

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

**TEACHER SHORTAGES AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

CORRECTED

**At Camden Civic Centre (Ferguson Gallery), Camden New South Wales on Wednesday
1 February 2023**

The Committee met at 10:45 am

PRESENT

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

The Hon. Aileen MacDonald

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Ms Abigail Boyd

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

The CHAIR: It being 10.45 a.m., we can commence this inquiry into the teacher shortages and education outcomes in New South Wales, which essentially is an update at the beginning of the school year 2023 on the work that we did last year. I welcome the Committee members to Camden, and our first guest, Angelo Gavrielatos. I also commence with the custom of the Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of the land, in this case the Dharawal people. I do that with all due respect. I also acknowledge other important contributors to the history of our Parliament, including those who built the building, very often working in a dangerous industry, and our parliamentary staff, particularly our Committee staff here today, who supported MPs and made our work and representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all.

Today the Committee will be hearing from representatives of the Teachers Federation, the IEU and the Secondary Principals' Council. We will also hear from several parents from this district. Before we commence, I would like to make some brief comments about the procedure for today's hearing. Today's hearing is being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. A transcript will be available in the usual fashion. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, the House has authorised the filming, broadcasting and photography of Committee proceedings by representatives of media organisations from any position in the room, and by any member of the public from any position in the audience. Any person filming or photographing proceedings must take responsibility for the proper use of that material. This is detailed in the broadcasting resolution, a copy of which is available from the secretariat.

While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence today, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of their evidence at the hearing. I, therefore, urge witnesses to be careful about the comments they may make to the media or others after they complete their time at the hearing. Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections on others, and we have a procedural fairness resolution that our House adopted in 2018.

Due to the short time frame for this inquiry, there is insufficient time for the usual questions on notice process. However, the Committee has resolved that witnesses can provide transcript corrections, clarifications to evidence and additional information within 24 hours of their receipt of the *Hansard* transcript. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. In terms of the audibility today, I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into their microphones. If everyone could turn off their mobile phones, including the Chair, that would be helpful for the duration of the hearing.

Mr ANGELO GAVRIELATOS, President, NSW Teachers Federation, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Do you have an opening statement that you'd like to make?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Yes, I do. Thanks, Chair. Before I do so, can I please acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. By way of some opening remarks, I'd just like to start off with a quote that guides me, and I hope would guide many people—and it certainly does guide many education policymakers around the world. It's a quote by an internationally acclaimed, highly esteemed academic researcher, Professor Linda Darling-Hammond.

Professor Linda Darling-Hammond said that if you don't have a strong supply of well-prepared teachers, nothing else in education can work. And here we are, in the State of New South Wales, without a strong supply of well-prepared teachers. In fact, in the middle—I hope it's the middle, because that might suggest that we might get out of it. But here we are, in New South Wales, experiencing the worst teacher shortage in living memory—a teacher shortage that has been brought to us courtesy of 10 years, at least, of failed policies by the Coalition Government.

In your report in November, on page 12, you said:

Failure to act decisively now, at a point where we are clearly experiencing acute teacher shortages across the state, will harm both current and future generations and their academic outcomes.

It pains me to report to the Committee that since your report, the situation has worsened in New South Wales. The teacher shortage has gone from bad to worse. The teacher shortage has deepened, impacting students—thousands of students—daily, impacting teachers daily. The last available public data is the public data that was tabled in Parliament in November, and that publicly available data shows that the vacancies across New South Wales were in the order of 3,300 vacancies. That's triple—in fact, more than triple—the number of vacancies of 2021, when the Government announced its much-heralded and often-cited Teacher Supply Strategy—the \$125 million Teacher Supply Strategy.

At that time there were 995 or thereabouts—and excuse me if I'm off by a digit or two—vacancies in 2021, when they announced the Teacher Supply Strategy for \$125 million. Well, based on the latest available data, I can report to the Committee that that strategy—that often-cited and much-heralded strategy—has delivered three people from overseas and five mid-career changers, one of whom has already left. It is a failure. But, you see, this failure is not only a failure in an academic sense. It's a failure in delivery of education, which, for me, is the most important contribution a government can make in terms of nation-building. Our kids are missing out; our teachers are burning out. We've also reached the point—never reached before in our history—where now resignation rates have outstripped retirement rates, and where the exit of early career teachers is at a 13-year high.

The causes of this shortage are well known. They're well documented and, clearly, have been before the Government by way of internal briefings for years. Internal briefings have told the Government of the severity of the crisis. Internal briefings have told the Government of the cause of the crisis: unsustainable, crippling workloads; uncompetitive salaries, which continue to decline relative to other professions—and we're talking about a tight labour market where there are certain labour market realities. Professor John Buchanan today released another report saying that teacher salaries have further declined since his last report of 2020. And, of course, insecure work, which increased by 83 per cent during the life of this Government—an 83 per cent increase of insecure work.

More than 70 per cent—close to 80 per cent—of all new graduates are engaged in insecure work, temporary contracts. And, according to their own research and evidence, knowing that insecure work increases "the likelihood of teachers leaving for more permanent work". I repeat, Mr Chair, when you know the cause of a problem, you know the solution. What we've had from this Government is repeated examples of the triumph of spin over substance, and the losers are our kids. Their education is being compromised. Their learning is being denied. Their futures are being compromised. Thousands of kids, last year, on a daily basis, were being denied their learning because of the teacher shortage—put in playgrounds, minimally supervised in halls and libraries. And, on top of that, the department denying you information that you ask for in an attempt to suppress—not only manipulate, but manipulate and suppress the data that goes to that matter.

Out-of-area teaching, which continues because of the shortage, is impacting kids. This is referenced, of course, in our submission of July last year. Their own internal evidence shows—and I know it's not profound; surprise, surprise!—that kids who are taught by fully qualified, appropriately qualified teachers—guess what? Their HSC results are better than those who aren't. It's in their reports. Kids are being denied opportunities and their futures. Around the State, I've been receiving reports. Last year for a month I was travelling the State and I

was receiving reports. I continue to receive reports of high schools collapsing classes, reducing subject choice, to create internal buffers because of the shortage and not being able to get the teachers that they need.

In high schools and primary schools, kids that need additional support more than others are being denied specialist support through EAL/D teachers or support teachers and the like who have been redirected and deployed to fill gaps because of shortages. This is a crisis. One of the burdens of having been around for a long time is that you can reference these things across a long period of history. I put it to you that in my time, there has never been a crisis, nor have I read of a documented crisis, the depth of which and breadth of which we are experiencing now. I used some words from your own report where you rightly said "failure to act decisively now". Here we are in 2023.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much, Mr Gavrielatos, for the impassioned opening statement—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I wasn't impassioned; I was contained.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We share your passion for our kids and wanting them to get the best start in life, and we certainly understand the pressure that teachers are under. We did do a very detailed and in-depth inquiry last year, which showed the state of the teacher shortages and the impact that that was having on students. Most kids returned to school this week, particularly at public schools, but teachers would have been back for some time now. Do you feel that the crisis or the shortages that we talked about last year have gotten better or that they have gotten worse?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I can only respond on publicly available data, and I have cited the publicly available data as it was tabled in Parliament in November last year. It has also been the subject of media reports I think about a week or two ago, which provided not only the global figure of 3,300 but the vacancies by way of the department's operational directorates, showing that of those vacancies, 55 per cent were in regional and rural areas, which speaks to the fact that they're impacted often first and most acutely. But here's the difference with respect to the crisis and where we find ourselves: It's statewide. When I say it's from Bondi to Broken Hill, that's not just trying to be literate or clever. When Northern Beaches reports vacancies in a high school of 10 vacancies—across the State, the depth of the crisis is deepening and broadening.

As I said, I've received countless reports of schools collapsing classes and reducing subject choice because of the shortage in an attempt to create an in-built buffer. That is denying kids their opportunities. Opportunities should be there. We should not be in this crisis because the briefings that were available to the Government three and four and five years' ago were not acted on. That's why we're in this crisis. "We will run out of teachers in five years," said one internal briefing in 2018 or 2019. Here we are. As I said earlier, we've now reached the point where resignation rates have outstripped retirement rates, the exit rate of early career teachers is at a 13-year high and for initial teacher education the numbers are off the cliff—a 30 per cent reduction in those enrolling in initial teacher education and only a 50 per cent completion rate. We know the cause of all this, but with this Government it's a case of anything but dealing with the cause and admitting that the policy settings have brought us here.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I appreciate you referring to the publicly available data. Obviously we've had a summer school holidays break. I would appreciate that this is only anecdotal evidence, but from your conversations with teachers who have returned to the classroom, have they seen any dramatic changes that have occurred over summer?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: In all fairness, it's the fourth day of the school year. These reports will start coming in, but I've already received reports of, as I said earlier, collapsed classes and the like in terms of timetabling, and I think we'll see more of that. I get no joy out of this—none at all.

The CHAIR: Where are those collapsed classes in particular?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: High schools. So what they do—

The CHAIR: I know what they do, but whereabouts? What sort of schools? What sort of regions?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: All across the State. Quite often the commentary is that the shortage is in maths and science and STEM. It's across the board, and the data that we presented last year shows it's English, maths, science, history, geography and the like. What you do in a school when you construct a timetable, for example, is that rather than run six English classes, you'll run five and increase the class size of all of them to create buffer. When you do that, you are denying the opportunities of kids in terms of teachers being able to provide more attention to kids in the process, and you create that buffer because of the shortages and to build in relief that doesn't exist.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of any directive that's gone out from the education department about ways in which schools can mask the nature and impact of these are teacher shortages and not inform parents of the true situation that schools—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I think I spoke to that the last time I appeared before the Committee. There was a request—I think it was a question on notice or a request from this Committee or some level of Government—asking for figures of the total instances of minimal supervision, collapsed classes et cetera. What happened as a result of that request, when the department started receiving numbers that were clearly embarrassing, the department then issued advice or instructions to school principals to recalibrate, to mask, the figures by offering new interpretations of what constitutes minimal supervision. For example, what they said is that if there are four classes in a playground or a school hall, that's not four instances of minimal supervision; that's one. But then what happened was, they didn't even provide you with the advice, saying in estimates—having watched some of it—that they can't provide the advice because it's inaccurate and they don't hold accurate advice.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of that advice being renewed for this school year—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: No.

The CHAIR: —that it's gone out again to give schools ways to mask the true impact—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I'm not aware of that.

The CHAIR: —and not tell parents what has happened, that they're better off collapsing classes and, as you say, one minimal count rather than leaving any students unattended?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I'm not aware of any such advice, direct or otherwise, since that time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I've just got one more question, Mr Gavrielatos, before I pass back to my colleagues. You talked about resignations outstripping retirements. This isn't a demographic problem that, to be honest, most of us would be aware of. Our teachers are aging. This is actually new teachers and trained teachers mid-career choosing to leave the teaching profession.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: This is what makes it even more serious. Even if they wanted to engage in sophisticated workforce planning, which they haven't for a long time, it's much easier to engage in workforce planning based on retirements. There's a kind of stability there in numbers. But when your resignations outstrip retirements, it makes the workforce planning even harder because, as you said, it's not demographic; it cuts across. Then when you couple that with the other statistic of exit rates at a 13-year high for early career teachers, you've got a major, major problem.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Gavrielatos, I'd just like to ask you about the Government's proposal around dealing with the question of insecure work. What consultation did they engage in with the federation in relation to the proposals around converting temporary positions to permanent positions?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Temporary engagements in New South Wales under the life of this Government have increased by 83 per cent. I need to say this by way of background. Their own research, the department's own figures, which are publicly available, show that 78 per cent of people entering the workforce entered as temporary engagements—insecure work. That's the context. There has been only a 1 per cent increase in permanent employment, or thereabouts, and an 83 per cent increase in temporary engagements. This is the Government's own doing, so I smile, cynically I suppose. But I'll say that we are glad that there is now a bipartisan commitment to convert 10,000 or 11,000 temporary engagements to permanent. We're glad that there's bipartisanship. We do note that the Coalition announced its intention to convert those temporary positions to permanent within 12 hours of Chris Minns having announced the policy to convert 10,000 temporary positions to permanent; that's fine. We've always—we support permanent work.

