

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Melbourne—Monday, 18 May 2020

#### Members

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

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## WITNESSES

Ms Anne-Maree Kliman, President, and

Mr Andrew Dalglish, Deputy President, Victorian Principals Association—primary schools, and Principal, Montpellier Primary School.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone, to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. I welcome the witnesses that have joined us at the table. The Committee will be reviewing and reporting to the Parliament on the responses taken by the Victorian Government, including as part of the national cabinet, to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and any other matter related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this forum, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. The hearings may be rebroadcast in compliance with standing order 234. We ask that photographers and camerapersons follow the established media guidelines and the instructions of the secretariat.

We welcome the Victorian Principals Association, and we invite you to make a 5-minute presentation. We ask that you state your name, position and organisation for broadcasting and Hansard purposes. This will be followed by questions from the Committee members relative to their representation at our table today. Thank you.

**Ms KLIMAN:** Thank you. My name is Anne-Maree Kliman. I am the President of the Victorian Principals Association, representing primary schools—government primary schools—in Victoria. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to address you today. In saying that, we represent about 1000 members. The first thing I would like to acknowledge is the adversity that schools and their communities have faced this year with bushfires and then the impact of COVID-19 and in doing so congratulate our school leaders, teachers and support staff for adapting so quickly to ensure continuity of learning for Victorian government school students. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of all staff at DET and the Victorian Government, who have engaged with the peaks to gain a genuine perspective on how COVID-19 is impacting on schools and have consulted on what needs to be done to best support schools through these times. The collaborative and collective approach has been and is still focused on what is needed to achieve the best outcomes for the Victorian education system.

COVID-19 has thrown many challenges at the system and schools. This morning I would like to provide you with some feedback from the field on how leaders have managed and what they have observed during these exceptional times. Schools were required to pivot at a rapid rate as they adapted from face-to-face to flexible and remote learning. School leaders have remarked on the following strategies as highly valuable and supportive to allow schools to make this prompt change. These have included the additional pupil-free days that were instrumental in providing schools with the necessary time to work together to plan for the transition and enable schools to tailor their approach and develop an implementation strategy based on their local context. Resources on the department websites such as the FUSE portal and literacy and numeracy portals were promptly adapted and ready to support schools to do remote teaching and learning. These sites supplied a comprehensive range of targeted materials that were able to be used to supplement teachers' planning and student learning programs. Even the availability of the ABC TV program was really valued, providing another avenue for quality activities to support teachers throughout the process.

The allocation of additional devices and internet access for vulnerable student cohorts was well received by the students and their families. Changes to the use of CSEF to support disadvantaged students and allow students to make local decisions about what their families needed was also an added bonus. Regular, comprehensive and timely communication from the department was targeted at addressing the most pressing issues at a point in time and providing clear and concise guidance to manage the changing situation. Then along with that communication were the supports that came to schools in the form of templated letters and signatures for their

school's newsletter and social media articles with translations for our CALD communities—all very important in ensuring that our schools were able to get consistent messaging out to their communities.

The enhanced cleaning allocation, the hygiene supplies and the PPE supplies have instilled a sense of calm in schools and have also instilled a sense of calm in the community. Reports to me have also expressed appreciation for the way the VSBA have handled any individual school's inquiries or questions on those issues.

The free sessional kindergarten and now the new funding grants that have been made available for hygiene and cleaning for kinders throughout term 2 were very well received. Part of the work I do with the department is with early childhood, and listening to what has been said through that, it has certainly been a very valued addition to the whole education system.

Modifications and postponements to some of the business-as-usual activities have been well received. The change to the performance and development cycle, the modified annual implementation review process, changes where schools have needed to not start their school review now but possibly do it in term 4, and assessment and reporting—they have all been things that schools have appreciated and that have allowed them to be able to focus on what is currently happening at hand. As I have often said, we are in a medical crisis or a health crisis, not an educational crisis, so this is helping them deal with the issues that are being presented at their school.

