverted from the aggressive digitalisation approach and is reducing screen use in schools. However, this has not been replicated across Finland yet.
- Sweden has new legislation in the works regarding the de-digitalisation of computers in the classroom, attributing mental and physical health issues to this teaching method.
- [Back to basics: Sweden aims to de-digitalize youth – DW – 09/16/2024](#)
- ‘Swedish students are suffering widespread disorders and a decline in physical and intellectual capabilities due to the hours spent online.’
- ‘The government’s proposal for the new law would allow students up to 9th grade to have no access to their devices during the entire time spent in school, including breaks.
- Their case is bolstered by new guidelines issued earlier this month by the Swedish Public Health Agency advising no screen time at all for toddlers below the age of two, one hour total for those aged two to five, two hours tops for those six to 12 and for teenagers, three hours maximum.”
- Self-esteem issues, body dysmorphia, bullying, addiction, lower physical activity and associated health issues, sleep disorders and anxiety have been associated with social media accessed via technology.
- ‘Differences in learning outcomes related to social background have become more pronounced than earlier. Moreover, the differences between genders are exceptionally large from an international perspective, and have continued to increase in the 21st century. <https://okm.fi/en/-/the-bildung-review-describes-the-development-of-finland-s-education-and-culture-sector-over-the-past-decades-up-to-the-present-moment>

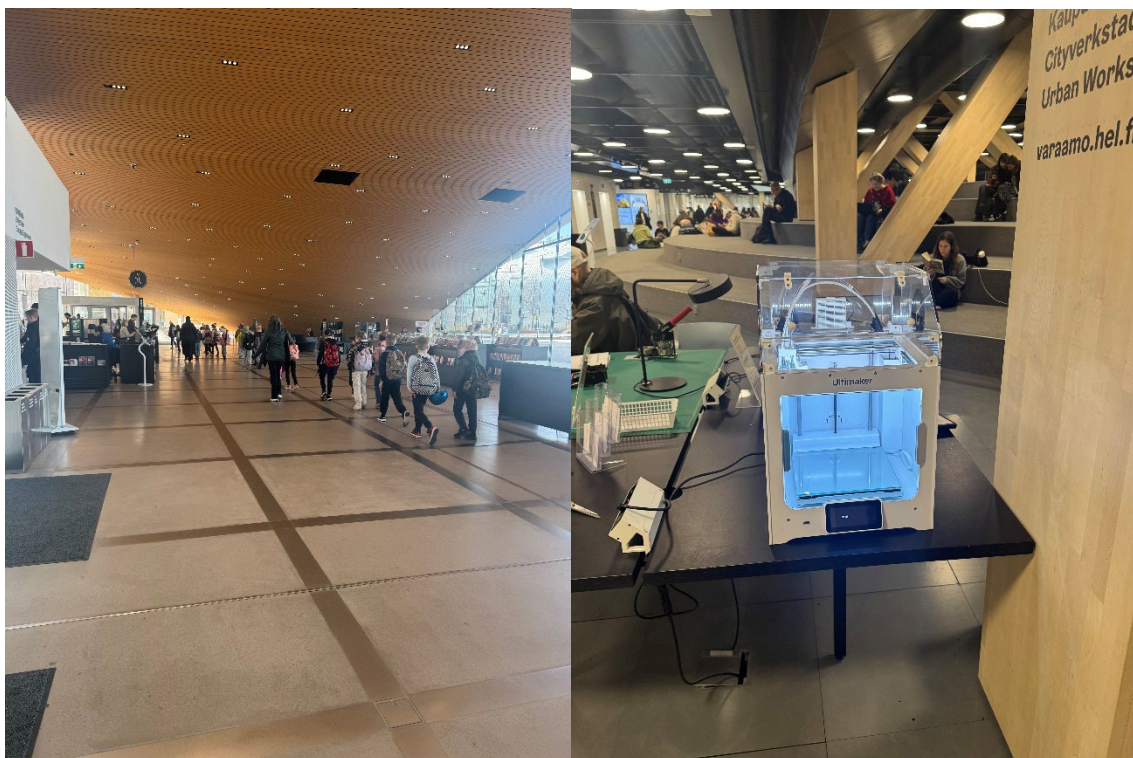
Day 7 - Monday 28 April 2025*

*Owing to a national Finnish Education conference held today in the Finnish language only, I have had to meet with further eminent education officials of Finland on Tuesday 29th April.