There should never have been such a proliferation. There is always a place for temporary engagements; we do need temporary engagements for those people who are on maternity leave, extended leave and the like. But what's happened has been an excessive use of and inappropriate use of temporary engagement, which impacts on the shortage because, as I said, their own internal data shows that those who are in temporary engagement are more likely to leave seeking permanent employment. We've had a number of meetings with them and we'll continue to meet in order to achieve the most efficient and sound application of such a policy setting.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Inflation is running at 7.8 per cent, and the Government's wage proposal that's being implemented is substantially lower than that. What feedback are you getting from teachers about the salaries question and the viability of the teaching profession when we're seeing real wage outcomes falling?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: So you're meaning, how do teachers feel about an arbitrary wage cap that has seen their salaries decline dramatically in comparison with other professions, only to be further worsened by the inflationary pressures? Yes, they're thrilled; they're just thrilled. Again, from Government's own internal briefings, teachers' salaries have declined dramatically in comparison to other professions over the last 30 years, making the profession less attractive. That's labour market economics: In a tight labour market, money matters. Indeed, a Federal Government inquiry commissioned by the previous Government into initial teacher education that looked at the collapse of those enrolling in initial teacher education found that, in terms of their surveys, the primary issue at that point was salaries. Other issues come into play in terms of workload as you progress through your career but, at the point of choosing a career, salary is important.

Today, as I said, Professor Buchanan and the team from the University of Sydney Business School released a report that shows that teachers' salaries continue to decline. The situation, to use the title of the report, is that the salary situation has gone "from bad to worse". Not only has it gone from bad to worse in terms of comparison with other professions but also the inflationary impact, which found that real earnings have declined by 5.7 per cent between 2020 and 2022. We've got the perfect storm—uncompetitive salaries, crippling workloads, all of which are the underlying factors of the crisis that has been created and will continue unless we have a policy reset.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning to you, Mr Gavrielatos. I thank you very much for attending again, and it's very upsetting to hear that things have not improved since the last time we spoke. I just wanted to touch on one of the things that you raised in your opening statement. I think you said that the SLSOs are being deployed to cover teacher shortfalls. Is that correct? Could you talk a bit more about what that looks like?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I didn't say precisely SLSOs; I said other specialist staff. There very well may be instances that SLSOs are providing some forms of supervision; I wouldn't be surprised by that. But my point went to—I'll use the word "redeployment" or the deployment of specialist staff in our schools—support teachers, EAL/D teachers and teacher librarians being deployed from their task of providing specialist support for those kids from non-English-speaking backgrounds or EAL/D backgrounds, kids with special needs, having those specialist teachers deployed from those tasks. They're technically—in many instances they're not assigned a class; they work with groups of kids. They're not working with those groups of kids to provide cover where other cover cannot be secured. That is a serious issue for those kids who need it the most, so that's what I spoke to, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It is incredibly concerning, then, that we have some of the most disadvantaged students being further disadvantaged by the teacher shortages. Since the last hearing that we held for this inquiry, we've obviously had the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, which New South Wales was part of, released in December. We've heard the New South Wales Government announce a plan to halve the study time required for postgrad teacher education from two years to one. Do you think that plan really aligns with point 2 of the national plan, to strengthen initial teacher education, or is it going against what they've agreed?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I think it's of grave concern that, against the backdrop of a teacher shortage, we're seeing attempts to undermine teacher qualifications and standards. We are very firm with respect to the need to defend qualifications and standards for the profession, but also for those aspiring to enter into the profession. It's interesting and contradictory, is it not, that in one breath the New South Wales Government in its submissions to Federal inquiries about qualifications and the preparations of teachers is saying we need to add more units to initial teacher education to better prepare graduating teachers to better deal with the complexities of the contemporary classroom—particularly to better deal with the needs of students with disabilities and students of EAL/D, and to be better prepared for classroom management, et cetera. In the one breath, they're saying in their submission—and I think I've quoted verbatim—"We need more units," and then all of a sudden they said, "but we're going to halve the qualification." They said, "We'll need more units and therefore more time to do it, but we're going to halve the qualifications."

I think it's a very dangerous signal here by the Government. We also know that when people—graduates—are underprepared, it increases the attrition rate once they come into teaching. Preparation or classroom readiness is important. Just to quote Professor Mary Ryan, dean of education:

We don't want to see graduates enter the profession only to leave shortly after due to being under-prepared and feeling unsupported for what is complex work.

There's always a legitimate debate to be had about initial teacher education and what constitutes sound initial teacher education. But we'll always err on the side of standards and qualifications of aspiring teachers rather than seeing a compromising of those standards, including the introduction and ushering in of people who are unqualified, and certainly underqualified, in our schools.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So again it's this approach: By shortcutting the teacher education, the Government is trying to put a bandaid over the teacher shortages issue and, in the process, creating more of a problem or a potential problem in the future. Is that what you're saying?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I would certainly agree with that, but there's also the other side of this. There are other studies that show that when you lower entry levels into initial teacher education and lower the quals, you're actually lowering the status. You're sending negative signals when it comes to recruiting or attracting into initial education bright young folk, who will look elsewhere. It has a negative impact. I think it's a case of the Government constantly deflecting from wanting to address the underlying causes, and it's always a case of another announcement—"Look over here; look over there"—rather than dealing with the issues.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So they're kind of creating that negative feedback loop. Before I hand over to the Chair, I will ask one question about the issue of pay. We talked a lot about the value of pay in elevating the public perception of teachers, as well as adequately rewarding teachers for the incredible job that they do. Do you think that the Government's plan to have some teachers on a higher salary than others is addressing that perception, or do you think it actually serves to divide public perception of teachers that some of them are worthy of this higher amount and some of them aren't? What are your views on that pay idea?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: We need a competitive salary across the board to attract and retain the teachers we need. We need to compensate teachers for the role they play in society and executing the functions that we expect of them. There are already differential rates of pay within our scales, including additional pay to recognise further qualifications, skills and training, and demonstrated qualifications. That already exists. What we are getting from the Government, and we got from the Government last year, was another attempt to deflect attention from failing to act on the fundamentals to recruit and retain the teachers we need. This is not about an exercise that may or may not impact 5 per cent of teachers. This is about securing the teachers we need when the Government itself said that by next year or the year after, we are going to need an extra 3,800 teachers, and that was before the new data that showed the exodus of early career teachers and resignation rates. We've got to deal with the fundamentals—the fundamentals; not sideshows.

The CHAIR: Just coming back to that question of the collapsed classes which you've said are across the State, can you provide the Committee with a couple of examples—for instance, the worst one that we've heard for the beginning of this school year?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: No, I can't. We will be collecting data as soon as we possibly can. Yesterday was the first day that kids started going back in our public schools. There is no doubt that the data will start coming in to us by our reps in the very next little while, but I do not have current data as of this year.

The CHAIR: Okay.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I am reporting on the publicly available data and other data as of last year.

The CHAIR: Just noting that this inquiry is not just about teacher shortages but also education outcomes, I saw the federation, through your good self, backing in Labor's latest funding deal for schools. With regard to education outcomes, many people raise with me—and I think it's a burning question for this Committee—why it is that over the past 20 years we've had the fastest falling school academic results in the world, according to Geoff Masters, the curriculum reviewer, but at the same time we've got the highest level of school funding we've ever had because of the Gonski pipeline? How do those two things match up?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Let's unpack that. There has been an increase in funding in education in the last 10 years, but the greatest increases of funding in the last 10 years have gone where it's needed least—to the non-government, Catholic and independent schools. The data speaks to that—the greatest increase in the last 10 years. Non-government schools—all of them—are funded at above what we call the minimum level of funding or the schooling resource standard, which is the standard agreed to by all Ministers as the minimum level of funding. Non-government schools aggregated are funded 105 per cent, or thereabouts, of their schooling resource standard. Our public schools in New South Wales are funded at about 88 per cent of the minimum level of funding. The Government will say it's 92 per cent because they throw in an extra 4 per cent of stuff that is not school related—for example, capital depreciation and the like, only impacting public schools. So our public schools remain underfunded. The additional funding in terms of getting our public schools to 100 per cent of the minimum level of funding they're entitled to—it's not an aspirational figure; that's what the Government has considered the minimum level of funding—is to be targeted and must be targeted for the schools that need it the most, serving our most disadvantaged kids and recognising there is no level playing field. We've got to invest in those kids to give them the best chance to succeed.

The CHAIR: But you are acknowledging there has been an increase in funding for government schools, but also a decline in—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: There has been. Minuscule in comparison.

The CHAIR: But how do you explain the breaking of that nexus—that the long-suffering taxpayer would expect more funding for schools would mean better results.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Because it has not been adequate to be able to target the kids in the way that we need to target them. It has also been during the same era where we've had failed department and government policies of Local Schools, Local Decisions, which haven't allowed for the focus of the funding to be able to deliver. Because we also had the funding monetised, governments and departments washing their hands, and schools left with money that they can't allocate because they can't find teachers. So the school budgets show in some instances—and I think you had a whack at me about this: There are instances where school budgets have got money in there because they are schools that can't find the teachers because of the teacher shortage and other related matters.

The CHAIR: I've been to many disadvantaged schools and spoken to principals about their funding allocation, and almost universally they'll say, "We've got enough money." In some cases, they say they've got so much money, they don't know how to spend it. I'll give you two examples: Ashcroft High School has converted what used to be a staffroom into the equivalent of a community health unit, with wellbeing counsellors, speech hearing experts and speech pathologists. That's how much money they've got. And at Warwick Farm Public School, they're funding a program where parents are bussed off to Ingleburn—a fair distance—to do "be a better parent" courses, I think under the coverage of the University of New South Wales. So this Gonski money, out on the ground, is like rivers of gold. And when you find a significant number of schools that have got so much money they don't know how to spend it on core educational objectives, what is the explanation for why this nexus has been broken between increased funding under Gonski and improved education outcomes?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: It's interesting that this discussion doesn't occur in the context of private schools being funded at 105 per cent—

The CHAIR: I've visited private schools. They also say they've got enough money. When I visit a school, Angelo, that tells me that there is a paucity of funding, I'll let you know. But for four years I visited a hell of a lot of schools, notwithstanding the COVID lockdowns, and this is what we're finding on the ground.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: We've obviously visited different schools.

The CHAIR: Where are the schools you've visited where they say they haven't got enough money?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I've not been to any school where they've said they've got enough money.

The CHAIR: You mustn't be asking.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I won't resile and we won't resile from continuing to pursue the policy objective of our schools being funded at their minimum level and that's 100 per cent of the SRS, which governments consider is the minimum amount required. Beyond that, what needs to be had is a discussion, and Government leading this, about making sure that money is being invested where it matters most so that kids can achieve their very best. And the first thing we need to do as part of that is ensure that there's a qualified teacher in front of every classroom, every day.

The CHAIR: Yes. One thing Labor has got right is the ban on mobile phones in high schools. What do your members say about this? My feedback close to home and elsewhere is that these mobile phones are a distraction. There's no evidence they provide any useful educational input in the school. They help to facilitate bullying. When the teachers turn the other way—some of these kids sadly are addicted to these things. Politicians are bad enough. The kids are worse.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I was going to say.

The CHAIR: What's the feedback that you get from your membership?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: There's no doubt that they are a distraction but, unfortunately, they are not the only distraction because you've also got tablets.

The CHAIR: And similar devices.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: So they are a distraction and many schools are approaching it in different manners and in age-specific manners. What you do in a primary school might be different in a high school. They are certainly a distraction. That's what our members say to us. There's a wide variety of views—those who believe you ban them; those who believe there's a policy of put them in your bag and you don't take them out. But either way, there have got to be some restrictions. We need restrictions and restrictions are important to ensure that kids

aren't distracted from lessons. There are legitimate times in a lesson when you might want kids to go to their tablet or their laptop, et cetera. But other than those times, they are a distraction.

The CHAIR: But the mobile phone, isn't the best practice that they go in the locker at the beginning of the day and they come out later, or in the bag?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Put them in your bag.

The CHAIR: They're technically at the school if an emergency phone call needs to be made.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: My view is put them in your bag.