On the ongoing contact with regional personnel, principals have indicated that they have been very supported and there has been a significant increase in engagement with their SEILs through virtual meetings as well as many check-ins, and then that was further supported by the key contact being provided to them, and they are feeling really well supported in that sense. But also where it came to managing some of the more complex questions that were being raised by families at the start, the regions were there behind them helping them to navigate their way through that.

So what have we learnt? We have seen an urgency that has required schools to pivot to remote learning and stretch teachers' capabilities and their capacities, particularly in the area of technologies. Remote learning has seen educators embrace new skills and further develop current skills to engage in productive and effective ways to support the remote learning. Access to DET and Bastow online professional learning was timely and supported this work. School leaders have commented on staff's increased reflective ability and their being adaptive practitioners during this period and have spoken of how their schools have modified processes along the journey according to the feedback that they have been receiving from their communities as well as the staff themselves.

Efficiency of practice—

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry, I will have to stop you there. Thank you.

**Ms KLIMAN:** Is that 5 minutes, already?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, it is already 5 minutes, but I am sure that there are further details that the Members will go through in their questions. Thank you so much. I will pass to Tim Richardson, MP, to start.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Anne-Maree and Andrew, for joining us today. Thank you for the work that you do in supporting principals at the primary level during this time. It is hard to believe that it has been under two months since the pivot to learning from home and everything that has been learnt across that journey. We give a big shout-out to our schools, our principals, our teachers and students during this incredible transformation and time. I am wondering if you can elaborate a bit more on the experience and support that the VPA has been providing to its principals and what some of the member schools have detailed to you during the coronavirus pandemic.

**Ms KLIMAN:** We have been providing much more consistent updates based on what is coming through from the department and what I am hearing from the department and then sending it out to schools to answer questions and go a little bit further and deeper with members. There have been regular updates, going probably two to three times a week initially, and then they have gone down to maybe two a week at the moment. But it is not only just with our own members; we decided that—you know, the catchphrase of 'We're all in this

together’—we would send them to all Victorian primary school principals during this time to ensure that they are also kept abreast of what is happening.

We are running our regional meetings virtually, and, really, they are the Q & As that they are having, thinking about what they actually need to know at the time and spending some time unpacking some of the questions. I have done several personal visits to catch up with principals, where they might have been a little bit distressed in the initial stages, to support them through that process, as well as with a few new principals who have come into schools at that very point in time and needed that guidance. There is lots of consultation with the department and even the Minister’s office in terms of feeding back our perspective of how things might hit the ground and negotiating with the department—assessment and reporting being one—around what we feel would be best to support school communities through that period. So there has been a lot of ongoing communication.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** In terms of the engagement with the department and particularly the resources that come forward as well, how has that communication been and what has been the feedback from members on that experience?

**Ms KLIMAN:** The members have really appreciated the communications coming through. They have appreciated the things I mentioned that the department has developed to support the school program side of things. In terms of what we have been able to do, it has just been instrumental in ensuring that we are kept at the same level as everyone else in what is going on and can keep our members informed. Andrew might want to add something from the school perspective of comms there?

**Mr DALGLEISH:** At the school level, Tim, for us it has been that clear and consistent advice. Our communities and our staff have certainly looked for that, and once that comes through we can make sure that it goes out consistently. If we look from central office through to the region, the region is certainly working in creating wellbeing teams. There is direct conversation with principals and teams to support us through and help answer questions that we may have along the line, as well as curriculum materials and online resources. So there has been quite a lot coming out for schools to be able to wrap their arms around, interpret and then use as needed.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** You mentioned before, Anne-Maree, the importance of those curriculum days. But I am interested in the workload and what you are hearing from principals about how they have gone with this transition. Obviously it is a significant increased workload during this period of time. How are they coping and how have those networks and regions gotten around them and supported them as well?

**Ms KLIMAN:** Well, the curriculum days did give schools the opportunity to actually work out their individual plan: what is it that our school has available to move to flexible and remote learning, and how will we do this? And they were very crucial, and Andrew could probably elaborate on that in terms of what his school did in particular. But we have seen a shift in it. They are working hard; they are really working hard. They are finding it very tiring, even the teachers. When you are looking at a screen all day, I must admit by the end of the week my eyes are sore, so they are finding that challenging.