I utilised the day conducting local research, touring the Helsinki Central Library (multi-purpose community and educational facility) and preparatory work for further meetings in the tour.

Helsinki Central Library Oodi – tour

Oodi complements the cultural and media hub formed by Helsinki Music Centre, Finlandia Hall, Sanoma House and the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. Oodi is a non-commercial, urban public space that is open to all, right opposite the Parliament Building.



- Library services, meeting rooms, school tours
- Urban workshop - is a DIY culture space open to all. There is a wide selection of equipment ranging from 3D photo printers to a laser cutter at your disposal, game room, various sound proof music studios, and a photography and editing studio – free access to all.
- Family spaces with children prioritised on every floor
- Oodi visitor numbers indicate that there is a major need for a place like Oodi in Helsinki. Oodi was designed taking into consideration the opinions of Helsinki residents

- Opened in December 2018, Central Library Oodi proved very popular right from the start, recording one million visitors in less than four months from its opening. In 2020–2022, Oodi's visitor numbers were negatively impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, but the numbers recorded in 2023 show a clear recovery: in 2023, Oodi recorded a total of nearly 2.5 million visits, indicating an increase of 36% from 2022.
- The question is whether the same need would translate in Victoria. With increasing density and also simultaneously isolation, the provision of a safe, accessible and shared space that is affordable and can also support small businesses/startups as well as fun shared activities, that has already proven to be extremely popular as a school resource, but also for broader community use, the proposition presents a useful example of a potentially successfully model for community hub(s) into the future.

It was therefore worthwhile doing a thorough tour of this huge, community hub in the centre of Helsinki – serving both an educational/school purpose but also a broader community purpose.

Day 8 - Tuesday 29th April 2025

Meeting and school tour with Tapio Lahtero, Adjunct Professor, Administrative Principal University of Helsinki Vikki Normal School, (Teacher Training School of the University of Helsinki). Tapio Lahtero is the leader of the principal training program of the University of Helsinki. He has been educating principals and leaders of education departments of municipalities at the Universities of Jyväskylä, Turku and Helsinki. He has published several research articles about leadership culture, strategic leadership, distributed leadership and broad based pedagogical leadership.



- Tapio gave a broad overview of the structure of teacher training in Finland and the demarcation between Teacher Training campuses (and roles), versus teaching roles in municipalities.
- Teacher Training School gets funding direct from the Ministry of Education, even though it is co-located at the Department of Education at Helsinki University.
- Vikki Normaal School – provides basic education as well as upper secondary and teacher training.
- 5 year study ahead of becoming a teacher at TTS school. 4 year degree, 1 year faculty of Ed (20 training/60 credits). 2 phases of onsite training: Autumn, followed by advanced level in Spring.
- 400 teacher students at Vikki
- Teachers at a TTS undertake research, supervision, collegiate articles – whole career option for those keen on research etc versus a municipality teacher role, which is more so focused on education only
- PD – no formal, systematic strategy as 192 days, only 1 day for it. But there are a number of inservice elements that lend themselves to PD eg through formal Department meetings, individuals petitioning for training courses, and shared research events.
- Future of teacher role and esteemed perceptions: teachers are apparently no longer necessarily coming out of the highest achieving students. Tapio attributed this in part to the media's negative portrayal of angry parents and aggressive students, as well as increasing financial demands which may have reduced the appeal of the role to some extent, though it is still a competitive process to become a teacher in Finland.
- There are 3 stages of application: written form, interview and group dynamic exercise.
- There is also a disparity in cost for the Principal administration course. Vikki charges less than other Universities – which is a bone of contention. In spite of various requirements, it can be hard to get Principals in rural areas so in those instances, the requirements can be overlooked.
- With regard to Finland and PISA results – on the one hand they are worried and actively tackling the issue. On the other hand, they question whether when comparing systems all pillars are examined ergo: the cognitive, the attitude as well as the belief of the students – ie whether they believe they have capacity to apply themselves and then be able to drive better outcomes.
- Behavioural challenges are on the rise. They are not exactly why but they do take any kind of violence in schools seriously.
- Tapio took me on a tour of the school. The practical workshop/craft infrastructure is very well developed and subjects such as woodwork, home economics and art are viewed with the same esteem as maths and English.
- The school cafeteria provided to all students for lunch is very impressive and shows a true egalitarian approach to nourishing students.

