

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—Tuesday, 25 August 2020

(via videoconference)

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

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Ms Anne-Maree Kliman, President, Victorian Principals Association (primary); and

Ms Sue Bell, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

The CHAIR: We welcome the Victorian Principals Association and the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals. We welcome you to the second week of the second series of public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The committee is 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. We ask that you note that members are attending remotely from home and their electorate offices and that members are not required to wear a face covering if they are working by themselves in an office under the stay-at-home directions, 6 August, part 2, section 7(i).

We also advise you that 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.

We invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes, and we ask that you state your names, positions and organisations represented for Hansard's record, and then this will be followed by questions from our committee. Welcome to you both.

Ms KLIMAN: Do you want an order to start at all, or shall I just go first?

Ms BELL: You go first!

The CHAIR: Whatever suits you.

Ms KLIMAN: Thanks. Anne-Maree Kliman, President of the Victorian Principals Association, representing government primary schools, and again, I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. As we know, Victorian schools and their communities have faced several adversities this year, and I just want to take the time to acknowledge the immense challenges faced by our government school leaders, teachers and support staff as they work to provide the best outcomes for students in Victoria. The chronic uncertainty of COVID-19 has continued to present challenges for schools as we saw schools pivot back to flexible and remote learning. But this time they did that with some experience to draw upon. Schools had time to reflect on flexible remote learning—what we call 1.0—experience through seeking feedback from their staff, students and their parent communities and then, when having additional pupil-free days, were allowed the opportunity to digest that information and feedback and consequently make appropriate adjustments for flexible remote learning 2.0 with the intent of being better prepared to ensure the necessary elements of effective teaching were present, such as setting clear expectations for learners, and somewhat their parents, having greater awareness of the scaffolds needed to support individuals and also having a comprehensive approach to collecting and managing feedback for students.

We experienced many school closures during this period, which became very challenging, particularly in Melbourne metro. But the introduction of a dedicated team at the Department of Health and Human Services, with the education sector going over to provide support, made for a much more efficient process and significantly reduced the numbers of closures as well as supported schools to manage those closures to a much higher degree. Principals have reported that they have been feeling extremely supported by the department when managing any school closure as the process has been comprehensive and fairly seamless for them. Again we saw additional devices and internet access, and communication from the department continued to be clear and came with supportive tools for schools to manage.

We saw the department provide schools with a COVID safety management plan and OH&S updates—all things that were really necessary to allow the principal to get on and focus on the work that their communities need them to do. We saw reusable masks come in. There was still an adjustment and modification component

of some of our business-as-usual activities, which again was well received. There was an increased focus on wellbeing for leaders, teachers, staff and parents, and there were lots of resources that were coming through the schools update, as well as online webinars et cetera, to tune people and schools into the supports that were available to help those families and children and everyone involved in education. We saw free sessional kinder continue, which was fantastic, and that really supported our early childhood community. But given the length of time in flexible learning, the next phase for primary schools is—

Ms BELL: Thank you, Anne-Maree.

Ms KLIMAN: Okay. I have got two things: to identify students with attainment gaps and work on that; transition arrangements from kinder to prep and years 6 to 7 and to make sure we focus on social and emotional learning as we go back.

Ms BELL: I need to put the secondary school perspective. Sue Bell, President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, and I concur with everything that Anne-Maree has said. So I have divided my 2 minutes into silver linings and challenges still to be achieved. In secondary schools the move to flexible and remote learning part 2 was much, much calmer. There was a different mindset. Teachers now had the confidence that they could actually teach in a virtual world. School leaders had sought and implemented feedback from parents and students and teachers about what had worked or not and had adapted the design balance of their lessons and the split of synchronous and asynchronous learning to better match the learning needs of the students.