The other side of it, though, is that there has been such a significant increase with communication with families, and that has been a real positive that has come through this. They are talking about how well they know their families. So the work has been different. Often work in a school can be dropping what is happening at the time and having to respond to what could be a mini-crisis for that particular parent at that point in time. It is totally different, the way they are working with their families the moment. So whilst they are all tired—and most of them would not have taken any time off over the school holidays because they were preparing to get through. And even worse for our people that went through bushfires in January because they had that period as well. They are all tired; they will look forward to the next lot of school holidays, but they are very happy with the way things are going, and I am not hearing of significant issues at all.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Andrew, maybe if you want to elaborate on more of your school’s experience, but what have you heard in your network around schools adapting to that changing environment and some of the work that has been done?

**Mr DALGLEISH:** Look, through the network and the local community of schools, one of the things that we are seeing is teachers as problem-solvers and leaders has really come to the forefront. If I talk about our experience as a school, those four curriculum days were absolutely critical. We sat down as a leadership group

and said, ‘How do we use them and maximise the impact for our staff?’, starting with: ‘What is it about a quality lesson?’; and going into that space that teachers really are expert practitioners on, and then moving into ‘How do we actually adapt that into an online process?’. So our school is reasonably well-established as far as a BYOD iPad program for grades 3 to 6. My principals and teacher aides released the teachers with those four days. We had students coming in where their parents needed them to be supervised, and there was lots of professional learning—professional learning on the use of platforms and professional learning on the use of technology, videoing and preparing lessons, feedback to each other and connecting with families to make sure that they were able to connect and get online in that space. So it was just hectic. There was a real buzz going on—teachers solving problems through WhatsApp. The technology experts in each year level just continually solving problems and then sharing it with staff was absolutely a powerful part of this work.

The main part at the moment is maintaining that, because we are seeing people hit the wall. They are getting very, very tired looking after their own health and wellbeing, but it is still ongoing. Now that they are seeing light at the end of the tunnel—that we will be transitioning back into the face-to-face learning and teaching—we are now preparing to again maximise that curriculum day to prepare staff for that space as well as again allowing them to work collaboratively, plan for and develop differentiated teaching and learning, start to get their heads clearly around what assessment and reporting is going to look like and flow from there. But that absolute growth in leadership of teachers inside the school and that connection with families has been exponential.

**Ms KLIMAN:** Just to add to that too in going to talking about the principals: one of the things that I am hearing coming through in lots of ways is the collaborative nature and the collegiality that is happening at a greater network level. They are virtually connecting way more than they were. There is a sense of, ‘We are in this and working together and it is not a competition’, as we might have often seen in the past in terms of ‘Who is going to get enrolments?’ and so forth. So there has been a great deal more collaborative conversations and sharing. Many of the networks I am hearing about have got little portals that they have set up. They have got all their little ideas going and people can access them at any point in time. So that has been a really positive thing for schools.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** You mentioned before the transition back to onsite learning, I am wondering about the views of the VPA on the announced dates and that transition back, and if you have got any feedback for the Committee.

**Ms KLIMAN:** Look, I have always said, even in my media conversations, that we will take the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and we will support the decisions being made. In saying that we have constantly heard, ‘We want to be back’. So we view it as a positive.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** What about the staging of those year levels as well? Obviously that 26 May time and then 9 June—that will probably be the busiest period for our primary principals.

**Ms KLIMAN:** I think the guidance has been very clear about what is expected of schools in that period of time. Firstly, we were asked as an association who we thought were the most vulnerable cohorts to get back, and it was always prep, 1 and 2 for primary schools, so we were pleased to see that. That was what I was hearing from all my members, because I would be quizzing them as I was meeting with them. They were saying they want their prep, 1 and 2s back first and foremost. In terms of the two-week break, it is quite clear what is remote and what is face to face, and whilst we will probably see that there will be more people going back to work, schools will adapt and they are ready to adapt to what that looks like in terms of more children on site that will still be doing remote learning as well in the 3 to 6 area.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** And how has that played out with your members as well? What is their view on the transition back and the support that has been provided in the lead-up to moving?