The CHAIR: And that's a federation policy?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: We don't have specific policy on that matter. We've got policy on a lot of things, but I'm offering you my view on that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just on this question of teacher workload, you cited earlier on our report in November, and the evidence we took I suppose was conflicting about the question of teacher workload. Because it seemed that some of the workload that was spoken of was actually integral to the job of teaching, such as marking tests and assessments, recording student data and learning plans, and ordering classroom materials and the like. What specifically is the workload paperwork item that the federation would like to see abolished?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: What we need to do is go through and undertake—this is the problem with some of these things. Some of these things need to happen, but the question needs to be asked: Is it teachers who need to be doing all of these things? There needs to be a thorough audit of all of this stuff, not only some of that admin stuff but the compliance stuff. Each year teachers have to spend a lot of time on compliance matters. Only last week I received a full spread of it. I'll share it with the Committee, what was sent to me, the full list of all the compliance things that have to be undertaken. This has to be done yearly. Some of this stuff I don't understand why it needs to be done yearly, this compliance stuff. Then there's the added admin stuff that we've got to look at. What is it that teachers should not be doing?

The CHAIR: Haven't schools got admin staff to do admin?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: They do, but clearly all of this has been put on the plate of teachers to do because admin staff have continued to do what they did and, no doubt, a lot more has been added to them in terms of data entry and compliance and the like. I think it's out of control. I think new technologies have resulted in some of this stuff getting out of control. I think it's high time for an even deeper investigation about the impact of these new technologies and how they're impacting on teachers. One of the things in terms of new technologies and impact on teachers is that teachers are now constantly in receipt of emails, even text messages, from parents and the like—we're living in a society where there's a fair bit of immediate, instant gratification kind of stuff happening—wanting real-time answers. Maybe it's time for us to look at what's happening in other jurisdictions and other countries about the right to disconnect and the like when it comes to some of these things outside hours of work.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just jump in on that question around data? I think there was an announcement last year from the Government about putting in place a trial for support staff to do data entry for teachers. Has that happened? What's the feedback on that?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I can't give you the latest. It's just another announcement. There may be one or two or three people trialling this, that or the other. What we've seen, as I said, is triumph of spin over substance, and no shortage of announcements aimed at deflecting attention from some serious matters.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: To pick up on that mobile phone point, you talked about the diversity of views amongst your members when it comes to that. With something like that, is it something that's perhaps best left at the local position, where the school principal can determine a position when it comes to mobile phones in schools?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I think it never hurts for the Government to have policy positions. Sometimes policy positions can be broad frameworks; sometimes they can be quite prescriptive. I don't think governments are that prescriptive, as I said, at different times. But, no doubt, there are always views expressed. And, as I said, there's always an age appropriateness to this stuff as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: As you were saying, differences between primary schools and high schools and senior high school and the like.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Of course there are.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I am also interested in going through and picking out some of the CC data in terms of the class numbers, particularly for K to 6. We've seen, since 2011, a reduction in general, and, even between 2021 to 2022, a reduction in the number of students per class sizes. How does that work in terms of the number of enrolments and the teacher supply shortage we're seeing? Why are we seeing that reduction in students per classes still?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Because the additional funding made available to schools is allocated in a way that schools consider to be appropriate and effective in addressing educational learning and outcomes for kids, and where funding is located to allow for more small group tuition, for example, or a slight reduction in class sizes. They're not dramatic reductions in class sizes; they're sound decisions aimed at improving the learning outcomes for kids. I don't think you're suggesting that we increase our class sizes in order to—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Not at all. I'm just wondering how you square that circle, in a sense, as to how we've got this teacher supply issue but we're still seeing the number of students in classes going down.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: But doesn't that go down to workforce planning and knowing full well in advance what your needs are going to be? When the Government was in receipt of data in 2018 and 2019, with graphs showing what the supply gap would be, why wasn't the Government acting to put in place the policy settings to address that supply gap? One of the graphs shows a projection of the supply gap, showing the potential shortage by the end of this year of 2,425. Well, guess what? We've exceeded it.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Which graph is this?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: There are thousands of pages of internal briefings that have been provided to the Government over the last number of years as a result of an SO 52. It's all available there. It's all on the desk of the Minister and other elements of the Government. It's all there. This is what annoys me: The Government had thousands of pages—I know members of this Committee have seen those thousands of pages—all of which were alerting the Government and warning the Government. When you've got a briefing that had the heading "We will run out of teachers in five years"—I'm not making this up; it's in the briefing—and you ignore it or you try to justify after it's been made public—"Oh, yes, but the circumstances have changed"—too right they've changed, they've become worse. And when the same briefing underscores and highlights the reasons for it, the excessive workload placed on teachers and uncompetitive salaries are acting as a disincentive when it comes to attracting and recruiting and retaining people. That's in the brief; they're not my words. It's very frustrating when I'm responding to you as a member of Government with verbatim from the briefings that are before the Government. But, anyway, that's the way it is.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Gavrielatos, picking up on some of the points you've raised before about some of the publicly available data—we have, of course, the department with us tomorrow to answer some questions—what are some of the things that you would like to see in terms of that updated publicly available data? You've talked about some of the figures you've got from last year. What would you like to see updates on? What are some of the things we should be asking about?

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I think we need data. We're always mindful of these calls for papers and SO 52s.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Just give us three examples of things that we should—

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I will, but I'm just saying that we're mindful, because that always falls back on our teachers and our principals, who have to supply this.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Of course.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Transparency is a very important thing when it comes to public policy. What we need to know is an update on the figures available to us in terms of vacancies across the State, the figures by way of subject areas would be important as well and projections related there too.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That's a good list of three.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: There you go.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Fantastic. Thank you very much. I will hand over to Ms MacDonald.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: I don't have any questions.

The CHAIR: Are there any other questions? Ms Boyd on Webex? The Opposition? We are on time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just ask one final question?

The CHAIR: Courtney Houssos, yes.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Have I been brief, Chair? Have my responses been efficient?

The CHAIR: You've exceeded expectations.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: One of the things that came out of the previous inquiry was that there's probably a difference—just coming back to the question about data and admin workload, there seems to be a difference in the way that parts of the department are considering the need to upload information to NESA in relation to things like programming and accreditation, whereas some in the independent sector are taking a slightly more minimalistic approach. Are you aware of any of those kinds of charges? That was certainly something that came out from our discussions.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: I don't feel I can respond to that question. I'd have to take that on notice and get some more info on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's completely fine.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: There's always a question about being efficient and avoiding duplication, and always assessing if there are any points where there is duplication. But, beyond that principle, I can't give you any further response.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's okay.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Angelo, for your contribution and also for your assistance throughout this parliamentary term. Undoubtedly, we will see you in the next one.

ANGELO GAVRIELATOS: Good luck to everyone.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. Cheers.

(The witness withdrew.)

Ms VERONICA YEWDALL, NSW/ACT Branch Organiser and Assistant Secretary, Independent Education Union, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: It's available to you to give a short opening statement, an outline for the Committee, and then we'll go to questions.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Prior to 2018, when I commenced my employment at the IEU, I was a teacher employed in non-government primary schools across Sydney for 34 years. You would be aware that the IEU attended this session last year, but we welcome the opportunity to remain engaged with the Committee to represent, particularly today, the interests of our members in the south-west, obviously facing the same issues in a much broader context across Sydney, in the hope of developing a better shared understanding about the direct correlation between the salary cap and professional pay and the workload intensification that directly correlate with the recruitment and retention issues which underpin the current teacher shortage crisis we're experiencing.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We will start with the Labor Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Yewdall, thanks for that very concise summary of the challenges that we're facing. This isn't a problem that we're just facing in the public school sector; this is something that we're facing right across the government and Catholic and independent school sector, and that's obviously where you would have your members.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On my way here this morning I had a conversation with a parent who said in passing they'd got an email saying that they didn't have a religion teacher at their high school at the moment. This was a Sydney metropolitan Catholic high school. You would think that this is a pretty attractive place to be working. Are these teacher shortages being felt across the board, in your experience, or just in specific areas?

VERONICA YEWDALL: No. Absolutely, we can confirm—obviously you have a focus today in the south-west, but we can confirm that it's across the State. In 2020 our members alerted us to the fact that they were feeling teacher shortages in their schools, and we conducted a survey at that time. We were already heavily engaged in the areas where we believed would eventually lead to difficulties with staffing—workload intensification being one, and the slide when compared with other professions in terms of pay. We were already engaged in that space, but we did immediately act on information that indicated that this problem was emerging and brought it to the attention of employers and to government agencies wherever the opportunity presented itself.

In terms of the south-west, we are aware currently of senior secondary colleges with severe difficulties staffing for this year. They had these problems at the end of last year. We also have primary schools where there are no casuals available, which obviously has an impact on literacy support and other programs which a primary school would normally run. I know there's a lot of focus on secondary, for good reason, but there is also an impact in primary schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, absolutely. We know that that early intervention is so important in primary schools, and if that early intervention and that support are not able to be provided it just creates a snowballing problem as the years go on. That's really helpful. As we said, it's a problem that's being faced across the board but, in some ways, the independent sector is better placed to be able to provide additional benefits or perhaps increased salaries. If they're facing shortages, they could actually be drawing from our public schools. Isn't that the case? It could be making the problems worse in the public system.

VERONICA YEWDALL: It would appear that that should be possible, although we have highly regarded, highly resourced North Sydney/North Shore schools also declaring difficulties with staffing. And, of course, the issue in that case is not so much their ability to pay staff; it's the availability of staff to employ. In that case, it does not simply devolve down to an issue of pay; it's about the fact that there is a shortage of people to employ. In the secondary situation, as we know, schools are currently being forced to employ teachers so that they have someone in front of a class, but that teacher will possibly be teaching out of field, which provides another layer of complexity to the educational outcomes and the way the teacher shortage is impacting on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that a widespread practice, in your experience? We call it out-of-area teaching sometimes, or we call it out of subject specialisation. Whatever the terminology, is that something that you're seeing happen?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes, absolutely. We did reach out over the last few days to schools in this area and received a lot of feedback about out-of-field teaching. Obviously, it's undesirable. Schools would not

take that route if they had any alternative. It creates a lot of extra workload for teachers, but obviously it also impacts significantly on student outcomes, and no teacher wants that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. And it creates an added pressure on both the teacher and on the student when they're winging it.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Absolutely, because, if we're talking about secondary in this instance, it is specialised key learning area curriculum-based instruction. If you have, as I have, examples of teachers trained in PDHPE undertaking studies for history students, clearly, whilst they will be getting as much support as possible from their colleagues, it won't be the same level of instruction. Obviously, there's a lot of focus on STEM—so the science and technology subjects—and English and mathematics. They are not the only subject areas, to our knowledge, that are impacted. We have shortages in other areas as well—history and geography teachers, as one example.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: One of the things that we heard in our previous inquiry from one of the specialty teacher associations—I can't remember if it was maths or science—was talking about how, if you become a science teacher or a maths teacher, you've got a real passion for it. And then that is imbued in your teaching and that's transferred to kids, which then allows them to engage better in the subject matter. That's obviously not happening. If your passion is PDHPE and you're trying to teach history, there's that disconnect. You would agree?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes, I would agree. But I also think there is a lot more to the delivery of a subject than simply delivering the content. A teacher who is trained as a science teacher will also be trained in—I'll use teacher language and describe it as "chunking", so breaking the curriculum down into manageable amounts for students to avoid cognitive load. It is in the news a lot at the moment—the cognitive load for students learning a subject area. Teachers are trained not only to know the content, but how to teach it. It's one of the teaching standards as well. It's an expectation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers that they not only know the subject or the content but know how to teach it. And, obviously, a teacher who is teaching out of field hasn't had the opportunity to be trained in how to do that, even though they may have an interest in science or history, for example. It's not desirable, no matter how you look at it, unfortunately.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And it's almost certainly going to result in poorer education outcomes for the students.

VERONICA YEWDALL: It's inevitable, and it's one of the contributing factors to high teacher dissatisfaction and difficulties with retention. We have such a large, dedicated, committed and professional workforce that we are struggling to retain, and one of the frustrations revolves around the fact that they are not able to provide the education to the students that they entered the profession to provide.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. That's understandable. You said that you'd spoken to schools around the south-west, and that's really helpful. That would be really useful for us, if you could just provide us with any feedback. It's obviously a growing part of Sydney. It's an area where lots of families are moving to bring their families here, and for a great life in the south-west. But you're hearing that the schools are having trouble staffing the schools. Is that correct?

