

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 8 May 2024

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Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Joe McCracken

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Lee Tarlamis

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Georgie Crozier

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Meredith Peace, President, and

Justin Mullaly, Deputy President, Australian Education Union.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria. Joining us today are Justin and Meredith from the Australian Education Union. Justin and Meredith, I will read this information to you before we continue.

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's standing orders. Therefore the information provided during this 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 this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, could you please state your name and the organisation you are representing.

Meredith PEACE: Meredith Peace, Australian Education Union, Victorian branch.

Justin MULLALY: Justin Mullaly, Australian Education Union, Victorian branch.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to make a submission today and present to the panel.

My name is Trung Luu. I am the Chair. On my left is Ryan Batchelor, Deputy Chair. We have Mr Aiv Puglielli, Ms Melina Bath, Mr Joe McCracken and Mrs Moira Deeming on the panel. On Zoom we have Mr Michael Galea and Dr Renee Heath.

I know you have made a submission, but I invite you to make a short opening statement so that we have time to ask you questions as well.

Meredith PEACE: I will be very brief. I think central to our submission is the issue of school funding. We are facing significant challenges in the public education system not only in Victoria but of course reflected nationally, including significant workforce shortages. In terms of our students, there are particular concerns around their health and wellbeing and ensuring that they get the educational support that they require, and ultimately this comes down to funding. We are in the process as a state of being engaged in discussions and negotiations with the federal government over a new national school funding agreement. That is going to be critical in terms of the levels of support and resources that our public schools receive and to give our public schools the capacity to actually address the issues that our members are confronting in schools every day. We must see Victorian public schools funded to the federal government's funding standard that they set more than a decade ago. We must get to 100 per cent, at a minimum, of that standard if we are to address the issues that we have and to provide the resources to our schools to respond to the educational and support needs of students and to ensure that the workforce is appropriately invested in to do the work that it is asked to do. I will leave it there. Thank you.

The CHAIR: We will start with questions. I invite the Deputy Chair to start off.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair. Meredith and Justin, thanks for coming in. We have heard a lot of evidence in prior hearings about issues of teacher shortages across the system. Your submission talks a bit about various measures, including retention payments. How do you think and what form do you think that retention payments would play in addressing teacher shortages in this state?

Meredith PEACE: There are two issues when we talk about workforce shortages. One of course is retention, as you have alluded to, and the other one is attraction. There have been a range of incentives, if you

like, put in place by the state government, limited also by the federal government, to address the issue of attraction, but what is missing is the retention piece.

Although it is difficult to get accurate current-time figures, we know from information that the attrition rates have increased over the past 18 months at least, and we know they have stayed high. We are continuing to lose people from the profession, and the primary reason for that is unsustainable workloads being experienced, the stress and burnout which occurs in some instances as a consequence of that and also teachers feeling that they do not have the resources at hand that they need to respond to the needs of their kids. We believe a retention payment is one component of a range of initiatives that are needed to make sure that we do not lose the very valuable workforce that we currently have whilst the attraction mechanisms take effect, because as we have said, there is no quick fix in terms of attracting people to the profession. People have to have a four-year qualification, and that will take time. People coming in from other careers can do a two-year masters on top of a degree that they already have, but it still takes time, and in that time we need to hang on to the people we have got. They are a valuable resource, and they need to be supported. We think a retention payment would help keep some of those people in the system, and it would send a really clear message, I think most importantly, to the whole profession that they are valued and that they are valued by political leaders and by our government for the important work that they do and that they want them to stay in the profession.

Ryan BATCHELOR: What more do you think the government can do to try and increase the supply of teachers in the system?

Meredith PEACE: In terms of attraction?

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes.