Professional learning—we believe that what has been achieved in two terms would have actually taken us 10 years in the past. The just-in-time learning has given an urgency and a clear relevance to the learning of teachers and has put them in a position where they have seen the benefits of new practices that can actually change their beliefs. The student-free days schools were given for planning at the beginning of the remote learning period ameliorated the heightened anxiety that was growing. The authority principals were given to differentiate for their school and context made an enormous difference as communities helped join in the endeavour, and the additional communication between families and schools strengthened those relationships, which will go on into the future.

The challenges are still to be achieved. It has not been all good. Some schools are seeing a higher level of disengagement of students this time, particularly in some low socio-economic areas. Getting them settled back into school will be problematic. Year 7s have now spent more time at home than in their new school. Principals will need to approach this differently. We still have to get year 12s through the GAT, their final exams and the consideration of educational disadvantage process, and we need clear and quick processes from the VCAA to ensure this happens with the least anxiety. Student wellbeing continues to be the highest priority. Mental health issues are increasing, and schools are working on very detailed plans to be actioned now and on the return to on-site learning. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will pass to Mr Gary Maas for the first question. Thanks, Gary.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Ms Kliman and Ms Bell, for appearing before the committee again, and thank you for your presentations as well. I also take this moment just to acknowledge the fine work that your organisations are doing, and in particular school principals, who are leading schools through an absolutely extraordinary time—a very difficult time. So thank you for that.

My questions will be to both of you. So if each of you could give your perspectives from the primary and secondary schools cohort, that would be appreciated. I would like to go to learning from home, and I would just like to know: what are some of the differences your members have observed in students between the first and second rounds of remote and flexible learning from home? If you could expand on that. I might start with you, Ms Kliman. Thank you.

Ms KLIMAN: Thank you, Mr Maas. Look, it is interesting. One of the things that they found this time was that they needed to adjust what they were expecting of their families and their students to allow the students to be able to manage the time and cope with the work as well as building some wellbeing supports for them. I have heard from principals that they adjusted the weekly timetables. They brought it all back to focus on core subjects and really the things that are guaranteed and viable and needed for continuous learning through the school year, through the stages of learning. They have made adjustments to their timetables in terms of a lot of

the primary schools have talked about having Monday and Tuesday as their core learning days and Thursday and Friday as core learning days, but on Wednesday having their specialists take a lot of the programs and have a very heavy focus on wellbeing, which also supported the classroom teachers to have some time to do some planning.

There has been a greater focus on what is essential learning. They have also realised that to support their teachers they have needed to actually block out some time to allow them to have that dedicated planning time to make sure they are focusing. There is a bit more one-on-one work with children happening this time rather than just whole group work. Again, as I said, there was a big focus on wellbeing supports to emphasise and get children through this, because as Sue alluded to before, we are hearing more and more of children finding this a more difficult thing the second time around, as are most people.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Ms Bell?

Ms BELL: Yes. I think what happened was Zoom fatigue the first time around. Some schools just transplanted their full timetable and expected students to be in school uniform, dressed and ready to go at 9 o'clock as per usual and to follow the timetable. I think they realised fairly quickly that that was incredibly tiring and students needed time when they were not under that sort of pressure. So they pulled back from totally synchronous learning to some synchronous and some asynchronous. Students would meet with the teacher at the beginning of the class. The teacher would set an activity and then go into individual rooms with individual students and provide one-on-one support rather than talking at them the whole time, which is incredibly draining.

They have used different platforms. They have even used platforms like Instagram—you know, Sunny Foods, which is Sunshine College, that I talked about last time. That has continued. I do not know how many followers they have got now, but they actually have students doing cooking classes at home. There are lots more activities. Physical education: students are developing paths around their community using GPS and then going out and doing those runs and measuring what they are doing. So a whole lot more activity has been put into it. And certainly there is increased use of educational support staff to touch base with families and with students in terms of wellbeing checks, to make sure that they are getting on with the learning and they are feeling okay with it.