VERONICA YEWDALL: And some of the issues that result from that are merged classes. Merged classes are coming up in both secondary and primary. We're talking about, in primary, most likely classes up to 30—so two classes combined with a single teacher, 60 students. I have a reference to a year 8 merged class situation. In the secondary, it's more likely also to include merged KLAs, or key learning areas. You may not have two merged science classes; you may, in fact, have a mixture of students because there isn't a geography teacher available that day. We are having that reported to us—that it's not only a combination of classes in the same subject. I hope that would be rare, but it has been reported to us.

Also, another issue that emerges because of the combining of classes revolves around early career teachers, who may perhaps be in their first or second year of teaching, and who normally would not be allocated a senior class, but who are more regularly being asked to take classes of senior students when they are at a very inexperienced stage of their career. In terms of primary, if I can keep them also within the story here—for primary teachers, when classes are merged, sometimes schools need to draw on their specialist teachers to take those classes. We're looking at the special needs or diverse learning teacher going into a classroom for the day, which means that the rest of the students in that school, who may qualify under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for students with disability funding to receive support—but it is impossible if those teachers need to be in front of a class.

Similarly, most schools would be running literacy and numeracy support programs with teachers running those programs, not support staff. They often are also drafted into that work. And I have a report of specialist

music teachers, who, of course, are also more broadly trained teachers. Of course, that means that what we would consider the broader aspects of education, perhaps art, PDHPE and sport, music—a reduction in the accessibility to those classes because of a need to place those teachers in the general classroom.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: One of the points that Mr Gavrielatos was speaking about when he appeared previously was the real increase in the number of early career teachers who are leaving. What we have heard through previous inquiries is that really successful schools actually provide those early year teachers with quite a lot of support. That might mean they're not teaching a full load. They're receiving mentoring and support in those early years of a career, as you would in any career that's appropriate. But given the teacher shortages, it sounds as though that is just increasingly difficult to provide.

VERONICA YEWDALL: I would agree with that. In the largest of the non-government sector, the Catholic systemic sector, we have agreements which guarantee an amount of release days for early career teachers. They vary across the State in the amount that the particular employer has agreed to provide. But at this stage, we are working towards a reduced load, which I believe is what you were sort of referring to, because the problem with providing an amount of release days is that in the case of a teacher shortage, they're often not able to be provided or they are banked up towards the end of the year, which may not be when they're needed. Whilst that provision of release is helpful and laudable, the practical reality is that it isn't eventuating in many cases that we're aware of. In other parts of the independent sector, we don't have such arrangements, so it depends on what resources the school has available to provide. That support for early career teachers is absolutely crucial.

I'm sure we can all anticipate and understand the issues that an early career teacher has going into a new school without adequate support, particularly this year and next year when we have new New South Wales curriculum syllabuses being launched into schools both in primary and secondary coming up. That will mean that teachers are not only grappling with being new teachers, they will also be trying to come to terms with a new syllabus—in the case of primary, a number of new syllabuses—at the same time. There is a lot of pressure there on early career teachers.

In the past, experienced teachers would have gladly taken on the role of mentoring and, in some cases, more active supervision. Schools are required to provide accreditation supervisors for provisional and conditional teachers who are working towards proficiency, but most schools would have aimed to provide more support than that. However, experienced teachers are struggling with their own workload. In my time as a teacher, I took several prac students and also mentored early career teachers, but I completely understand why the current cohort of experienced teachers struggle to fulfil that role, particularly when they are covering other classes, perhaps teaching out of field and perhaps working day to day with a merged class situation.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Could you perhaps explain, I suppose, the nexus that exists between the salary outcomes in the State system and the salary outcomes that apply in the non-government system, and how the salary outcomes in the State system affect teacher salaries in the non-government system?

VERONICA YEWDALL: I'm sure the Committee is aware that the 2.5 per cent or nearly 3 per cent salary cap applies to government schools. However, there has long been a connection between salaries in the non-government sector, particularly the Catholic systemic sector, which has long had a principle—I guess that is how you would describe it—that teachers in the Catholic sector would not be paid more or before their counterparts in the State system. I'd like to just comment here that I believe that the vast majority of teachers would not want to see a situation in which the State sector were paid less than the non-government sector. That is not the way teachers perceive the profession at all.

Whilst we are not, in the non-government sector, tied to that salary cap, in effect, in practice, the same salary outcomes apply to teachers in Catholic systemic because of that longstanding principle. For the independent sector that are not within the Catholic system, what has been the practice in the past is that they are reluctant to, again, step outside whatever applies to teachers in the government sector. I believe that teachers generally would say that there should be parity regardless of where you teach—teachers are teachers regardless of the sector—and that whatever pay increases apply should apply across the board. Does that explain what you were—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes. Effectively, the Government's policy, the wages policy, has a big bearing on the salary outcomes in the non-government sector.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Absolutely. Over the last 12 years, because the cap has been in place—this is the twelfth year. Over the last 12 years, salaries for teachers in the Catholic system have marched in line with whatever was achieved in the government sector.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has that been carried forward in terms of the most recent salary outcomes for the Teachers Federation with the State Government salary outcome?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes, in the main. With the exception of one particular employer who has made the decision to increase, the bulk of the Catholic systemic employers have marched along in step.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That means teachers in that sector have experienced a real wage cut.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Is that your union's policy to tie non-government salaries to this wages cap in the public sector?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Our policy is to try and achieve the best salary outcomes for all teachers, so we would hope that what happened—

The CHAIR: Right. Well, why don't you—

VERONICA YEWDALL: We don't have a policy, if I can explain it that way, that would say that we align it. That's at the discretion of the employer, because the union does not control salary outcomes.

The CHAIR: No, but why don't you negotiate and campaign for the highest possible salary for your members? Isn't that why they pay you?

VERONICA YEWDALL: We absolutely do, Mr Latham. The Hear Our Voice campaign was underpinned by two aspects: lift the salary cap and achieve significant reductions of workload, and also support staff parity. That's one area where the Catholic systemic employers have not matched the outcomes that support staff in the State sector achieved. There's a significant lag time there. Support staff in the non-government sector are significantly disadvantaged at the moment, and we have been campaigning long and hard on exactly that.

The CHAIR: Wouldn't a lot of your members say that non-government schools are flourishing with enrolments; that it's the expansion sector; they get higher results academically; these are, by and large, very good schools; a lot of them are affordable now, breaking the stereotype in western Sydney; and that your members should be paid significantly more than the government school teachers?

VERONICA YEWDALL: I think the—

The CHAIR: If I was working there, that's what I'd be saying. Surely people must say that.

VERONICA YEWDALL: I think teachers have a very clear understanding of the different circumstances that impact on results, that impact on academic outcomes, and that it never comes down to better teachers here or harder work. Teachers understand. It's one of the reasons why teachers oppose so-called performance pay for teachers, because we understand that depending on the cohort of students you have, the amount of resourcing you're given, the way staff shortages have impacted on your school, that can seriously affect what appear to be your student outcomes. In terms of teachers saying, "We deserve more because we have better results", I think the majority of teachers would say, "If we're fortunate enough to have better results, that does not reflect poorly on my neighbouring teacher who has a higher percentage of students with special needs and perhaps is taking a larger class."

The CHAIR: Isn't this the general problem with what's happened to the status of teaching? In my time in public life, it's dropped significantly, the status of teaching and the public regard for teaching, exactly because of the reason you've outlined: That excellence is not recognised and rewarded in its own right. There is always this levelling down mentality. There is always a set of excuses to level down, which is something out of the old Soviet Union that's a hopeless failure. Don't you need to reward and applaud excellence in its own right and reward people accordingly, and then the whole status of teaching will lift rather than the levelling down mentality, which is just so counterproductive.

VERONICA YEWDALL: I'd like to say, Mr Latham, that I think the premise on which you're basing that is false. In the face of such inequity between school systems, I don't think you can compare like with like.

The CHAIR: But you've got the best schools.

VERONICA YEWDALL: I would certainly say there are—

The CHAIR: I can tell you the reasons why the failing schools are failing, but you've got the best schools. Why don't you argue for stronger rewards for your teachers?

VERONICA YEWDALL: I would argue that there are excellent schools in all sectors: in the government, in the Catholic systemic and in the independent.

The CHAIR: It says levelling down.

VERONICA YEWDALL: It's not about levelling down.

The CHAIR: Yes, it is. Every statement you've made is about a dead hand on excellence and recognising performance.

VERONICA YEWDALL: No, Mr Latham, I don't see at all how that's a dead hand on excellence. All schools strive for excellence with the resources that they have. At the moment, resourcing does not just come down to money; it comes down to allowing teachers to do their job and doing something about the workload intensification. Workload intensification is what causes levelling down. It's far more responsible for a perceived decline in outcomes than anything else that you wish to discuss. Workload intensification, and the loss of agency of teachers to do what is best for their students, has had a catastrophic effect on outcomes. We would argue that the profession believes in needs-based funding and a far more equitable education system.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You mentioned the frustrations driving exits, and I wanted to ask about the accreditation system. There was a decision by the Government a little while ago to cancel a whole range of approved courses for the 50 registered hours that are required to maintain accreditation.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I'm getting feedback from teachers that that has resulted in a shortage of available courses to meet your accreditation, and that in turn is driving a situation where teachers are feeling more anxious about maintenance of accreditation. That's more stress on teachers. Are you getting a similar kind of feedback from your members about the accreditation system and that sort of choke point that's been created by the Government's decision?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes, absolutely, when we consider that at the moment that situation is partially masked by the fact that we have a huge cohort of pre-2004 teachers. I am one of those teachers. We are, at the moment, within an extension period, and we will need to submit by the end of this year. However, most of that group of teachers have long ago achieved their 50 hours of accredited PD, so the problem of inaccessibility is, at the moment, partially masked by the fact that there are a large number of teachers who, at the moment, are not in need of that accredited PD. They can fulfil the rest of their hours with elective PD. However, in a very short period of time, we are going to be facing a situation where there is very limited accredited PD available. According to NESA's website, they have roughly of the order of 500 accredited PD courses, and only a very small amount of those are free. All of the others—we're talking in excess of 450 of those courses—attract large fees; large fees are applicable. It was never an expectation that teachers would need to pay for professional development in order to maintain their accreditation.

In the past, schools were also able to accredit their staff meetings where those staff meetings met the criteria for accredited PD, and in many cases they did. However, because the application process for accredited PD has become far more difficult and more onerous and time-consuming, many schools have withdrawn from that process altogether and are no longer attempting to register their staff meeting time as accredited PD—which also adds pressure to a teacher's capacity to complete those 50 hours.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They have to do it in their own time.

VERONICA YEWDALL: It has to be done in their own time and, in the current state of play, at significant cost. Many of the courses that are available are significantly priced, sometimes in the hundreds of dollars. The IEU was an endorsed provider of accredited PD, so we have had some success after significant effort to apply for accredited PD. But I can assure you from our own experience it is an extremely time-consuming process, and we were delivering previously accredited PD. It also limits the number of providers in the space who are able to provide accredited PD.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This is a big cost shift to teachers, isn't it?

VERONICA YEWDALL: As at the way things stand at the moment, that is the way it appears, yes. Although, as I said, it's partially masked at the moment, that won't persist for much longer because there will be teachers who will be needing to accumulate their 50 hours. The other part that is problematic is the restriction to the four priority areas. There are only four areas at the moment—well, there is a fifth, but it's optional. The four priority areas relate to curriculum, student mental health, students with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The fifth and optional area is leadership. While there is absolutely no question about the value or the validity of those areas, it certainly does limit teachers who believe they have a need to source out professional development in areas outside of those four priority areas. But they cannot claim it as accredited PD, so it doesn't assist with meeting that target.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you so much, Ms Yewdall, for appearing again and contributing to our inquiry. I want to take you back to the bit about how much of not being able to fill teacher shortages is down to pay. I know that the IEU has members in a great variety of different types of schools. Although we sometimes

think of independent schools as being the very high fee paying schools, with the pools and jacuzzis and whatever else they have, the vast majority of your members are in the more low fee paying Catholic schools. Independent schools are at that 100 per cent SRS, or sometimes above. If it's not pay that we're using to attract into that sector, what is the tangible difference of working in an independent school that has 100 per cent SRS? Would you agree that that at least has a beneficial impact compared to where the public schools are at?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Thank you for pointing out that the vast majority of independent schools are actually the local Catholic primary or secondary school, and certainly not with swimming pools and jacuzzis, and are often struggling with sub-par facilities. Obviously over time that situation has improved. Please correct me if I've strayed a little bit from what you were trying to ask me about but, in terms of the funding, it certainly is not going towards increasing teacher pay. The reason that that is such a contributor to the teacher shortage is that it impacts on our ability to recruit. Young year 12 students who are looking at the comparison, who want to work in a profession and may have an interest in teaching but look at the salaries that are available to them in other professions, can quickly see that whilst they may get off to quite a reasonable start, it isn't long before they hit a plateau that does not exist in other professions.