Meredith PEACE: We put forward a whole range of proposals, probably more than 18 months ago now, when we launched our 10-year plan for staffing in public education, not only for schools but across other sectors that we represent. I think there are a range of things that can be done in addition to what is already being done. We have paid placements, which have been provided for students going into particularly outer regional or rural settings and also metropolitan specialist settings where we have greater shortages than we have perhaps in other areas. That is important. We know from our student members that cost-of-living pressures are a significant reason for people dropping out or deferring their education courses. Education, sadly, has one of the highest dropout rates of any tertiary qualification; I think it is currently just over 50 per cent who complete, so that is a real concern. So that is helpful, and we think there should be paid placements across the board to support all students, because if we could resolve the problem of people completing their education degrees, that would make a significant difference. Supporting our student-teachers, so preservice teachers, with that financial support across the board would make a difference. We think the scholarship program for secondary ITE courses should be expanded to all education courses. Anyone studying to become a teacher should be funded to do that in the way that nursing has been. It does not necessarily need to be forever but for a period of time where we can ensure that the supply is increased. I think they are two important steps on top of what is already being done.

This is probably more retention than attraction, but for our student-teachers who are in schools, seeing what being a teacher is actually like and experiencing the workloads and observing the workloads of other staff, can be a deterrent to people ultimately coming into the profession. For those people to be able to see that when they join the profession as a fully qualified teacher there is support. We have a career start program in some of our schools that is currently being expanded, which will cover I think about 75 per cent of schools by the end of next year. We want to see that broadened to provide direct mentoring support and release from face-to-face teaching for our first-year teachers – for every first-year teacher who steps into a public school – so that they are supported in those critical early years of their careers, and we know that makes a difference in terms of people staying, because they get that really crucial support. It also means that the existing workforce who are mentoring these staff are getting supported and time to actually sit down with these new teachers and talk to them about their experience, where they might need help, to provide them with advice.

That is a really important process, and we need to see greater levels of support. We have seen increased levels of support in the last few years, but we need to see that broadened to make sure every new teacher who steps in is provided with that support. I would also add to that that we have significant numbers of underqualified people or unqualified people in our schools at the moment who are currently studying, continuing their studies

in their final years but also working and responsible for classrooms. We often see that the schools struggle to be able to provide the support that they need, and we are at risk of burning out the next generation of teachers if we do not make sure that those people are provided with the support that they need.

There are a myriad of proposals we have put forward, but one of the other ones is around ensuring that we have a workforce for the public education system, and that is for the department to actually what we have described I think as 'centrally' employ a chunk of graduates, perhaps 2000 or 3000 graduates. In the past we have needed roughly about 2500 – I think that number is now greater with the shortages of new graduates coming into the system – just to deal with attrition. Actually employ those people centrally and then say, 'Okay, we've got a body of people who are qualified, ready to work, and then we'll send them to where they're needed.' And there could be incentives provided, particularly for rural and regional schools where they struggle to get the staff that they need, to say, 'Okay, we've given you a guaranteed job, employed you ongoing, but if you're prepared to go out and work in a hard-to-staff school, whether that's in a growth corridor in Melbourne or in one of our rural and regional areas, we'll offer a further incentive to get you to go out and work in those communities.' Targeting the strategies, and targeting some of the existing strategies, to make sure that we have staff where we need them. Right now we have got kids in the system who are missing out on the education they are entitled to and that they deserve because schools cannot get the staff they need.

Justin MULLALY: If I could add to that by talking about salary, there is no doubt that salary is a significant issue when it comes to attracting and retaining a workforce. That is the same for our industry compared to any other industry. Of course that is where a retention payment makes a contribution. Again that is something that businesses do when they need to hang on to staff, and that is something that we think absolutely has a place. But in terms of salary and when you look at the circumstance not least for mid-career teachers – these are teachers that are perhaps in their first five years maybe through to their 10th year of teaching – we know that too many of them in particular are leaving the profession. These are folks who have gotten through their early years, without the support they actually needed, and are making decisions about whether or not they should stick around. When they look perhaps at friends and acquaintances and family members who are doing work in like professions and they look at the career path that they have available to them and the remuneration associated with that career path, there is no doubt that there is much that needs to be addressed in terms of salary. When we look at interstate comparisons, it is certainly the case that teachers in other places are paid at a higher rate and are valued therefore in a better way. That can only aid in attracting people to our profession, but as important as that might be it is about retaining them as well. I think that we have to focus on salary as much as we have to focus on a whole range of these other measures, including workload.