There are still some students that have difficulty with internet access, so schools are still managing to get them hard copies of work to continue with, but the vast majority of the work is being done online.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Ms Bell, and we might stay with you. In terms of teaching from home, I was just wondering what sort of feedback you might have received from members about their experience of teaching and working from home.

Ms BELL: It has been a learning curve, and as I said in my introduction, a lot of teachers did not really know what it was going to be like the first time around. But they have built confidence, so now they have been able to do a whole range of different things and bring a lot more engagement into the class. So rather than just, as we are doing now, talking at each other, they would have stimulus material, so they would develop a video that the students could work from and then break the students up into small groups so that they can actually do more of the talking, which is where a lot of the learning happens.

They do find it tiring, but what we have seen is a huge increase in collaboration with teachers of the same subject. For example, in a large secondary school you might have eight year 7 English classes, so those teachers are working very strongly together to ensure that the learning is equal between those classes and that there is sharing of resources so that they are sharing the load of developing new online materials. That is really supported by things like the department of education's new Arc webpage—activities that students can log into, you know, like logging into the zoo and doing a virtual excursion and then talking about it. I think there is a lot more engagement happening. Schools are using their learning management system platforms like Compass and Canvas even more to provide better resources for students. They are getting a lot slicker at it. They are feeling a lot more confident with it.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Ms Kliman, your perspective?

Ms KLIMAN: Similar to what Sue has said. I was talking to a group of principals this morning, and one thing that did come up was that they are starting to get very fatigued. Naturally, I think everyone is kind of a little bit fatigued about the whole experience. But they are now focusing, and they are really pleased to be focusing on teaching and learning, and there is a lot of the white noise that normally happens in a school setting that is actually not happening. They are not organising excursions and camps and so forth, so they are feeling that they are more focused on the teaching and learning aspect and not being distracted by other things. And that collaboration, as Sue indicated, has been huge.

The other thing that was interesting that came out of it this morning was that principals were saying that there was some more willingness from teachers to actually come and work onsite. And of course schools are limiting that as much as they need to, but I am wondering if that is because they are a little tired of working between four walls at home and it is a bit about that social interaction and connection with their peers. The virtual experiences have really taken off, and it was quite interesting to hear a range of experiences that the principals were talking about this morning that the teachers are doing themselves to keep engaged and connected, such as trivia nights together et cetera, so having some of those social interactions.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Ms Kliman, I will stay with you. In terms of our regional and our rural schools are the differences that were experienced in the metropolitan and the city areas similar, or were they somewhat different in regional areas?

Ms KLIMAN: They are somewhat different. We are all experiencing similar things because we are going through the same work, but because we are working in two different stages and stage 3 has different requirements from stage 4, the things that are coming up that are slightly different are that, in terms of managing children coming onto school sites, for example, it is much clearer when you are asking parents to demonstrate in a stage 4 area that they have a permit to go to work, whereas they are still relying in the stage 3 area on parents' ability to pass on that they are going to work. So that is probably the only issue that they are really bringing up, the difference between who can come on. And they do not want to erode relationships that they have with their community, so they are very reluctant to say, 'Well, what evidence are you going to show me that you are actually going to work?'. So that causes a little bit of angst, but other than that there are probably more kids attending schools in the regional areas than there are in stage 4 areas, so that is another difference. But pretty much they are on the same playing field.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Ms Bell?

Ms BELL: Interestingly, because there were so few cases in some of these country towns you would think the anxiety levels would be quite low, but once the numbers started growing—even to two, three or four—the anxiety levels skyrocketed, and that was felt very much in schools. So parents were becoming very reluctant before we went to remote learning to actually send their children to school, so we saw numbers dropping. Now that we are remote learning we know that the students are receiving the materials. The big thing for secondary schools is year 12s and their mandatory assessments, and that has been the difficult thing—to actually work out how to bring those year 12s safely onto site. And that has been similar across the state. The higher the risk level the less likely people are to want to do that, and so those students are doing their SACs remotely and that work is going to have to be authenticated when the students get back to school next term so that the teachers know that it is the work of that student.