In terms of teacher pay, the issue is not so much the difference between what an independent school may be able to afford to pay their teachers. That no doubt happens, but it doesn't apply to the vast majority of the teaching workforce, who are locked into whatever the State cap dictates. It's about whether or not we can recruit young people into the profession of teaching without addressing the slide between the education profession and other professions. In terms of the experience of working in those schools, Ms Boyd, if that was part of your question, would you mind clarifying if you would like me to speak more to that?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, I would. Apologies, my question was a little bit convoluted.

VERONICA YEWDALL: No, not at all.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, I'm kind of curious. Perhaps it doesn't come into attracting teachers in the first place; maybe it's more about retention. But as someone who has been lobbying for a long time for there to be 100 per cent SRS at public schools, it would be interesting to know from your perspective whether that funding for those schools—although it may not be going towards teacher salaries—increases or improves the experience of teachers. Do you think that you have better retention rates, perhaps, than what we see at public schools?

VERONICA YEWDALL: I would say in terms of retention, obviously, while we have a problem with early career teachers, we also have significant loss of experienced teachers. Whilst pay itself may be an aspect of that, teachers themselves tell us that it's the workload that is the issue. I'd also like to say that the IEU has said frequently and publicly that we believe in needs-based funding and that it should be equitably distributed. We've made that statement publicly on a number of occasions.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: My final question, and it's one that I asked the prior witness, is in relation to this idea of shortcutting qualifications or reducing from two years to one year the time it takes to get your teaching qualification. Do you think that that would improve or actually exacerbate the teacher shortages issue in the long run?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Are you referring to the attempts to attract people who already have a degree and may be moving from one profession and talking about the current two-year masters of teaching?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, I am.

VERONICA YEWDALL: The IEU strongly believes in the integrity of the teaching profession and the importance of qualifications. As I referred to earlier, there is more to teaching than simply knowing the content. And we would hope that the time that was invested in preparing teachers who are coming out of one profession into education would address issues around the delivery of content, the best way to teach that particular subject area, behaviour management and all of the professional responsibilities that are not written down in any syllabus but are an important part of a teacher's professional role in a school. Respect for confidentiality, discretion, professional boundaries, professional boundaries between parents and teachers, between students and teachers—that sort of hidden curriculum that doesn't appear in any syllabus but that is vital. And we wouldn't like to see any shortcutting of that.

However, that being said, if a shortening of that two-year period was matched with far better support once a person moved into teaching in a school, then it may be something that is a viable proposition. We haven't had detail yet on what the intention is in terms of what it would look like. The IEU has attended several meetings with the NSW Council of Deans of Education and NESA, who are working on exactly what this would look like. So I don't have any detail really on which I can comment, but in terms of support for or opposition to it, it depends on what the actual proposition would look like. Our concern is that people going into teaching, regardless of

whether they are coming from one profession into education or they are new graduates, need a significant amount of support in order to be successful and to be long-term members of the profession. As we know, we have a significant number of teachers who joined the profession anticipating that they would be career teachers and that they would retire as teachers. And more and more, we are seeing people leave the profession, but they are not leaving the workforce. They still have 10 or 15 years left to work, and this is not a situation that we have faced before.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think there is a double standard that's being applied here? We've got a shortage of doctors and nurses but no-one is advocating for a cut in the degree qualifications for doctors or nurses. And yet they think it's appropriate to have a cut or reduction in qualification time for teachers. Do you think that there's a double standard that's being applied?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Possibly. Although there are a lot of double standards applied when you compare education and health and others as well—more, perhaps. But I think if we are talking about trying to address the current crisis, I can see why this is being considered. However, it needs to be thoroughly and carefully considered in light of the fact that we know that, without appropriate support and appropriate training, people do not continue in the profession. And we don't want to add to the issues we already have after investing in people to try to address the shortage. Without the support, that investment is wasted.

The CHAIR: Could I ask about the question of workload? It seems that we hear more about the paperwork workload issues in the government sector. What is the situation in the non-government schools, and if the workload is less and the red tape and so forth is less, what would explain that?

VERONICA YEWDALL: I would say the workload is not less and the red tape is not less. From my own experience and from my ongoing experience, even whilst working at the IEU, a lot of the issues that we deal with are workload related. I'd like to, if I may, point to a few reasons why we are having these issues. One is that over the last decade and a half we have seen a proliferation of intervention in education, some from commercial interests. The rise of the education expert—and I won't use air quotes because it's objectionable, but if you would consider the number of people who generate evidence-based education initiatives. And these initiatives are sometimes implemented without proper consideration in schools. This is a situation that has escalated over the past several years. It is incredibly intensifying of workload and often, unfortunately, does have a very short shelf life, because one educational initiative is quickly supplanted by the next one. So this is something that the non-government sector appears to be equally susceptible to, if not more susceptible to, than the government sector, possibly out of feeling the need to compete. I'm not sure. At the union we have coined the term "initiative churn" because that's the practical reality of it.

We have also had, over the past several years, a proliferation in documentation and the juvenilisation of professional documentation. So when a teacher is trained to become a teacher, they initially generate program and assessment documentation that is far more detailed as part of their training. Once they are an in-service teacher, it is not possible to sustain that level of detail in a program, nor is it desirable, because it exhausts teachers for no reason, and everyone who is looking at the programs is presumably a professional and not needing explanatory text. However, we have seen a proliferation of that in our schools, where excessive detail is being required. With thanks to my colleague who coined this term, it's a "bureaucratic edifice" around documentation. And this is one of the reasons why we are optimistic about some of the work can be done to address the teacher shortage. Because a lot of this documentation that is excessive does not contribute to teaching learning outcomes and is, in fact, damaging.

If you add to that the duplication that is happening, we have government agencies, regulatory authorities and employers all involved in the same space. Government agencies—as an example, the Federal Department of Education, who have responsibility for overseeing the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data process for students with disability, which provides the funding for students with disability and is vitally important. But over the last few years, the documentation that schools were being required to generate for that funding far exceeded what the department ever required, and the IEU was engaged in some work with the Department of Education to clarify what was and was not required for the purpose of verifying suitability of that funding. In spite of that work—a tremendous document was produced which clarified what was and was not needed—we're still, in some places, overcoming resistance to dismantling all of the duplicative documentation that is not required.

You can look at NESA's compliance manuals in the same way. Compliance is another area where we are seeing layers of documentation that are being required. NESA are currently engaged in work on their compliance requirements to, again, make very clear what is and is not required. This will hopefully allow us to identify the source of the duplicated documentation and the usefulness of it. Obviously, employers have the right to request that their teachers provide documentation, but where that documentation is already being supplied elsewhere for

either a government agency or a regulatory authority, it's an unnecessary addition to the workload. It doesn't provide any extra value.

The final thing I would like to point to is the lack of connection to allied health. So if we are looking at workload intensification, there's a high number of students in Catholic systemic schools who require specialist support. Allied health professionals are often difficult to access. So that's a workload intensification that we share. I suspect we share all four of those issues with our counterparts in State schools. So that's the way we are, as a union, trying to address that, by working in that space, clarifying what is and isn't required, what is duplication and what could be either reduced or eliminated altogether. But I would argue that our issues are very similar, if not identical, to what's happening in the State system.

The CHAIR: I visited a Catholic school that tabulates and records—you've mentioned too much documentation—the sleeping habits of their students. This is just kooky, isn't it? That schools are now into having the kids record, "I slept for four hours last night", "I slept for six", and "I slept between 11 and five." And they keep records of this, and there are teachers and staff inside the school who regurgitate this stuff, meditate over it and make conclusions about it. Why can't we just teach?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Exactly.

The CHAIR: These are self-inflicted wounds, aren't they, all this stuff?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Self-inflicted in the sense that—I'm not sure, in the situation that you're quoting, where it came from, whether it was—

The CHAIR: The school has a good reputation. I went there to hear about academic excellence and I got this thing about a sleep doctor and walked out wanting to go to sleep myself.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Yes. We're constantly in the position of asking what is the purpose of the documentation and for whom is it required? Because the situation we are facing is that a lot of this required documentation is a dead end. It doesn't go anywhere. It's not contributing positively to teaching-learning outcomes. In fact, it's destructive because of the time that it takes. Where documentation is needed, it's usually—frequently—already being generated to satisfy genuine compliance requirements, either from a Federal agency, such as the Department of Education, our own New South Wales Department of Education or a regulatory authority like NESA, which has been very helpful and clear about what it is trying to do in the space to alleviate this situation.

The CHAIR: What's an example of initiative churn?

VERONICA YEWDALL: An example of initiative churn would be a new mathematics program that involves different mathematical strategies and requires a total rewrite of the school's current mathematics program. It would involve extensive training of the teachers, usually after school. It would probably involve in-between meeting work, where teachers were trying to implement the program and reporting back. After six months—and I'm speaking from personal experience here—that program was discredited, resulting in a new consultant and a total rewrite again of a program, and all of this happening whilst the syllabus itself is unchanged. So this is not as a result of a change of a syllabus; it's a result of the impact of educational consultants—obviously well-meaning in many cases and, perhaps, under instruction themselves to do this work. I'm certainly not attributing any malice or intent to cause a problem. But initiative churn is a significant issue, perhaps particularly in primary, where teachers are generalist and they may be facing this sort of program intervention across multiple key learning areas.

The CHAIR: Does this happen more in schools that are struggling? From what I've seen, the top schools know what they're doing. They've got established systems and pedagogy programs, and they stick to them and they continue to get good results. Why change a winning formula, I suppose, is their attitude. Struggling schools, though, go through this cycle of fads. I love that expression, "initiative churn", where they're desperate for some new thing in maths. "Let's give it a go", and six months later they've dug a deeper hole, haven't they?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Of course. It's not good teaching practice. It doesn't take into account the student readiness and it doesn't allow student consolidation. Even if the teachers wanted to persist with it, believing that perhaps it might have merit, sometimes there isn't any option and the teachers have lost the agency to continue with something that they believed was working or, alternatively, to get rid of something which isn't. Perhaps disadvantaged schools may be susceptible, but we tend to find that it operates in clusters. Schools may be clustered geographically, even within a sectoral system, and it may be that that's a particular initiative adopted by a cluster of schools. So when we are hearing about this initiative churn, we are often hearing about it from several schools at once.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is this driven by private, commercial interests?

VERONICA YEWDALL: Sometimes, but certainly not always. There is a lot of good work, obviously, also being done in the research and education space. The Australian Education Research Organisation itself was instituted to try and make sure that what was happening in school was evidence based. Obviously, the IEU is supportive of the aims of AERO, if I can shorten it to that. However, we have asked AERO to provide guidance to schools about the implementation of initiatives, because sometimes even a good initiative can be damaging if it's introduced at a time when other initiatives are also happening or perhaps it contradicts previous initiatives. So we have asked and it has produced. Certainly not just at our request; I'm sure it was something it intended to do anyway. But we wanted to stress the importance of proper consultation with teachers about the implementation of educational initiatives.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thank you for coming so very early in the school term. As you know, we had an inquiry last year. I'm not sure whether you've had a chance to read the report or the responses. In terms of this inquiry, what could you offer that's different? What could you add that wasn't part of the previous inquiry with respect to the Government response?

VERONICA YEWDALL: With respect to the Government response?

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, and also noting that it wouldn't have had any time yet to implement a lot of that.