The other thing I would add is about the way in which we talk about teachers, both as a community and the people who have responsibility for that in public discourse, and the very notion that we too easily as a community talk poorly about teachers and the work that they do. We too easily as a community assume that it is not our responsibility to talk up and recognise the work that teachers do and the effort that they put in and the importance of doing that in the context of the way in which students engage in schooling, whether that be overall, whether that be in the classroom or whether that be as much as they contribute to the community conversation about schooling. If we do not talk about the profession in the way right way, we are not recognising and actually having the profession held in the esteem that it must be held in, and that is critical to attracting people to teaching, it is critical to keeping people in teaching and it is critical to the way in which our students learn. We know that the level of respect given to our profession in order for it to conduct its work every day in the classroom must be higher. We all have a responsibility to talk about the work of teachers in such a way that we laud them. We cannot allow the public discourse to continue as it is now, where we actively find ways to chastise teachers and the efforts that they put in. That actually drives down student learning, it drives down student wellbeing and it drives down the attraction and retention of teachers in our schools.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Justin. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you, Justin. I am a former state school teacher and I really appreciate those comments, but I do think it is actually vital that we all have those conversations and put the right focus on respecting teachers, so thank you. You have covered off some of the things that I was going to ask, but let us go to the other end, to principals. I know in your submission you referenced the Auditor-General's report of 2023 that says the DE:

... is not effectively protecting the health and wellbeing of its schools principals.

I also note I had a look in the budget papers yesterday and at the moment there is nothing to reduce the admin burden on principals. Can you speak to what we need to do to support principals, because they are the head of the corporation and the culture of principals influences the culture of the school. What do we need to understand to make recommendations to government in relation to principals in our state schools?

Meredith PEACE: I will start with the administrative burden – and you have highlighted a really critical issue. Our school leaders are incredibly important in terms of how our schools run and what they can achieve. We are keen for as much support to be given as possible to our school leaders to enable them to do their job, and they are under a lot of pressure at the moment, particularly around workforce shortages.

There was some money in yesterday's budget around the administration burden; it is a continuation of a number of programs that we negotiated as part of the last schools agreement to sit alongside that agreement around focusing on lifting some of the administration and compliance burden on principals. It has been focused on two particular areas. One really critical area is around occupational health and safety and the extensive audits that any workplace has to do, but particularly a school, to ensure the health and safety of not only students but staff and make sure that the school environment is safe. That work has traditionally been carried out by schools, so they have had to either contract in someone to do a lot of that audit work, if you like, or they have allocated it to another staff member, often an assistant principal. Now the department – this work is still being undertaken – have started a process where they are employing a range of people who will work directly with schools to actually do that work. The principal will still be responsible under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to sign off on the audits, but they will not have to actually do the work and they will have someone in the school who can come into the school and provide that support.

Melina BATH: Meredith, does that account also for remote schools and regional schools? Because they struggle big time.

Meredith PEACE: Yes, it is a statewide program. They are still employing staff at the moment, but that program will be rolled out across the state, and certainly for those schools who have been through audits already and have had support, we have had really good feedback from principals about how that is going, and that has really made a difference. So we will continue to monitor that.

I think we have made this comment in our submission: we feel that there is actually a need to review the role of principals in our schools. We have a model of school leadership that has been in place for a very long time. Our principals have contracts of employment that they work under, which include a schedule that has a very, very long list of duties that they have to comply with. We think it is well beyond time to actually sit down and think about what is the critical work that we need our school leaders to do in schools, because at the moment if I go back to 2016 and 17 when we commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to do a workload study of principals, teachers and support staff in the public system, what it showed very clearly – and this is still the case when we do follow-up survey work with our members – is that principals are spending the majority of their time on administration and compliance. They are teachers. They are educational leaders. We want them to be focused on the teaching and learning in the school, and that is what they say to us. That is the work they want to do, but they get dragged away from it because they are doing a whole raft of other things that they are required to do in their leadership role. So we would like to see an extensive review of the role and for the community and for our school system and our profession to think about what the work is that we actually want our principals to do and provide them the time to do that.