**Ms KLIMAN:** They are very happy with the transition back. They have appreciated the guidance that has come out. There was lots of information that was provided to them at the end of last week, so they feel quite informed about what to expect. That is probably one of the areas that I have had the very least amount of questions or comments made from members at the moment. They are quite ready and quite prepared for it, and the timing was very important. They had the announcement last Tuesday, so they have almost two weeks to

adjust to that. So they are very happy with that, and also the bonus of another curriculum day to spend with their staff to actually look at moving forward.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** So obviously the coronavirus pandemic has been an unprecedented experience for our education sector. There will be lessons learned along this journey, and I am interested if you could take us to what you have seen as being amazing in terms of best practice and things that we can learn and evolve, and how this might carry forward when we get back to some sort of normality—what we might be able to take forward as an education sector.

**Ms KLIMAN:** So one of the most important lessons, besides the fact that—and I am hearing it from members all the time—there has been a huge increase in teacher skill level with the technologies. I think Andrew mentioned before sometimes it can take us two years to get them to train for these things, but they have done it in three weeks. We need to bounce on that and we need to keep going with that, because what we have also heard is that those children that may have been disengaged from the system, there are more of them that are actually liking this type of learning. There are some bonuses in that. How do we then capture what we have been doing and include it in face-to-face teaching so that there is a way of continuing to engage those children in what is targeted and personalised learning for them and at their point in time? A story I heard recently was that a child was saying, ‘I could watch the video three or four times, and I needed to watch that video three or four times, but in a classroom you don’t get to watch the teacher do it three or four times’. So we have to look at how we are going to adapt and what teachers have learned. Teachers are expressing that themselves: ‘What have we all learned that is going to be carried forward?’.

The other thing is that the relationships between home and school are much stronger than they have been in the past. Whilst that is probably the nature of the way we have been working with our families at the moment, how do we make sure that that does not drop off and that families see school as a place where they can ring and make that appointment and come up and have a conversation in a great way to make or achieve the best outcomes for their children? So we would like to see that continue as well. The overall thing is that generally we are seeing that there is an increased status of the profession, which is a positive when we look at the fact that Phil Riley’s research came out a couple of weeks ago and there is still that violence and aggression and abuse, and we want to get that down. So we would hope that we would see some positives come through from that too, as well as the reflection just generally on what has been effective teaching and learning. I laugh when I think I always said to my teachers, ‘Get off the stage. It shouldn’t be you standing there talking at kids for half an hour. It should be short, sharp, explicit’. And they have had to do that, so how can we transition that across too?

**Mr RICHARDSON:** What about your school community, Andrew? Obviously it was a big change in a very small period of time. Are there things that you have taken from this that are lessons or challenges that you have had to overcome and then things that you might implement into the future going forward?

**Mr DALGLEISH:** Look, I think it is almost getting into the catchphrase of thinking differently, because we know when we come back to face-to-face learning it will never be the same. And already teachers are reflecting on their practice and what they are going to take from this. One of the great things we have seen has been student voice and feedback from children to teachers quite clearly around whether they are not quite understanding it, whether they need to be extended and how that happens. Feedback from children: ‘We’re caught in a timetable world. The bell rings, but I’m heavily engaged in my writing. I’m able to continue that on and really build a quality piece’. The student-directed learning aspect, or the self-directed learning, where they can continue to take and grow and then share that work in an authentic process—not just within their class but beyond and across their school and even further beyond that—has been a big part of that.