VERONICA YEWDALL: No. One thing I would like to comment on—perhaps it was covered and I may have missed it—is that the Department of Education has commenced a range of initiatives. The Quality Time Program is one—I think the most recent report was July last year, so, again, it's still underway—with the aim of reducing teacher workload and streamlining processes. At the point when the inquiry took place last year, I'm not sure how much that was discussed. Obviously, it's a laudable attempt to perhaps move some of the duties that would have been undertaken by teachers to support staff, thus freeing up teachers.

What I would like to perhaps add is the reason why, in our view, these initiatives have not been as successful as perhaps it was hoped is because those two issues around a professional pay increase and workload intensification that teachers are solely responsible for has not really been the focus in our sector. In the government sector they have gone quite a long way, I believe, to generating resources that will do something about initiative churn because they will put a sort of imprimatur on the resources and will hopefully stop schools from moving from one to another. We're not sure at this stage what sort of access the non-government sector will have to those resources, and we struggle with employers in that sector to get much movement—certainly not quickly.

I think in the four items that I referenced just a few minutes ago, with the exception of the connection to allied health, the other three areas around juvenilisation of documentation, duplication and initiative churn, something could be done about those things this week because they are process driven—they are processes. There's no cost. In fact, they would have a positive impact immediately. So we have been very focused on trying to convince the non-government sector of the value of providing the sorts of resources that the government sector is trying to provide. Whilst they are very worthwhile, without addressing the workload intensification for teachers and the salary cap, the initiative itself, the Quality Time Program, I don't believe, with the best will in the world, will be as successful as hoped.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your evidence, Veronica, and all the best for the school year that we've now moved into.

VERONICA YEWDALL: Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms HANNA VALENZUELA, Parent, affirmed and examined

Ms KATE LANEY, Parent, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: It being 1.00 p.m., we can recommence our hearing. Welcome to Kate Laney, from the Gregory Hills community. Kate appeared before us previously in the infrastructure inquiry. Thanks very much for your time. Thanks to Hanna Valenzuela for coming along, also from Gregory Hills. In what capacity are you appearing today?

HANNA VALENZUELA: I am a parent of the community of Gregory Hills. I will have to state, as well, that I am a teacher, but I am putting my parent hat on today.

The CHAIR: Fantastic.

KATE LANEY: I am a parent of children that have been in both Gledswood Hills Public School and now Gregory Hills Public School. We are residents of Gregory Hills.

The CHAIR: Thank you. It's available for you, before we go to questions from the Committee members, to make a short statement to outline the issues that you are concerned about. Kate and Hanna, you can each make a statement, or just one of you—whatever suits.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's very informal. Don't worry.

KATE LANEY: Okay, cool. It feels a lot more formal than the last time I did this on Zoom.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, we're just having a chat.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Home ground advantage for you.

The CHAIR: Yes, this is a home game for you, in Camden.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We're the away team.

KATE LANEY: True. Thanks for coming out—it's a quick drive. I've had a child in school now going on for five years. He first started at Oran Park Public School for kindergarten, and then Gledswood Hills was opened in 2020 and he moved there. I've seen the number of children grow over this last five years really fast. In speaking with other family members who live outside of the area, they've always been really amazed at the number of students at the schools, and how that growth has been. I think that there's a huge problem that we've been sort of coming up with over this time, with the number of kids coming through and the need for teachers in general. But I definitely think that, specifically, there's a huge problem with absent classroom teachers.

I just want to put forward, first of all, that I am not being critical in any capacity towards any teachers. I think they do a stellar job. It's strictly in terms of their face-to-face teacher time and the amount of time that they have to be taken away for other roles, whether they be administrative, RFF or absenteeism for illness or otherwise. I think that in this classroom the kids are facing a lot of absenteeism. Especially, that's really exacerbated in a school of Gledswood Hills' size, where there's over 1,000 students. They do struggle to find casual teachers to fill classroom teacher positions on a regular basis. Obviously, that grows with the size of the school—that is really exacerbated. They are not looking for just one casual teacher a day; they're looking for multiple.

If there is no casual available, the classes get split across the other classes, either in their grade or a grade above or below that. They are sent with a split workbook that they have to work through. They don't actually participate in the classroom program that's happening in that classroom. This is feedback that I've received from both other parents who I have spoken to and my own personal kids' experiences. When they are split into those classes, their continuity and consistency in the learning that they are following gets a little bit broken. It's hard for the teachers taking them on to integrate back into their classrooms. I think that's why they use these split books. But the children do find that it is difficult to follow the work that they are given, and they're obviously less likely, because it's not their familiar teacher, to ask questions when they are struggling. And then, sometimes, those children don't actually get any work completed, or assistance with the work. That leads to a whole lot of time lost.

I remember being given the compulsory attendance letter that the department offers. That states that if your child misses one day a fortnight for a whole year on average, over the weeks they miss in one year is four weeks of school, and the years over their school life is a whole year of education that's missed. All of these little bits of time that they don't have their proper face-to-face learning is going to be impacted over the years that they spend at school. A friend of mine actually said that she believed that her child's teacher was absent on average one day a week for one whole term last year, and that equates to two weeks of that 10-week term. I'm not saying that they'll be losing all of that time, but a considerable amount of that time when they don't have their face-to-face teacher because they're juggling extra children coming into their classes and thus making the class sizes bigger as well.

I think that when the kids are being moved so often, there's a struggle for them to develop their relationships with their teacher and get that familiarity so that they are confident to ask questions, especially in the K-2 area. I also did hear from a parent of a school somewhere in the Campbelltown region that had a year 7 class being taught over a megaphone in the school hall—for maths for year 7. I was quite surprised to hear that. I can't really attest to the older groups of children in high school and the impact of that, but I'm sure that they'd be put more onto their own self-study on technology. That leaves room for not making those social connections and developing their relationships with their teacher and learning in that full capacity.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Similar to Kate, I have had some similar grievances in regard to split classes with my son at Gledswood Hills.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Hanna, can you draw the microphone a bit closer to you? That helps.

HANNA VALENZUELA: No worries. I'm not sure who Kate was talking about, but I think it may be somebody that was in my son's class, because in term three that's pretty much what happened in regard to his teacher, due to illness of herself, family members, as well as moving into—because she is quite an experienced teacher—the AP role within the school. She was away quite a bit in term three, and it was very much probably at least once a week, if not more, throughout that term. It wouldn't surprise me if the kids were split for about two weeks, like Kate has said. The split books have been an issue in our home. My son has said to me that he finds it difficult to follow along with the split book.

He's quite an anxious child so he doesn't like to put his hand up. Even though he's been going into the same classroom for his split class throughout the whole year, he's not familiar with that teacher because it's not his usual teacher. Another issue is that when there are casuals, they're not consistent casuals. He's never had the same casual more than once. He won't know their name. When I say, "Who was your casual teacher today?", he won't remember their name. Again, that continuity, that familiarity, that he would normally receive kind of goes out the window at the moment, and that's something that we've kind of had in that regard. I won't talk too much about the split classes because Kate covered it quite well.

Something else that I'm quite fearful of because of certain family members that have gone through this quite a bit is the idea that teachers may not be permanent. My fear is that, because I've got a very anxious son, his teacher is going to leave halfway through the year to seek permanency elsewhere. I know that with, again, somebody that I know, they had a very competent teacher—she was very experienced and she was teaching a high-achieving class—who had to leave halfway through the year because, although she was seeking permanency at the school she was at and she was very happy she was temporary for a number of years, and an opportunity came up and she had to leave. Because of the lack of teachers, the teacher that they did have cover the class was an interim approval teacher, so it was a teacher who had done a prac previously in the year with that class, but she was not even out of uni and she still had another semester to finish at uni. She was given this high-achieving class, which was meant to extend, and as far as I know the class kind of stayed stagnant according to the person that I've spoken to. Their child didn't move throughout that year for the rest of the year because of that.

Another issue I've had personally is in regard to the support in the classroom. Throughout the year, it just seems like my son's teacher for last year especially was very busy. All the time, she was very, very busy. Whether that was taken up by administrative stuff, I don't know, but it was very, very difficult to catch time to speak to her. Throughout all of last year and part of the year before, I had been trying to seek some OT for my son because we feel he might have some sensory processing issues. To kind of convey that to her in the beginning took weeks, because you've got 20-plus other parents who are trying to speak to this teacher. She has maybe two minutes to talk to each parent in the beginning at school pick-up time. It's just not enough time to get round.

By the time you do get round to sending an email or leaving a phone call, you almost feel guilty trying to steal that time away from her. Often whenever I would email or leave a message on the school platform to communicate with the teacher, the responses I would get would be quite late at night. I'd get a message 10 o'clock at night and then there would be this overwhelming guilt that I've just taken time away from this lady's family. She's got a young family herself, and, yes, I need an answer because I need to seek an answer for my own child, but what gives me the right to take that away from her. She's working up until 10 o'clock at night. It's just nuts to me. That's that.

The other thing I kind of found with the lack of support in the classroom was that my son is very passionate about science and maths, but it just felt like there was no time to extend him in those areas. I'm not saying he's the brightest in the class or anything like that, but that's something that we tried to foster at home. If he's got a passion for something, we're going to explore that a little more. It'd be nice if that could kind of happen at school, but it just seems like there isn't enough time to do that. The things that he does lack in, other areas like art and things like that where he's probably below average or middle of the pack, it just feels like he kind of gets forgotten a little bit because he is in the middle. I think with COVID, a lot of the parents I've spoken to who do have kids who

are struggling are getting a lot of support to try to boost their children up. But because my child's not at the bottom, it's almost as if he's sitting there waiting for everybody else to catch up that he can't move any further forward just because there's a lack of time.

The last thing I kind of wanted to touch on was in regard to bullying and things like that in the playground. Whenever there's a casual teacher in the classroom. Last year there was a child in my son's class who was a very difficult child and there were a lot of issues around that. Sorry, not last year, the year before that when he was in kindergarten. There were a lot of supports in places with his teacher at that time to stop the bullying and things like that happening. But whenever there was a casual, because it wasn't a consistent person throughout the school, it was always chaos that day. It was the same in the playground. If there was somebody unfamiliar in the playground, it becomes hard for my son, especially, to go and seek help because there's just a strange casual in the playground. That's kind of all I've got.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I say thank you to both of you for sharing your stories and also for the efforts you've clearly gone to to talk to other parents and to give us some insight about what's happening across the region. You're both mums who have had kids at Gledswood Hills and now at Gregory Hills. Is that right this year?

HANNA VALENZUELA: Kate is at Gregory Hills. I haven't moved across.

KATE LANEY: My kids just started at Gregory Hills yesterday. My eldest was there from the opening of Gledswood Hills, so he was there for three years, but prior to that he was at Oran Park for kindergarten because obviously the lack of schools situation at that time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and we have visited both Oran Park and Gledswood Hills in our previous inquiries. I'd be keen, given that it has just opened, to hear what your experience is of Gregory Hills, the new site, and if there have been any issues.

KATE LANEY: Given that it's only been one day, I can't really say that I've had too much to do with that. We just sent the kids off. But I will say that the way that they've structured the classes—originally my initial concern about moving my eldest, who is in year 4 this year, was that they were going to be having a 3/4/5 class. Although he was in a 3/4 composite last year, I was a bit concerned about that moving forward just because it's spanning two stages. Although his classroom teacher assured me that for things like geography and the other extra STEM subjects all the curriculum is on the same level for a stage—it's just the maths and that that are slightly up or down—and she said that they've got things in place to help and it's not as difficult as it seems to someone maybe who's not a teacher, I knew that that might be a problem going into it. Last night they added a new class the day before the day was starting, so he's actually in a full year 4 class there. But my son who's going into year 2, he's actually gone into a 2/3 class. There are two 1/2 classes, one 2/3 class, a year 4 class and a 5/6 class. I actually am concerned about my other son now, because he's across two different grades—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Stages.

KATE LANEY: Stages, sorry, yes. I've always kind of thought it's a bit hard to do composite classes. I've personally been in them myself when I was in primary school. They obviously make those classes because when you've got 10 kids left over that don't make up a class in year 3 and then the same in year 4, they like to push them together because they don't want to give extra funding for an additional teacher. I think that's a bit of a backwards situation, because I feel that the children would all benefit if they roughed out those numbers and made them smaller.