So I think really for secondaries it has actually been a very similar sort of experience, trying to juggle all of those requirements at the same time as making people feel safe in their environment. Schools have been good doing that. The mask compliance has been huge among students; they have been really supportive of that—mainly because we have had older students. I am not sure when we get the year 7s back how they will go with it. That will be interesting to see next term. But I think students are generally on board with it and staff are certainly modelling that and are working to keep very calm, because students will mirror how the staff feel.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, and, Ms Bell, we will stick with you. I was just wondering if there were any practical examples that you could give me in terms of—this is a mental health, wellbeing and resilience question. Schools are often close-knit communities and I was wondering if you could give some examples where schools have banded together to give support to families who have done it tough in the lockdown. Are there any practical examples you could give us?

Ms BELL: I have got lots of practical examples from individual schools, because it tends to be an individual one.

Mr MAAS: Of course.

Ms BELL: Daily check-ins—the students have to check in every single morning with a smiley face or a sad face depending on how they are feeling, and the student wellbeing team are on the phones, ringing by 10 o'clock in the morning to make sure that those students are fine. I am not sure if I should tell you this one, because I think it might be illegal. But there was—

Mr MAAS: Well, don't!

Ms BELL: Okay, I won't. It is our secret; it will stay quiet here. They are seeing an increased self-referral from secondary schools to the wellbeing team, and so those people are conducting online conversations with those students. Schools are organising online fun activities. Normally in September they would be having footy days, where kids wear their footy tops. They are still going ahead with that, but rather than having the longest kick competition on the oval, they are getting kids doing trick shots and actually videoing themselves, and then they are putting up the winners of those so that there is a continued sense of connection, which is really important in schools, because as we all know that is what they are missing most. They are putting up videos about health and wellbeing that students can link into, and then they are having classes where they follow through and discuss what students are actually doing to ensure their own health and wellbeing.

They are also doing many activities with parents around that—so having Zoom meetings where parents can just drop in. Interestingly enough, a principal of a very low socio-economic school said if you had asked her at the beginning of the year if her parents would come to a Zoom meeting just to have a chat about anything, she would have said it would never have happened, and now she is absolutely swamped with parents just dropping into these meetings to have a conversation sitting in the comfort of their own lounge room. So they are the sorts of things that are continuing to build the connection which is going to provide the stability we need in the future to help these kids readjust when they get back and catch up on their learning.

Mr MAAS: Some good lessons to be learned there, certainly. Ms Kliman, just before we finish up.

Ms KLIMAN: Yes, thanks. Some of the things that are happening are the breakfast clubs and the wellbeing kits for families. Particularly in our low socio-economic areas they are very aware of families being without and providing items that are supporting them, whether it be food items or stationery items. I heard of one school that had pulled together some books and things and art activity things just to send home to keep the children entertained—and some games. I heard of a school, which was Tallygaroopna Primary School, which was doing a Tally's Got Talent session online for the whole school community. There are lots of music clips and short videos that schools are popping up not so much across schools but within schools and across year levels where they are combining year levels. I think we have learned from the experience last time; there are a lot more check-ins for individuals. Schools are very aware of the children that did not engage as much last time, so they have really been focusing on those this time. Parent engagement has definitely increased. The one thing in which there are mixed and varied things happening is the transition arrangements for kinder to prep, and that is an area that we need to start to focus a little more on. But a lot of schools are starting to pull together virtual tours, and—

The CHAIR: Sorry to cut you off there, Ms Kliman, but the member's time for questions has expired. I will pass the call to Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Sue and Anne-Maree. On behalf of the coalition can I thank principals for the work they have done—and the teachers, of course, but given you are representing the principals. It has been a difficult process for everyone, and I speak from experience—it has been a lot easier this time. I think the schools did recognise that they probably overloaded a bit the first time around. It has been a bit easier, and of course the kids are more used to it. I might add, though, that when they are finished by 11 o'clock that provides its own challenges when you are trying to work from home and you have got to keep them occupied for the rest of the day.