Melina BATH: My time is out, but I did not read your position on what you would like them to be.

Meredith PEACE: In simple terms, to be quick, it is about allowing them to focus on their educational leadership.

Melina BATH: Teaching and learning?

Meredith PEACE: Teaching and learning – to be able to work with and support their staff and to be focused on responding to the needs of their students and rolling out high-quality educational programs and supports to meet the needs of their students.

Melina BATH: To focus down, not up to the department in checking and ticking or the like?

Meredith PEACE: Yes, there is too much administration. All of those things need to be done. That is quite clear. You know, schools are complex places because you do not just have a workforce; you have got possibly thousands of children that you are responsible for. So that work needs to be done, but let us have a look at how we can alleviate that work, have other people doing that work so that they can focus on the educational part of their job.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for coming in, and thank you for the work that you do. To focus on student wellbeing here, one of the recommendations you make in your submission is that the Department of Education should conduct a review of the VCE and the ATAR system to recommend ways in which the negative impacts of the senior year certificate and tertiary entrance rankings on the wellbeing and mental health of students can be alleviated. I was just wondering if you could expand a bit more on this and explain those negative impacts. And do you have any solutions in mind?

Meredith PEACE: Do you want to go?

Justin MULLALY: Yes, I can do that. Thank you for the question. I think when we look at the construction of the VCE and certainly its origins and then when we consider how the study that students do through their VCE studies and how it is realised in an ATAR, where it is a scored outcome, they are serving quite different purposes. Originally the VCE was introduced in such a way as to be a comprehensive certificate, and now it is genuinely an even more comprehensive certificate with the changes that have been made around the vocational major. But what it meant was that students were able to undertake years 11 and 12 in such a way that they could get successful outcomes, get on the right trajectory in terms of a post-school destination – whatever that might mean for any given young person – and do that by getting satisfactory outcomes. Or if they were not able to, they would get unsatisfactory outcomes. In that sense it was designed to be inclusive. In that sense it was designed to support the learning and the needs of the students at the same time as ensuring that they were learning the skills and knowledge that they needed and at the same time as ensuring that there was appropriate academic rigour in terms of those learning outcomes, which is critical. So equity and excellence was the background of the VCE and remains something that is very clearly part of it.

But when we look at what the world has turned into and when we look at the way in which ATAR can actually affect wellbeing in particular, we find that too many students – not every student but too many students – find the stress that is often associated with that means that they cannot achieve the outcomes that we would want them to achieve. So from that point of view we also should look at what universities are doing. More and more universities are turning their backs on ATAR in terms of it being the measure by which they might select students into their courses. They are using things like other aptitude tests, interviews and a range of other measures. So from that point of view the question has to be asked: what is the purpose of ATAR in that context, and what is the purpose of it when we know that it can create pressure systems for students that actually undermine student achievement? This is not an exercise in questioning whether or not there should be excellence in student learning outcomes. This is not a question of whether or not we should be driving students to have the level of knowledge and skills that we must have them have when they leave school. This is about a question of what regime of ranking we have in place for the benefit of universities to select students in an environment where that can actually have a negative impact on student wellbeing.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure, thank you. Just to go into a bit more detail in relation to secondary schools, do you have a view to what that answer is? Like, how should we be testing students in a way that is going to alleviate those pressures you have spoken about?

Justin MULLALY: I do not think this is necessarily a question about a radical change to the VCE. In terms of the assessment that a student might go through in a VCE environment, that is well proven and well tested. There are ways that are school-based assessments, there is the exam approach and a mix in between that depending on the units of study we are actually talking about. This is really about what is on the other side of that, and in that sense I think that we should actually have an open conversation that perhaps drives us away as a community from saying that the value of a student outcome at year 12 is measured by the numbers you get in your ATAR, because I actually think that that does not value the outcomes that many of our students get. If we need to have a method, including a ranking system, that aids universities in terms of who they might actually select into their courses, well, we can have that, there is no problem with that necessarily, but let that not be the

measure of how successful a student's outcome is. Reducing students to a number, which is what we currently do, actually does not value the learning of students, and it should not be there as a proxy for quality. Quality is actually measured by how well a student does in their actual studies, not how they are ranked.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Well said. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you. I was interested in your comments about NAPLAN as an indicator of measurement of success, going on from what has just been spoken about. I am getting you guys do not like NAPLAN very much.