It would have also allowed—I know, particularly, when we were growing at Gledswood Hills in 2020, that first year, there were three year 1 classes. By the end of the COVID lockdown, they had added two more classes to that school for that grade alone. I was really blown away. There was a lot of shuffling around of classes that particular year. That year the school actually used up all of the extra classrooms that they had spare at the start and then needed the demountables for the start of the 2021 year, which is when Hanna's first and my second started kindergarten. Because I'd already been at Oran Park with the 48 demountables that they had there in 2019, I was like, "What's going to happen? I know the school classrooms are full. What's the plan?" And then they put in the 18 demountables to cater for that new influx of children.

There was a lot of shuffling around because they didn't allow room. I know that that's probably not the case at all schools in the area. But in the growth areas, like our area, I feel like they could have alleviated a lot of issues if they had just kept a bit of space there to shuffle around. Obviously you can't allocate, always, for that. They probably didn't really expect the numbers to grow as quickly as they did either. But that would have helped soften it, because I know a lot of parents were really frustrated in that year 1 that their kids were moved two or three times. He had kids in his class that had moved a number of classes in that time frame, so it just made it—

The CHAIR: Kate, do you know or can you estimate how many enrolments the pop-up school has?

KATE LANEY: I believe that there were 80 kids coming in for kindergarten; they started today. I believe that Mrs Rourke said that there were 197 kids that they were starting with. I think that was including kindergarten as well, because I knew that—when they did a pop-up information session, I was talking to her. She said that they had, like, 75 kids for kindy, and then the rest was another 75.

The CHAIR: Right, so the weight of kindy new starters and other students who have had to move from other schools, which is a bit harder.

KATE LANEY: Yes, kindy was, like, half of it, and then the rest was made up over the rest of the grades.

The CHAIR: That's interesting. Is there any guide as to when you will get permanent buildings there?

KATE LANEY: School Infrastructure have said that they're hoping for it to be mid next year, but that's dependent upon approvals for the DAs and stuff like that, and that they're currently assessing submissions on it. The contractor who built the temporary pop-up school is the one who's going to be doing the contract for the main build. I actually ran into him at the gate last week one afternoon, just having a little stickybeak, and he said that they're hoping to start by the end of March with that. I said, "So will that be ready for term one next year?" He said, "No, it won't. It'll probably be a year." To me, just as a generic outsider, that doesn't seem like that can work. I believe that the pop-up school had a cap of 300 kids that they can fit on that site, and there's not really anywhere for them to add extra. There is a grassed area, but do we really need to do that again? I believe that they're keeping the cap. But to start next year—I think a lot of people in the area, once they realise that that school will be in the brand-new building the following year, will want to move. But they won't be able to accommodate that if it's not ready for term one, day one, next year. They'll have the cap in place still, and I just don't see how it would be possible to move the school in the middle of the term. I think it's a bad idea.

The CHAIR: Yes, if they keep getting 80 kindies a year, they're obviously way over the top.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: Yes, and I think a lot of people might realise, too, because Gledswood Hills is having a second stage built in one of their limited areas, that there's going to be less room. There's going to be a lot of disruption to the school itself, and I think a lot of people may end up moving across later on. I think that there was a bit of hesitancy because of being ingrained at Gledswood. It's a pop-up, so it's temporary.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Have there been any issues with people who live in Gregory Hills having access to Gregory Hills primary—to the pop-up?

HANNA VALENZUELA: I think initially there was. I know of somebody who lives in Gregory Hills, and initially there was a catchment. There was a line that was drawn down Gregory Hills Drive so that there was a pocket of people who live on one side, which essentially is across the road from the school, which became a part of the Gledswood Hills catchment area. They would have to stay even though they wanted to move across, but I'm pretty sure the principal at Gregory Hills has rectified that.

KATE LANEY: Yes, her and Lisa changed—they made an agreement, but then they actually got it formally changed with the Department of Education so now the kids across the road can. But that kind of happened all too late, I think, because—

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes, because I wasn't even aware of that until probably the end of last year, late last year, that that had happened.

KATE LANEY: Yes, there's a family that I'm thinking of that live just on the other side of the road there with three children. I think if she'd known that, that might have changed her decision. But it was quite late in the game that that happened.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes. I am still considering moving across, but I think the idea that everything's happened so late in the year—and even Kate herself only made the—

KATE LANEY: Decided last week.

HANNA VALENZUELA: —decision last week to make the change—that's what's holding a lot of people off it. But it's what Kate's saying—that a lot of people may still go across. I myself am still considering: Is it better if we just move across, because we can just walk to school then?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And that's why you came here, right? That's why you bought where you bought.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Exactly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You expected that there would be a school that you could walk to and access, and it would be part of the community, right?

HANNA VALENZUELA: Exactly, yes.

KATE LANEY: Yes, my eldest was one when we bought.

HANNA VALENZUELA: I wasn't even married. I wasn't married, didn't have kids, anything like that. We were very naive when we bought, and we listened to what the developer had said. We assumed that with the amount of houses that were going in—and not just in our area, but in Oran Park, Willowdale, Denham Court, Leppington—

KATE LANEY: Everywhere.

HANNA VALENZUELA: —everywhere—that the infrastructure would just automatically go in. When they said to us, "It'll be a couple of years," me and my now husband said, "Okay, so we can slowly start. We can get married. We can wait a couple of years before we have kids." All of that kind of ticked along, and then my son's all of a sudden starting school and there's still no school. He's going into year 2 now and it's only just opened. Yes, three kids later, we've finally got one.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: With regard to the actual boundaries for the school, was there any consultation with local parents? I know there's a really active parents group in Gregory Hills, so I'm interested to know what consultation there was about those actual boundaries.

HANNA VALENZUELA: In regard to the boundaries, I think that was something that was talked about specifically with Lisa Whitfield, the principal, and School Infrastructure. We were brought in for a meeting.

KATE LANEY: Yes, we did.

HANNA VALENZUELA: But when we questioned it they said, "That's already been sorted. The boundary is this."

KATE LANEY: Yes.

HANNA VALENZUELA: That was just it; they just had to draw a hard line somewhere. That is what they said.

KATE LANEY: Did you go and speak to School Infrastructure with some of the recommendations and things like that?

HANNA VALENZUELA: With Juliana?

KATE LANEY: Yes.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: Yes, we actually were brought in with School Infrastructure when they were talking about the initial plans and that sort of thing, and one of the issues that we brought up was the kids crossing safely across Gregory Hills Drive to the other side of the road.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: I said, "Why can't you make an overpass there?", because the lights are further down and you have to go past the shopping centre car park. They were like, "Oh, it's a bit difficult." I think that's why they ended up changing the boundary to mark it down the main road so that they didn't have to do that. But then that's when the complaints started coming in from parents on the other side to both principals, and then that's when they were like, "We can't do this to them. We need to allow that that's going to be an option." So they eventually changed it to open the boundary up for that reason. So they did work through that, but now they've got the issue that they'll still have to come up with an idea to get it safely across there because we know that they don't want to make it 40 along that road too.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But it goes then to the poor planning, right? You know that that's the school site. These are new built areas.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand that it's not like we're working within an existing suburb here. You can say, "Well, I'm going to put the traffic lights here so that I can allow safe crossing", rather than retrofitting.

KATE LANEY: Yes, that's it.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The thing that I would be really interested in, especially from you, Kate, is obviously you've seen the growth issues around Oran Park and then Gledswood Hills and then Gregory Hills. These are schools that we feel quite well versed in in this Committee because we've talked about the challenges and how some of those challenges have been repeated over time. For this inquiry, I would be interested to hear about the age and the experience of the teachers that you've experienced across those different schools. Have you seen that there has been a high number of newly graduated teachers or has there been a bit of a mix across the board?

KATE LANEY: At Oran Park my son had an older, more experienced teacher and she was amazing. I was like, "Oh my goodness." But there were 14 kindergarten classes that year, so there was a mixture of older, more experienced teachers but there were definitely still a lot of young—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, what year was that? 2014?

KATE LANEY: It was 2019 that he started kindergarten there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's 280 kids.

KATE LANEY: He is in year 4 this year. Is that right?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. My daughter is the same age. It was 2019.

KATE LANEY: I started to doubt myself then, sorry. So he had an older teacher, but they had a new grad come into the classroom for definitely a term. I can't remember exactly if it was longer than that or not. There were a lot of other younger teachers. One of the teachers that was one of the younger ones there is actually at Gregory Hills this year. She was at Gledswood Hills as well. So she has been at all three now, so I recognised her. What I will say, actually, is that I don't know if I remember any male teachers at the Gregory Hills school yesterday. I think they were all female. But, yes, there were some younger ones and some ones that seemed a little bit older than that. But I would say that, on the whole, there are definitely a lot of younger ones. There is a smattering of that but at Gledswood there are so many teachers—I don't even know half of them. My kids were in two different stage groups, so I was doing double with the older kids and then the younger kids. There was definitely a mixture, but I would say more younger overall.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Can I just add to that? During COVID the teachers obviously shared amongst themselves a lot of the online work that was given and were creating resources, I suppose, to lighten the load. So the faces that we did see in my son's kindergarten class were all very young. I think there were maybe two out of the 12 classes where the actual teachers looked like they were maybe a touch older than me—not very much older than me, but a touch older. Most of them looked very young, just from what I could tell.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you very much to our witnesses for appearing this afternoon. I just want to touch on something that you were saying during the opening statements. I thought it was really compelling the comparison of the impacts of absenteeism with the impacts of attending school but not really being effectively taught and the parity between those two things. But one of the things that we don't hear about as much is not just the impact of teacher shortages on learning outcomes in terms of subject matter but also the disruption that has on children, particularly those with anxiety, with autism and with other types of things where those constant changes of teachers and not knowing who's going to be teaching you in which room is a compounding impact on disadvantage. Are you able to share with us any stories or personal experiences of how it feels to be a child in a school with such a disrupted schedule?

KATE LANEY: I'd say you're probably better.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes. Like I said, my son is—he's not super anxious but he does get very funny when it comes to adults who he's unfamiliar with and he has to perform for. So if he has to answer a question and he doesn't know you, he's going to shut down. Generally when he does that, the rest of his day he's constantly thinking about that in particular. So it takes a while and it takes somebody who knows him to pull him back out of his own thoughts and thinking, "I've made a mistake and now I look silly." So being in a classroom where perhaps a teacher—and I haven't heard anything from him about this, but if I was thinking about him and situations he's been in previously where he gets put on the spot and he's unable to answer it, he gets very upset about it. And that is my main issue with him and not having somebody that is consistent.

I remember—and I'm talking about myself here—when I was in primary school, whenever there was a casual, it was a consistent casual. It was somebody who I had seen before, multiple times, who had taken the class multiple times. It was almost as if the school had hired her specifically to do casual work. And I know that that's probably very difficult in a school that's as large as Gledswood Hills, but to see somebody who has a familiar face would make so much difference to my son. And even if it was only once or twice, at least he knows who he's getting, what's to come and what the expectations are for that classroom. I hope that has answered your question.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, that's really good. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Any other questions? Because unfortunately we have run over time and we've got our last witness for the day.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, that was fantastic. Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Yes, it was fantastic. Thank you.

KATE LANEY: No problem.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: All the best for the school year.

KATE LANEY: Thanks very much. Thanks for having us.

The CHAIR: Hopefully some permanent buildings will pop up, too.

KATE LANEY: Fingers crossed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You make a very good point about term 1 next year, though.

KATE LANEY: Yes, that's not going to work. And I don't think you need to be a teacher or an educator to realise that that's going to be really difficult for all of the schools, Gledswood especially. The uncertainty of—they are like, "Oh, are you coming in?"

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, I have one final question. At Gledswood Hills, are there any new demountables this year?

KATE LANEY: I don't know.

HANNA VALENZUELA: I haven't heard anything. I'm not sure.

KATE LANEY: There were last year. I think they added six more.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: I think there are 22 altogether now.

HANNA VALENZUELA: I'm not sure what the numbers are or anything.

KATE LANEY: You might find that out once your daughter goes to kindy—

HANNA VALENZUELA: Yes.

KATE LANEY: —starting next week.

HANNA VALENZUELA: Actually, I did help put together the resource boxes. I've probably got the numbers. I did tally the numbers. If you wanted to know that for each class, how many classes I have across the years—did you want to know that?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That would be awesome.

HANNA VALENZUELA: If you can give me one second and I will pull that out, because I like to keep notes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You can take it on notice if you want.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Take it on notice and then send it to us.