- Tapio took me to observe co-teaching classes where teachers in training were co-teaching; planned a 3-class intermingled activity with drama, art and singing. The exercise allowed for mentor input to improve the design and then the teachers in training were in the process of getting the 3 classes ready and implementing the proposed project for an upcoming school assembly.

2. Meeting concurrently with Tarja Tuomainen Development Manager at OPPIVA Network <https://oppivaverkosto.fi/en/what/> in Finland. She has been working in this position since 2018, leading the network's organization and teams. She manages and implements network's meetings and training events in the field of education for leaders and education experts.

And also, Venla Bernelius a Senior Specialist at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and a Docent (Adjunct Professor) of Urban Geography at the University of Helsinki. At the Ministry, Bernelius works with topics of educational analysis, research-based development and educational equality. She currently coordinates the Finnish "School for Tomorrow" –project, which aims to formulate a new vision for basic education in the context of fast technological and societal change, in collaboration with national and international stakeholders.



Finland has one of the most decentralised education systems where some 300 local governments (municipalities) are responsible for running schools. Declines in recent international student assessments have called Finnish policymakers, local education authorities and school leaders to consider new approaches in school improvement for the

future. This masterclass explores recent trends in education reform and school improvement in Finland and invites participants to share ideas and further develop policies and practices for collaborative approaches for transforming education systems.

Within this context there are global lessons regarding next steps in technology use in classrooms, large-scale testing/monitoring, literacy and numeracy reforms, disability education and support, AI and how it should be used, fostering multiculturalism and providing appropriate supports in schools, fostering bilingual education & more.

- Right now, in Finland, a nationwide development process for the future work of basic education is underway. Tarja Tuomainen plays an important role in the ministry's working group and has led dialogue discussions about the future of schools in various parts of the country.
- Critical thinking is embedded across subjects from early childhood education. They assist children not only through empowered problem-solving but through seeing all that is behind the end product eg in recycling
- Their focus is to move away from over diagnosis/medicalisation of individualised mental health conditions, towards how the system can support well-being (physical, psychological and pedagogical well-being) through community activity/engagement. Compared to Australia, they do not have a culture of parent engagement in schools, but are seeking to change this to assist with surmounting some of the isolation problems
- Digitalisation in schools? They contend that the drive away from computers in schools in Sweden has been triggered by a political debate. They would rather find a balance somewhere in between. Even with AI, evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are inclined to over rely on AI as parental oversight is low. Higher socio-economic families can use filters that keep children thinking for themselves.
- Apparently, part of a shortage of surgeons is the result of motor-skill deficit from students overly dependent on technology and without enough motor-skill activity
- Big differences in how technology is used – can vary from the premise of the individual teacher around the country. They are seeking to provide greater synergy with this.
- There is a gender gap with boys – girls are advancing at a higher rate in Finland. But there is a greater gap in socio-economic areas. To tackle the issue with boys, they are using a campaign with Donald Duck as apparently this appeals to boys – to inspire them to read more.
- In terms of PISA results, they are worried by the global trend for Finland. Overall they are aiming to build reading communities, and encourage parents to read more as well as there has been a decline in families reading – an over focus on mobile phones. They want families to develop better habits at home.
- Finland has evolved from a basically homogenous society to one that has stark contrast. More homogenous higher socio-economic areas v low socio-economic, high migrant areas. Finding a way through to better serve those worse off so to speak.