Justin MULLALY: Not many reasons to.

Melina BATH: You have got their favourite subject.

Joe McCracken: Tell us about that, because I may agree with you.

Meredith PEACE: Look, to pick up on the comments Justin just made about the ATAR, we know that we have got increasing concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of our young people in schools – that is a community issue, not just one for schools – and it is quite clear from the feedback that we get from our members, when we talk directly to members but also in survey instruments we use from time to time, that our members report back that their students find the whole NAPLAN testing regime a very stressful period of time. Our teachers get frustrated by it because it is a very disruptive program – it takes up a chunk of time during the course of a week. It does not just disrupt those year levels who happen to be doing the test that year, it disrupts the whole school. Again, teachers are frustrated by that when they feel they could be using that time better.

We have a clear view nationally that we absolutely see a place for measurement of outcomes for kids but that should be done in this kind of system at a system level. What we have seen with NAPLAN, which was really supposed to be about systems being able to monitor how things are going, is it is now used at the local level, class by class. It was never intended for that purpose, and it does enormous damage – not only to schools. Justin raised the issue of the public discourse about schools, about teachers and about teaching and the damage that does, and there is no better example than when we get reports about NAPLAN tests and the demonisation that goes on around schools being ranked and being told as a school community, 'You're not very good,' ignoring all of the context that a school might be operating in and the successes it will be having.

Joe McCracken: It is just an inaccurate, limited system. It does not really do justice to the work that teachers do. I am a former teacher myself; I completely understand where you are coming from.

Meredith PEACE: We are happy to have testing, but we think it should be a sample test so that the system can still get a read on what is happening at a system level but so we do not have the circumstances where we drill down class by class.

Two other quick points: teachers are qualified professionals trained to do the work that they are doing, experienced in many instances, because we got a lot of experienced teachers in the system, and school leaders. I think one of the things that NAPLAN has done is sideline the important work that our teachers do in assessing and monitoring their students on a day-by-day basis. It is teachers' professional judgements that need to be considered. As parents you want to be able to go to your teacher and have a good conversation about how your child is going on a whole range of factors, whether that is emotionally or academically, and your teacher is the best person to talk to, not looking at a standardised test result. I think there has been far too much prominence around those results, and that is why we have taken the position we have around it being a sample test and allowing schools to do the assessments they need to do – whether it is for an individual teacher, a school assessment or a year level assessment – that they think are appropriate to monitor student learning.

Justin MULLALY: If I could add by putting it this way, we have to ask the question: for whom is NAPLAN established? Adrian Piccoli, who may not be the first person I might choose to quote on a whole range of matters – he is a former education minister in New South Wales – said that the system of NAPLAN is designed for the adults, not for the children. As teachers we assess – that is a core part of the work that we do – but we assess for the benefit of children, not for the benefit of systems, departments and politicians in order to

have data that enables what appears on one level to be information to inform how we should have our schooling but which is actually serving a different purpose. In the end it is a politicised purpose that aids a rhetoric about our schools that does not support children, and if it does not support children, then it is not supporting the teachers.

Joe McCracken: Thank you. That was brilliant.

The CHAIR: Ms Deeming.

Moira Deeming: Mr McCracken asked my questions, and then you answered them obviously, so I am good.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Melina Bath: Chair, could I – sorry, Michael is waiting patiently.

The CHAIR: Yes, Michael is up. I will invite you to ask a quick question. Thank you.

Michael Galea: Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Melina, too. Thank you both for joining us today. I have got a few questions. I would like to start with new school builds. I represent a very fast growing outer suburban region. We just had two more schools announced for Clyde North yesterday in the state budget. There will be around nine new schools by the time they are finished, just in that area. Some of my primary schools, though, opened a few years ago with 400 students and already have 1300 students enrolled this year. They are huge numbers, so these schools really are vital. I would just like your view on the progress of the new school builds.