Taking our parents on the journey has probably opened the classroom doors more than ever before. Whilst that may be exciting, it is also challenging, and sometimes it is for teachers to have the courage to be able to continue in that space in what has been probably a private practice for quite a while. We have started to open the doors, but now it is not just open to colleagues, it is open to parents. It is open to the broader community. Trying to get into a space of being non-judgemental and not comparing, ‘This teacher’s doing that’, but being able to learn. One of the things for our staff members is their own professional learning where they have created short, sharp instructional videos and shared them on our school private website, and teachers have been able to observe each other teaching and give feedback on that to grow their practice—not just graduate teachers

coming in who are really trying to learn, but even expert teachers in that space also. That has been probably one of the real positives around that.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** That is outstanding. Thank you.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** Thank you, Ms Kliman and Mr Dalgleish, for appearing today. I would like to start with one of the tools, or the range of tools, that principals and teachers use to engage students—things like school assemblies, camps, excursions, musical concerts and interschool sports. All of these things are either not going to be there in the short term or are going to be significantly changed. My feeling is that schools will need to either replace them somehow to engage students or significantly modify how they operate. What sort of reports are you hearing back from principals on how they are going about that?

**Ms KLIMAN:** I have seen a number of assemblies that have been done virtually, and they are incorporating the students in the assembly as well. So they are already starting to think a little bit outside that box and not look at, ‘Do we have to be in one room and I stand up and talk at you?’. They are already thinking flexibly around particularly assemblies. Camps and excursions will be a little more challenging. It is going to be how you use the current available resources to teach vicariously within the classroom. So they are not things that are not doable. It is just that mind shift of, ‘We’re not going out for this; we’re actually going to do it in a different way in the classroom’. So they are already thinking about that. Music classes have continued through this, with teachers getting online and still doing music. I can see that they can still have their celebrations. They are just probably going to be virtual.

**Mr DALGLEISH:** One of the learnings for us in that space has been that students using social media—TikTok and whatever else—to do that, whereas the experience in our school has been creating a school talent show. Children create 30-second videos of music, singing, performing. The children are then putting that video together to share with the community. So they are taking even further ownership in that space and still being able to celebrate their talents and their abilities in different ways.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** I have got two children in primary school that are going through this at the moment. One of the things that I have noticed talking to other parents and other people is that in a normal classroom situation a teacher will notice if a student is having a bit of trouble or they will also notice if it is not very challenging for a bright student, and they will give them more work or give them more assistance and that sort of thing, whereas in the virtual environment is quite difficult for the teacher to recognise those things. How do you feel that they are dealing with that recognition of students who are either doing well really or not doing really well? Does that mean that some children maybe have been inadvertently either not challenged enough or have not gotten enough assistance when they need, and what might we need to do after this has ended?

**Ms KLIMAN:** Andrew has got a good story about a child at his school that was stretched through an extension activity, but I think we have got to also be honest and recognise that sometimes even within face-to-face teaching there are children who are not being extended and children who are not actually getting that support the way they should possibly have gotten that support. If anything, this has probably been an eye-opener for everyone. Moving forward to children getting back to face-to-face learning, I think one of the things that teachers and school leaders are very cognisant of is that they actually will probably need to reassess where children are at and pivot back to where they started from, because we will not know what they have missed until we actually get them back on site. In saying that, my own experiences many, many years ago involved doing a lot of assessment of children. We have heard of lots of people being worried about remote learning and the fact that they may not be learning, and one of the tasks I did many, many years ago was assess children’s reading and prep to 2 in November–December every year and then immediately in February–March every year as part of a research project with Melbourne University. I would have said 2 per cent of the cohort, which was in this very low socio-economic disadvantaged area, would have gone backwards over the non-teaching period of the school holidays. We do not want to assume that they have not continued to grow or that they have continued to maintain; it is about how we get back and actually adjust and make sure that that work is done to meet those kids’ needs.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** You mentioned earlier that for younger children—so preps, 1s and 2s—the clear demand from principals was that they go back first. Was that around their ability to use technology? What is the main reason for that?

**Ms KLIMAN:** Partly it would be around the fact that they are not self-regulated learners generally and they are not independent enough to do the work themselves, and they do require so much more support.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** Yes.