- They are currently examining whether to implement more national testing, that is in addition to matriculation. On the one hand, national testing can gear study to testing outcomes and impose psychological stress on teachers. On the other hand, it's a question of accountability. It may be they find somewhere in the middle.
- Whilst they believe that comparatively by other nations teacher retention is not a major issue, burnout is most prevalent in lower socio-economic schools. And there is a bias towards applications for higher socio-economic schools as less onerous/tiring to teach.
- Teachers are complaining about excess administrative burden taking them away from teaching.
- Students have complained about loneliness and parents are becoming more demanding and tending to lose their tempers since COVID.
- Above all though, early childhood education standards in Finland have been consistently high and they emphasise the need for high quality early childhood educators.
- With regard to behavioural challenges which have increased in recent years, part of it is attributed to screen addiction, lack of impulse control, families not interacting well and isolating with mobile phones.
- They are looking to Australia in terms of how parents are involved in schools and can help each other in the community; how we engage multicultural communities and how we are handling AI.

Day 9 - Wednesday 30 April 2025

1. Meeting with School Principal and tour of classes at Ressu Comprehensive School - Located in Kamppi, our school includes primary school grades 1-6 and lower secondary school grades 7-9. [Ressu Comprehensive School | City of Helsinki](#) It is a school that is highly sought after because of the high academic achievement, both locally and from abroad.



The Principal Dr. Leena Liusvaara, took me on a tour of the school, in particular to visit primary school classes from both the Finnish stream, and the English stream. Children were conducting projects on different aspects of habitat: lakes, rivers, marine life, swamps, etc. Ecological awareness is embedded into the curriculum and Helsinki purports to be the most sustainable city in the world.



Whilst overall the Finnish education system is egalitarian, Ressu has an entrance exam for the upper secondary English stream. Parents apparently apply a lot of pressure for children to be accepted into the school, both local and from overseas. Hence, the school has the difficulty of counselling some parents who are disappointed that their lifelong plan for their children is interrupted – any such plans can commence from 6 years of age.

Legislative controls are being introduced to support schools being able to isolate the use of mobile phones in school. However, there is some pushback from some Finnish parents. This creates tension between the teachers and some parents.

Computer use by teachers is not as such mandated, though technically they are meant to instruct in the school at least in part from Grade 3 upwards with computers. The autonomous nature of teachers traditionally in Finland, means that there is a reasonable spread of discretion among teachers.

Hence, there is a global tension in schooling more broadly regarding the balance of technology use, distraction, mental health, physical activity, health face to face interaction and also educational outcomes more broadly. Lessons to be learnt, shared and adapted for the future.

Conclusion:

It was inspiring and informative to meet with leading educational experts in Finland. It appears that there are indeed a number of synergies regarding contemporary challenges in the education sector.

It was also pleasing to see that a number of Finnish education experts, whilst proud of their strong education system, were looking to Australia on a number of fronts such as:

- How we engage our school communities, including how we involve parents
- How we foster multiculturalism in our schools (language, culture, respect)
- How we are managing AI from a policy perspective
- How we are managing behavioural challenges in schools

I also observed that in Victoria, we are advanced in terms of mobile phone management in schools and have already observed significant attention and engagement advantages as a result – Finland is still in the process of tackling this issue.

The esteem bestowed on teachers in Finland is certainly a tremendous achievement of their education system, though I note Victoria has implemented significant reforms to drive teacher career status and excellence, and retention.

Important challenges are shared on the matter of the optimal use of technology in school, balancing student IT skills, with the need to also preserve attention that is not otherwise distracted by other modalities enabled by laptops in the classroom.

Having now made strong connections with eminent education leaders and policy makers in Finland, we agreed moving forward to drive a policy interchange (where relevant), in different respects that compliment the needs of other countries – hence building shared experiences and learnings into the future.

It was a very rewarding experience, that enabled a rapid intake of intense educational policy and practical teaching and learning methods and system(s), as well as building positive and productive educational exchange, which can continue to grow into the foreseeable future for the benefit of Victoria.

2. Return journey to Melbourne, Australia