Can I just ask both of you, though, about schools that were forced to lock down because they had a positive case either with a student or a teacher: was there enough support for principals from DET and DHHS?

Ms BELL: I am happy to go first on that one. That has been on a curve. Initially when that happened it all worked very slickly. The cleaners came in, the contact tracing happened, people were notified and the schools were cleaned and got back to work very quickly. As numbers grew that whole process slowed down, and it reached a point where it was taking far too long to do the contact tracing. The cleaning the whole way through happened perfectly. That was never an issue. It was the contact tracing. So schools were getting to the stage where it would take two weeks before they were even asked for the contacts, which was a sign that DHHS were overwhelmed with the contact tracing. Even though they are good people and they were trying their hardest, it just was not possible to do that, and I think at that stage they were certainly ramping up the capacity that they had. The Department of Education and Training stepped in at that stage and put a special task force into DHHS that dealt with that and we saw that time frame plummet, basically, and come back to where it is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And the task force, we just heard earlier—I think they introduced that at the end of July?

Ms BELL: Yes, I think that is correct. So very quickly schools that had been shut for two or three weeks were able to reopen, and the time that they are closed now is much shorter. I think that is one of the critical things as we go into next term. We have to know that we have some certainty that that process will happen very quickly, because schools can cope with having an incident and being shut down and then being reopened but when they are shut down overnight, they do not have their equipment at home with them and they are out for three weeks, it just makes it very difficult, even though I know the department was ferrying around extra laptops to teachers who did not have them and that sort of thing. But it is a certainty that we need for the future and it is a process that was developed that seems to have worked quite well now.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Anne-Maree, I can see you nodding a lot, so I am happy for you to answer as well, but can I ask whether either or both of you actually took your concerns to the government over that period where it was not working well?

Ms KLIMAN: Yes.

Ms BELL: Yes, absolutely. The COVID task force that our department has set up has been incredibly responsive and answers our phone calls—I do not know; it answers mine, Anne-Maree—

Ms KLIMAN: They answer mine too.

Ms BELL: very, very quickly and rushes very quickly to do that. And they have done things like job sharing and putting staff on seven days a week, so we can ring with concerns on Saturday or Sunday now and know that you are going to instantly get someone and that they are going to respond to particular schools—because I have been approached by groups of principals who were very concerned, particularly in the western and the northern suburbs where, you know, the hotspots were, and so they have been supported through that process once we got through the contact tracing. I have also asked that schools be given the option of doing that contact communication—it is very hard to say—themselves if they want to, because even though they are not health people they know the families and it is a sort of a welfare check at the same time. Some schools have been asked to do that and have done it quite well.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, were there examples that either of you heard of schools basically having to take that role on? As you said, there were two-week delays sometimes with DHHS, and certainly we have had feedback that some schools effectively did not wait. They just had to go and do it themselves with the principal leading the charge.

Ms BELL: Yes, that certainly did happen. Strangely, some DHHS people asked them to do it and some said that they could not possibly do it, so I do not quite know what happened in the process behind the scenes there but certainly many principals were very happy to do it. Strangely, one principal told me he had worked out that he could get all the contacts out of the system in 10 minutes, and I am going, 'That's great, but you know, it might take 10 days to actually give them the information'. So they are very efficient in schools and because they know the people they can do that very well, but not all schools have that capacity, you know. Anne-Maree could tell you probably that smaller primary schools cannot delegate hundreds of contacts to have communication.