**Ms KLIMAN:** Secondly, they are our foundation years. They are our crucial learning years. Optimal learning happens in those first couple of years, prep and 1 in particular, so there is always a concern for that group or cohort, thinking what are they missing out on if they are not having that face to face. The third thing I was hearing a little bit of was that teachers and schools were engaging with these families but they were not really sure how much was Mum's and Dad's work and how much was the child's work. For that reason alone, a teacher wants to have that knowledge of their students.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** Yes.

**Mr DALGLEISH:** And absolutely the relationships between the teacher and the child are critical, and we know the challenges that we face if we are doing it via screen or via text message, email and the like.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** I certainly found with one of my children, who is in grade 2, they had a lot more trouble than the older kids in dealing with the technology. Thank you very much.

**Ms KLIMAN:** You are welcome.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. The Member's time has expired.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Thank you, witnesses, for today. I would first like to just seek your feedback. In an open letter to the Minister from the Corangamite shire, who surveyed all their school principals, they made the following comments:

The feedback from principals highlights that some students are being left behind. Unless urgently addressed, online learning will compound existing social and economic inequality between metropolitan and rural students.

That was sent to the Minister and forwarded to me, but also I have been individually approached by some of the principals. I was wondering: are you getting much feedback with difficulty particularly in more remote schools?

**Ms KLIMAN:** I have had conversations with the Country Education Project—their executive director—recently, and I was aware that that was an issue that was being raised. A lot of that gets down to connectivity issues for those in that particular area. He was explaining to me that not only was it difficult for them to be learning via the internet or connectivity in that way but also remote learning even by the phone is very difficult because of their abilities to not actually have access to those resources. So they did feel that there were potentially some lost opportunities for real, authentic engagement with those communities. I had only heard a little bit about it, but that was pretty much the gist of what I had heard.

**Mr DALGLEISH:** This is certainly part of the work that commenced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic around the rural and regional education task force, so it is consistent with what the evidence is showing in that space. It is an ongoing piece of work.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Further to that, just the last bit—which concerned me also greatly, and we quizzed the Minister this morning and he did not identify any extra support in IT—was:

Normal IT support provision across our schools is already limited and yet the demands associated with online learning have not seen the support provision increased in any way. On top of that, the IT technicians are often only available remotely and this is making it difficult with specialist hardware needs in rural areas.

Is that a concern?

**Ms KLIMAN:** So the TTSPs, the technicians that go into schools, were genuinely working remotely; however, they were able to also go into schools, so that might have been a localised company issue around what they were choosing to do. I have not heard much more about it in terms of them not having the access, but what we could say, if I had heard directly from those principals myself, was that there was an abundance of materials that were also provided for booklets et cetera to help provide an ongoing program for those children through FUSE, through portals and through the department's literacy and numeracy portal as well. So we were

always going to be aware that there was going to be a combination of those that would be able to access it because they had effective internet and technologies et cetera in place and that there was the backup of hard copy stuff to continue to help. That makes it difficult, of course, with the teaching side a little more challenging.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So would it be your view—not that anyone was prepared for the pandemic—looking at this type of situation, if it happens again in the future, we do need to beef up IT support, particularly—

**Ms KLIMAN:** Yes, most definitely it is an area that could be. I think that is a learning that comes out of this and it is something we could look to into the future to start pushing a little bit further.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Mr Dalgleish, you touched on BYOD, a new acronym I have gotten used to over the last couple of weeks.

**Mr DALGLEISH:** There are plenty of them.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Yes. We raised this also with the Minister earlier, just about what that means. It seems that there is no extra funding for schools in this space, and schools have, where possible, given out all their equipment to families and support. What sort of long-term funding issues can you foresee around the provision of IT? So if all the equipment has gone out—the Minister says we are not going to be asking for it back anytime soon, which is understandable—and obviously at schools there will be preps again next year and people move on and children move schools and perhaps use different equipment, where is the money going to come from? Is it currently coming out of existing budgets? What are you aware of for billing that IT gap?