Meredith Peace: In the broad sense, I presume.

Michael Galea: In the broad sense, and how much is it needed from your perspective?

Meredith Peace: There is no question that we need to continue to see new schools being built and upgrades of existing school infrastructure. We have had, I think, unprecedented investment in new schools and infrastructure over the past nine years. I think it averages out somewhere around \$1.7 billion a year during that time. That has been critically important, because in the previous four years we saw no new schools opened and very little maintenance and upgrade work occur. Whilst I think student growth has slowed a little bit on what it has been in previous years, we are still growing. Certainly for your area we know we have growth corridor areas in the south-east, also in the north and the north-west, where there is a really urgent need. We certainly support the investment that has been made, but we would like to see more. There is certainly more need.

I would add to that: I opened today talking about the need for a new national school funding agreement, which sees our public schools fully funded. There is another part to that relationship between the federal government and the state governments in this country, and that is that right now no public schools in this country, including Victoria, receive ongoing funding for infrastructure from the federal government, whilst there is an ongoing fund for private schools in this country to support the building of their infrastructure. It is high time that the federal government actually allocated an ongoing infrastructure fund to support state and territory governments around the country to build the school infrastructure that we need and to provide support for upgrading. Most importantly, because we need new schools, we also need to make sure that our children and our staff are able to learn and work in school buildings with facilities that are fit for purpose, that are safe and allow the best possible teaching and learning to occur.

Michael Galea: Thank you. I think that is a very good point as well about the national contributions towards infrastructure. I was actually going to ask you next about the current negotiations between the states, territories and the Commonwealth. I think I probably know the answer, but I would like to ask you if you support the state's request for 5 per cent from the Commonwealth rather than the 2.25 per cent that they have offered. Also, can you tell me a bit about what such an infrastructure program would look like which you suggested be funded by the federal government?

Justin Mullaly: Thank you for that question. If I can start with the second part first, as it leads off from the previous response, I think that what we have seen in terms of some money that was allocated by the federal government in more recent years, is that it was allocated in such a fashion, as I understand it, so it would enable the state to then determine how best that money might actually be spent in a particular school community. So in

other words, it is important that any federal money is factored in in a very consistent manner with what any state contribution might be and indeed what a state plan might be in terms of funding school rebuilds or new schools. I think that that is a critical way that it dovetails rather than sits as a separate process.

Meredith PEACE: Can I add to that before you talk about the funding? The other part of that of course is I think in this most recent federal process individual school communities had an opportunity to put forward ideas about what they wanted funding. I think Justin is absolutely right: the state needs to be directly involved because they have an understanding of what the system needs, but it is also important for school communities to be able to highlight where they believe their individual needs are and the kinds of facilities they need – either upgraded or where it is the provision of new facilities.

Justin MULLALY: In terms of the Commonwealth's contribution to school funding, it is without doubt that as it is the government that has the much bigger revenue-raising capacity compared to states and territories, it has an obligation to contribute a further 5 per cent at least so that through these negotiations we can realise 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard for public schools. I think you anticipated that to be the answer, but if I could extend the answer by also talking about the state obligation, we know that the original Gonski deal was designed in such a way where both levels of government made a contribution to get to a standard that was set as part of that original process. We know that Victorian government schools are nowhere near that standard as it currently sits, and we know that the Victorian government must make a significant contribution to get us to 100 per cent of the SRS. That also includes rejecting what was on the table courtesy of the former federal government – a way to discount the state's contribution. The committee might be familiar with the fact that Victoria contributes a percentage that should be at least 75 per cent but that it is far short of that. One of the reasons that it is short is that it is able to count a whole range of system costs which are not directly related to the provision of schooling, so in that way public schools are further disadvantaged. We need to see not only a serious increase in the contribution from the federal government but we need to see a commensurate increase in contribution from the state government without the 4 per cent discount.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael.

Michael GALEA: I have got many more questions, but I know I am out of time, so I will leave it there.

The CHAIR: I am just mindful of the time. I have a few questions to ask before we finish up this section. You mentioned the varied roles of teachers. In relation to your workload, how do you see we reduce the workload, just from your perspective, so we can put our recommendations forward?