Ms KLIMAN: Those smaller primary schools do not necessarily have hundreds of contacts, but they are principals who are also working—teaching remotely—as well at the same time, so they do not have that

capacity to be able to do that additional work in their time. And just, I would reiterate and support everything Sue has said around that question, only to add that when I have asked anyone—and quite often I would ring a school after there had been a closure and just ask about the supports they have had—they have been very complimentary of everything that the department has done and the way they have responded. And even, as Sue said, us ringing the department because the school may have been having lag time with DHHS prior to the task force, the department actually jumped in very quickly and pushed things through and got answers really quickly for those schools.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Do you get feedback, though, either of you, from any principals who just could not get call-backs from either DHHS or DET?

Ms KLIMAN: From DHHS, they sometimes struggled with. There was definitely lag time that I was hearing, yes. And that was often around the contact tracing part.

Ms BELL: Yes, I heard that too, but once the department task force was there they were all given a liaison person who was their go-to person, and that seemed to work quite well as a system.

Ms KLIMAN: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Just broadly, I asked about you taking these matters up with the government. Have there been any other issues that you have raised with government since we last heard from you at the hearings that have not been addressed? Are there any outstanding issues that you are concerned about?

Ms BELL: Probably around year 12s and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. It is a very large ship to actually change course on, particularly around regulatory matters, and so principals early on felt that that was all too slow. When you have got your year 12s being highly anxious and their parents being highly anxious and a government body cannot move quickly, that made it very difficult. But we seem to have gotten through that now, and we seem to be getting better communications there, which is helpful.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Just while we are on that, Sue, the new consideration of educational disadvantage criteria that is going to be applied across VCE, how much extra pressure is that going to place on teachers and principals in trying to work out how much COVID has impacted an individual student?

Ms BELL: Yes. Well, fortunately I am on a consultative committee at the VCAA now that they set up of principals from all sectors, which was a very clever move, and so I have actually seen that documentation. It has been run past me as a draft, and I have been able to give feedback on it to make it a little bit more efficient in how it will work. I think it is going to be difficult, but schools being able to bring year 12s in to do authenticated SACs is good, because that will give teachers more idea of the capacity of students. I think at the end, with the statistical moderation that happens at the end of exams—it is absolutely critical that we actually have the exams and the GAT—that should actually even it out.

I think it is very important that students and parents are able to have input to the process so they do not feel that there is anything being missed, because in a class of 25 a teacher will have a pretty good idea of what has happened for students but they will not know everything, because sometimes students do not want to tell them everything. One of the things I noticed on the list they asked about was family violence, and I am not sure how many students are going to want to admit that they live in an environment with family violence. But the student wellbeing coordinator might know that. We have provided advice to VCAA on how to actually set that up so that they get the appropriate knowledge. It is important that it is a transparent process and students feel like they have been listened to.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sue, is that draft—

The CHAIR: I am sorry to cut you off there, Mr O'Brien, but your time has expired. I pass the call to Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. And thank you both for appearing before the inquiry today. I just want to touch first on the issue around contact tracing and just ask: were schools given clear advice as to what to communicate to parents should there be a case or a suspected case at a school?

Ms BELL: Yes. Absolutely. It was so clear they were not allowed to say anything unless it came to them from DHHS in a written statement, and they had to send that written statement. So it was very clear. It was just sometimes a bit later than you would want.

Mr HIBBINS: Right; okay. And what was the advice given to parents? Were they advised to self-isolate until contact tracing had been commenced or finished?

Ms BELL: I do not know.

Ms KLIMAN: I have not seen any advice.

Ms BELL: I have not actually seen the letters, unfortunately, so I cannot tell you exactly what advice they were given.

Ms KLIMAN: Yes.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Sure. Thanks. Just moving on to support for students who have not done well due to remote learning and may have fallen behind. Today we spoke to the education minister, who outlined a range of measures and advice that the department would be giving to schools to support students to catch up. Are schools comfortable with that advice, and are they comfortable with the level of support they are being given to actually act on that advice?