**Mr DALGLEISH:** Schools have been managing IT budgets for a long period of time, including setting up computer labs down to more individualised one-on-one devices, and all systems tend to work within the constraints of their current budget. Those that are choosing to go down one-to-one devices are finding funding-wise there needs to be a parent co-contribution or contribution in that space. Certainly the provision of devices through the COVID-19 pandemic—the department responded quite rapidly to that in providing internet-accessible devices to schools that needed it, portable modems and so on again. But, again, it is probably one of the largest spends in most school budget items—to be able to get the devices in the hands of children. The most important part of that, though, is still ensuring that it is the teaching and learning component that leads. It is not a panacea or an answer for education but it is a tool to actually support and amplify learning.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So would you view that most schools are in a position to maintain a comprehensive BYOD program from prep to grade 6?

**The CHAIR:** I will just remind the Deputy Chair of the terms of reference of this Inquiry being in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Well, it is very specifically related to that, Chair. I am just referring, as I did to the Minister, to one school in my electorate which sent a thing out saying that in order to ensure the highest standards of hygiene they want all their students to have their own device. So do you think from what you are hearing from your principals they are all equipped to do that or is that going to need more funding?

**Mr DALGLEISH:** I think it is going to need more work and almost a case by case on exactly where every school is at and every community is at, because we know there is a difference between communities and the capacity for families to be able to support that.

**Ms KLIMAN:** And the other thing that goes along with that is that as principals or school leaders change, it also depends on what they have prioritised as something that they want for their school. So some of these schools may have not had people that have focused a lot on that sort of material, and then a new principal comes in. So they could be years behind in terms of accessing or having that amount of equipment in place. It really does get down to localised decisions.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So it would be your view that we can expect over the next 12 months to see all our primary schools dealing in this area very differently? So some schools will have technology, others will not?

**Ms KLIMAN:** Yes, I always think that a school will deal with it according to what they think, and the best way that they are going to meet the needs of their own students. I can honestly say I was in a school that probably had that option but never really bothered with one-to-one devices, with particularly our lower-level

children, because we had a significant focus on handwriting and learning to read. It is a tool. It does not create the learning; it is a tool to get to and to support learning. There are ways of doing it. This has probably been raised mainly because all of a sudden we have moved to something that is unprecedented and not prepared for.

**Mr RIORDAN:** The school attendance and participation, I guess it is harder to judge—well, you know, how long is a piece of string, I guess. Are you as principals happy with the way we are recording it? Do you think it has been a good measure? We heard that the department believes that attendance rates actually have increased with homeschooling. Would that be your experience of it? And how is that being measured?

**Ms KLIMAN:** I have also heard from principals that they have had greater attendance and check-ins, and they are very much daily monitoring. They are required to enter student attendance every day, and it is also uploaded to the department every day as well so that it is monitored as a system. I think it is also partly too because if a child has not been online at a point in time, there has been an effort to make contact with that family to check. Sometimes it is because they have not been able to connect.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So every family has been contacted every day?

**Ms KLIMAN:** I cannot answer whether everyone has. That was part of the brief. You have to make regular contact with the families, whether it be that you are seeing them online and it has been an email communication, whether it be a face to face via virtual means or whether it be a phone call, there is contact to be made. My understanding is that that is what everyone is aiming to do.

**Mr DALGLEISH:** And teachers certainly very early on understood that difference between attendance and actual engagement. So again, that is a normal day-to-day process within the classroom, picking up on the engagement and then having conversations with children and families—almost a three-way conversation with parents, the child and the teacher—to understand what the case or the issue may be that day and then supporting them and motivating them to keep engaging and completing set tasks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. The Member's time has expired. We thank you for appearing before our Committee again today. You are becoming familiar faces. Thank you for your time again. We appreciate it. The Committee will follow up on any questions that were taken on notice in writing and responses will be required within five working days of the Committee's requests. The Committee will now move to consideration of the next witness. Thank you for your time.

**Witnesses withdrew.**