Meredith PEACE: For teachers in particular the most common remark we get from members about their workload is in a sense the same as my response earlier about school leadership. They want more time to focus on the teaching and learning component of their job, which should be the core of their work, and that is about having more time for planning, preparation, assessment and reporting. What we find is that, like principals, teachers often have to do a whole range of other administrative roles and administrative tasks related to their teaching work which take them away from being able to spend all that time. We know teachers work well in excess of their 38-hour week, and the work that they are primarily doing outside those paid hours is around planning and preparation for their classroom. That should be the work that is done within their working week with their colleagues collaboratively during the school day, not at night and on weekends. Part of that is about reductions in face-to-face teaching to free up more time. We moved to do that. The government invested in that in the last schools agreement, which saw a 1½ hour reduction in face to face. As part of that we, if you like, quarantined their planning time so that teachers were able to direct the use of that planning time to focus on their classrooms. In terms of the administrative workload, I think we need to look at what that workload looks like. Where is it that teachers need relief? We believe there is a need, for example, for more support staff in our schools both directly to support students and teachers in classrooms but also perhaps to take up a range of other roles, not on top of existing roles, where they may be able to relieve that administrative burden.

I think the other thing – we have touched on this a bit about ATAR and NAPLAN: in terms of assessments and accountabilities, there has been a very strong focus around assessment and accountability. What we are hearing from teachers is that they are spending a lot of time with the administrative side of that process – you know, entering data into the school systems. That in itself takes up a huge amount of time, and that is time they then do not have to actually work on what they are doing in their classroom and how they are responding to the

needs of their kids. So I think there are two broad areas for us around focusing on preparation and planning and giving teachers the time to do that.

Having more specialised support in schools – we have talked about mental health and wellbeing. There has been a lot of additional support put in by the Labor government over a number of years, and that has been welcomed, but we still struggle to find the professionals that are needed to support some of our kids, whether it is with disability, with learning difficulties or with challenging behaviours. So teachers need additional support in that space but also around that administration and compliance work.

The CHAIR: Just one quick question before we finish off: you mentioned extra staff and that it is part of helping to resource and lower the workload. You also mentioned in your submission not speeding up the initial teacher education. We have had issues raised with us from teachers in schools about graduate teachers not being ready for class management. Could you expand on the government speeding up the ITE. Is that the cause of the issues which we are seeing at the moment?

Meredith PEACE: I do not necessarily think it is a direct cause, but we are concerned about the number, as I said before, of either underqualified or unqualified teachers in our schools at the moment. That has arisen largely because of the workforce shortages, where we have got significant numbers of people who are still studying who are working in schools – 0.6 or 0.8 whilst they are still studying. That must put enormous pressure on those students who are still trying to finish their teaching qualifications. But it also creates pressures for the school where these people need significant support. Even a first-year qualified teacher, or a first- and second-year qualified teacher, needs a lot of support. You do not know everything until you are actually in front of your own classroom responsible for those kids. It is a weighty responsibility, and new teachers need, quite rightly and like any profession, lots of support.

We are concerned that at a time of workforce shortage we need to be very careful that we do not burn out the next generation of teachers before they actually get qualified and start in our schools, but also that we do not accept that the norm is that we bring large numbers of unqualified people into our schools. Teachers unions in the 1970s battled very hard to make sure that we had qualified teachers in classrooms, because most of the teachers at that time were not qualified. It is really important in terms of the quality of education we provide to our young people that we have, like any profession, qualified people educating our young people. So we have been supportive of some of those programs, which are kind of intern programs where people come in for periods of time to work to understand what it is like to work in a school and to work with experienced teachers. That is vital experience before you are qualified. But we need to be careful not to tip the balance towards a quick fix to shortage problems by bringing in people who are not suitably qualified to our schools to educate our kids, because the quality of our profession is really important in terms of the outcomes we deliver for our children.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am mindful of time; I know I have gone a bit over time. Thank you so much for coming in and for your submission. It is valuable and it goes a long way for our recommendations down the track, so we appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.