Ms KLIMAN: My understanding is that currently schools are, through their area forums, at the moment having these discussions and contributing to the conversation around this topic. I have not seen any formal advice that has been provided yet. I know that this has been a discussion that we have been having at the VPA particularly, regarding the attainment gap for primary school-age children. It is a discussion we have been having with the department, and I am currently in the process of also pulling together some advice about what we would see as appropriate as well as what they are doing when they are collecting it from principals at their area forums.

Ms BELL: Certainly in secondary schools in the online classes there is a lot of work being done around quizzes and monitoring the learning of students and how they are going. When they get back to school, most secondary schools do the ACER PAT tests—PAT reading and PAT maths—to actually determine the learning growth of a student in a year, so they will be conducting those again in the absence of NAPLAN. But secondary schools generally use the ACER tests. Then they will be monitoring what they actually do, so if the learning has been missed, they will go a bit backwards to catch them up. I think Anne-Maree mentioned before that the school decides what the most essential learning is, because the Victorian curriculum is a giant beast and you cannot possibly teach all of it. So are there bits that can be left behind that might be picked up a bit later on? They are all the sorts of professional decisions that teachers and schools will be making over the coming weeks.

Mr HIBBINS: And do you think there will need to be some additional resourcing provided to schools to implement any of the advice coming from government, particularly if it involves, for example, tutorials or to employ further educators?

Ms KLIMAN: Thanks, Mr Hibbins. I think that is a good question, because it is something that I have raised in terms of, one, even going back to do some assessment when students return to face-to-face teaching. I am particularly talking about the prep, 1, 2 area of our school, where those foundation years are crucial for ongoing learning success. I had a conversation with the department about whether we look at doing the online literacy and numeracy test again in term 4, because it was done just prior to going off into remote flexible learning for all preps and grade 1s at the beginning of the year. But that is resource intensive, so they are the sorts of decisions that need to be made about how we support schools to manage collecting really effective data that is then able to be used to determine gaps in student learning, which then means teachers can target the teaching and be very explicit about what content they are covering. So there will be times.

The other thing that worries me is I have also suggested we might need to look at some clear guidance for schools around using equity funding, because it is given to our most vulnerable communities, our disadvantaged communities—so some clear guidance about how they might use that for, dare I say it, catch-up, if necessary, and provide the support. There is existing money in their budgets, but what are they doing with it

to make sure that it is used most effectively to target those children where attainment gaps have widened during this period of time?

It is going to be a matter where we need to all be very explicit in what we are teaching. There is a need for teachers and schools to really focus in on that guaranteed viable curriculum, the essential learnings, and focus on that. But to get to that point we need to know what we are actually doing. Where we have not had these children in face to face, there will be a degree to which teachers will have an understanding of what the child has attained during that time, but there will be gaps that will not necessarily be noticed through the remote flexible learning time. There is a need to probably look at how we resource that within the existing frames, but maybe some additional resourcing.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes, okay.

Ms BELL: Schools were asked to do a recut of their budgets—I think it was back in about June—because obviously some of the expenses that they would normally have, they have not had, and they will have additional expenses. So bringing in additional educators may be one of them. Coincidentally, though, there is some extra money going into the system which was not planned for COVID but has been really helpful. After the rural and regional review last year, money was put into each rural and regional secondary school to allow VCE revision lectures to be reached by students.

Now, the regional areas are actually running those from the department themselves, so I think there is going to be a huge take-up. They are actually employing city teachers to record some interactive lectures on the top VCE subjects. That is for unit 3 and 4 students at the moment, but it looks like it might even spread to units 1 and 2. So that will be really interesting to see how that develops, and continuing to have that investment is important. But it is going to be up to the individual school—

The CHAIR: I am sorry to cut you off there. Thank you. The member's time for questions has expired, and our time for this session has expired, unfortunately. Thank you very much for appearing before our committee today. 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 request. We will take a short break now before consideration of the next witness, but we thank you both very much for your time and input into our deliberations again. Thank you.

Ms BELL: Thank you, and thank you for your work.

Ms KLIMAN: Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.