KATE LANEY: Okay. No worries.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you so much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr CRAIG PETERSEN, President, NSW Secondary Principals' Council, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: If you could state your position. It might also be helpful to outline the schools of which you are the principal.

CRAIG PETERSEN: Certainly. I am the president of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council. We're the professional association representing approximately 500 principals of public schools in New South Wales with secondary enrolments. I'm not currently a principal within a school. I was previously the principal of Forbes High School from 2006 until 2010 and, more recently, the principal of Denison College of Secondary Education, which is a multi-campus college in Bathurst—Bathurst high and Kelso high being the two campuses. I was the college principal there from 2011 until June of last year.

The CHAIR: Have you got sabbatical now?

CRAIG PETERSEN: No. I'm full-time in the role of president. I have been full-time in the role of president of SPC since June 2019.

The CHAIR: Craig, it's available to you to make a short opening statement, if you so wish.

CRAIG PETERSEN: Certainly. Mr Chair and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I'd like to start by saying that I don't have access to systems-level data, so I won't be able to provide specific statistics and data to questions. What I can provide is a deep understanding and description of the experiences of principals from across the field—across all of New South Wales—in relation to the current teacher shortage and its impact on student outcomes. I acknowledge recent efforts by the department to address teacher shortages in New South Wales. Our colleagues in HR are dedicated and are doing the best they can in the current circumstances, but SPC has been warning of increasing teacher shortages for well over a decade. We initially identified difficulties in staffing our rural and remote schools, but we also flagged at the time that we saw evidence of the issue beginning to impact in regional centres, as well as some harder-to-staff areas in metropolitan Sydney. We foreshadowed that this was likely to get worse without deliberate action. Federal funding for tertiary education has contributed to the situation, as initial teacher education providers have moved towards models of course delivery that favoured cheaper courses, regardless of workforce demand, hence the shortage of TAS and science teachers.

It's also difficult for systems to track or predict workforce demand. There's a problem with multiple regulatory authorities and the inability to see whether a teacher who appears to be on a New South Wales DoE list, for example, is actually really available for appointment or not. They could be working with the non-government sector, interstate or enjoying a break overseas. Why does all this matter? Regardless of how technically low the percentage of unfilled vacancies is across the system, a single vacancy in a secondary school means that up to six classes may not be covered by an appropriately qualified teacher. That's potentially 180 students whose learning is likely to be impacted every day. It's not enough to just have any teacher in front of a class; students need to have their teacher in front of them every day, and their teacher needs to be a teacher of that subject. Principals and teachers are exhausted and are feeling undervalued. As a couple of teachers told me at the beginning of last year, "We still love teaching but now we hate our job." I fear that we will not solve this issue until we address salary and workload issues and provide the profession with the respect it deserves.

The CHAIR: We will start with questions from the Labor Opposition.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I had a situation with my son just recently. It was very late in the piece when he got his timetable for year 11. I wonder whether you could give us an insight into the timetabling difficulties that are created if you're unsure about whether you can afford the staff at a school? Could you perhaps talk us through what's involved and how that might contribute to the problem?

CRAIG PETERSEN: Certainly. The timetabling operation in any school—obviously, I can talk with expertise around secondary schools, having been a timetabler since about 1993 in various schools at various levels. Our timetabling process starts in August of the preceding year. That's when we get our students to make their subject selections. Those subject selections traditionally, in most schools, have been driven by student interest but also, obviously, there's an element of what are the physical resources we've got in terms of specialist rooms and in terms of specialist staff. We submit our anticipated enrolment numbers in mid-August every year. Most principals at that stage will have applied a formula. They'll know, "If I've got X number of students, that will probably translate to this many staff." When I used to do that calculation, I could get it right to within 0.1 of a full-time equivalent entitlement. We then get our anticipated staffing entitlement back, and that varies. It can be later term three, very early term four—usually term three. That tells us the numbers. If we've got enrolments going up then, obviously, our staffing entitlement goes up. We then will declare a vacancy. If someone has got a transfer,

a promotion, a retirement, taking extended leave, that's when we go through our declaration of vacancies and our recruitment processes.

It is often not uncommon for principals not to know prior to the end of the year who they will have in front of students the following year. Some of the reasons for that are because of the way the staffing operation evolves. We have a lot of principals who will hold on to a vacancy until term four to declare that vacancy to advertise. That position that they then fill usually creates a vacancy somewhere else. A lot of promotions positions won't be advertised until term four. The department's own corporate recruitment often doesn't occur until term four. In fact, we had some corporate positions not being advertised until the last week of term last year. That, obviously, again, creates a backlog of positions that need filling. For obvious reasons, corporate staffing shuts down over the Christmas-New Year period and doesn't reopen until late January. We will submit our actual entitlement numbers, our actual enrolments, on Wednesday next week, 8 February, for our Eastern Division schools and Wednesday 15 February for our Western Division schools. That will then generate the actual entitlement for the school, and that will then mean we can finalise our timetables. It's an ongoing process. Most secondary schools will not release a timetable until the last weeks or the last days of the preceding year, and that timetable is usually a temporary timetable which then is replaced with a permanent timetable roughly around week six or week seven of term one.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In that circumstance, how is it that you're able to say with any certainty that you're going to have a teacher for a specific subject? Say, it's a year 11 or year 12 course that's being run. You've got the students but you don't know you're going to need the teacher. Then, because of teacher shortages, you may not actually be able to recruit someone, so that class then starts the year with no teacher. Is that a fair assessment of how it unfolds?

CRAIG PETERSEN: Usually, we've got a fairly good idea of who we're going to have, particularly if we're in a school with a stable staffing. Up until recently, most of our schools have had relatively stable staffing. That obviously varies. If you're in rural and remote parts of the State, you might have a significant churn of teachers. In other schools in other locations, that can be quite stable. So we've got a relatively high degree of certainty. When we're allocating our staff, we would normally privilege our senior students because of the importance of HSC, obviously. Then it depends on how we go about it. It might be particular subjects which we need to timetable first. It might be our year 7 cohort because we want them to have a good start to school. But we can't predict.

I had multiple occasions at the end of last term and during the Christmas holidays where principals have told me that teachers have told them without any notice that they're taking this year off or they're not coming back or they've got a job somewhere else. We can't predict those; we can only cater for the vacancies that we know: teachers who have got a promotion, a transfer or they're retiring, or they've informed us in advance that they're taking a year off for whatever reason. We can plan around those and we can allocate our staff the best we can. But there's always the potential for something unforeseen to happen and we can't put the teacher we thought we were going to put in front of that class in front of that class next year.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has the shortage made that process even more unpredictable?

CRAIG PETERSEN: Absolutely, it has. Absolutely, because of the numbers and then because we are often putting temporary teachers into a position. If I've got six unfilled vacancies, for example, right now, or if I knew I was anticipating six unfilled vacancies at the end of last year, I probably would have engaged local casuals to cover those positions. Those local casuals may or may not have qualifications in the area that I'm putting them in front of. If I get a permanent teacher appointed during the Christmas holidays who has the appropriate codes, I'll obviously put that teacher on that class.

There's a lot of swapping and shuffling that will go on. The more teachers that I am trying to fill the positions for, the more likelihood that there will be that degree of churn and uncertainty in that initial timetable. The other thing that comes into play as well is where we've got an unforeseen either increase or decrease in our enrolments as we are going through this process over this week and next. We're usually pretty close to the mark in terms of who we are expecting and what we get, but if there is an unforeseen change then that obviously adds to the complexity as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much for your testimony and for your time today. We heard from Angelo Gavrielatos this morning. He talked about how the teacher shortages are the worst he has seen in living memory, and that they have deepened, impacting students, particularly over the last couple of years. Is that your experience of teacher shortages, given your long history in education in New South Wales?

CRAIG PETERSEN: Absolutely, it is. I've never seen the difficulty that we've got recruiting teachers and school leadership teams that we have at the moment. As a little bit of background, in 2013 I was seconded out of Denison College. I led the development of the *Rural and Remote Education: A Blueprint for Action*. Prior

to that, I've been part of what's called the Futures Alliance, which is a partnership between the Primary Principals' Association, the Secondary Principals' Council and the Department of Education at the time, working on the rural education action plan. In 2012 we were identifying critical staffing shortages in some of our more remote and rural schools. As I said in the opening statement, we did see evidence of that starting to expand into regional and some areas of Sydney, particularly in south-west Sydney, at the time. The situation has continued to get worse.

To give you a specific example and a personal example, as a college principal at Denison College, I was, and I still am, employed as a P5 principal—that's the highest paid principal in most of our schools. We've also got an executive principal classification in our Connected Communities schools. There are not many P5 positions in the State. My position at Denison College has been advertised twice already because they haven't been able to find an experienced principal prepared to move to a regional centre like Bathurst to be paid a higher salary. That's one example.

During the time that I was principal at Denison College, we would often find for our KLA head teachers—our English head teachers, science, maths head teachers, for example—if we advertised with a vacancy there, we might get two or three applicants only in Bathurst. It's not an isolated, remote, undesirable location, by any means. For classroom teachers, traditionally, we would have no difficulty filling those positions. I know that this year Bathurst High Campus of Denison College is on the department's priority recruitment program because they simply can't fill their vacancies.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have an idea of how many vacancies they have?

CRAIG PETERSEN: No, I don't. I couldn't tell you, at this stage. What I can tell you, though, was that at the beginning of term two last year there were eight unfilled vacancies at that time. Part of that was exacerbated by a couple of teachers who were anti-vaxxers, and who left for that reason. Those positions were being filled by the principal using local casuals. But what doesn't appear in the department's statistics around that is that, in addition to the eight unfilled vacancies, there were an additional 12 vacancies created by teachers who were either on maternity leave, leave without pay, workers compensation, or were working in seconded roles within the department. While the apparent unfilled vacancies at that school at that time was only eight, the actual unfilled vacancies were 20.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Wow.

CRAIG PETERSEN: This is where sometimes it's the questions around what are you classifying as an unfilled vacancy, because there can be a real difference between statistics and figures on a page and people in front of classes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Again, this morning Mr Gavrielatos talked about how resignations are outstripping retirements and how early career teachers are leaving in record amounts. Is that your experience, as well, as a principal, and in the conversations you have with other principals?

CRAIG PETERSEN: Absolutely, it is. We've been concerned for a short period of time about the early resignations and separations, particularly amongst principal colleagues. Principals take on education for life as a chosen career and, traditionally, most principals would not retire until they reached—or, in some cases, well and truly passed—the nominal retirement age. What we are seeing now are principals opting to take long service leave, often on half pay, pending retirement, and actually leaving the profession up to two years earlier than they otherwise would have. We are seeing principals who previously have worked beyond retirement age saying, "I can't do this anymore. I don't have to do this anymore; I'm financially independent," and leaving the profession. We are seeing the same across the entire teaching service.

We are suffering in two ways. One is through people choosing to go to entirely different careers. We're also losing our staff to non-government schools who have got the ability to offer significant enhancements to their salary. In some of the information I got back from colleagues in the survey that I conducted in December last year, some colleagues were talking about private schools—non-government schools—offering \$10,000, \$20,000, up to \$50,000 additional for classroom teacher positions. We simply cannot match that in any way at all—we've got no capacity to.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We heard from the IEU today about the teacher shortages that they're experiencing as well, so it's really a flow-on effect. Before I hand to my colleagues, because I feel like I'm hogging the time this afternoon: In your experience as a principal and in the conversations that you have with other principals to represent them, how do you feel the intensification of the work has happened under Local Schools, Local Decisions? We've talked a lot in this Committee about how a lot of those supports that have been provided by the department have been cut, whether it's around literacy or curriculum support officers or requiring principals to be building site managers as well as educational leaders. Do you feel that that's contributing to teacher shortages—or, certainly, in the difficulties you talked about in recruiting school leadership positions?

CRAIG PETERSEN: It's certainly impacting on school leadership recruitment. The differential between a top of the scale classroom teacher and a head teacher is not that great. In fact, if you are a highly accomplished or lead teacher and you do HSC marking, you'll probably be earning more than a head teacher. The differential between a head teacher and a deputy principal is not that great. A lot of people who previously would have been interested in a leadership role have been turned off as our head teachers, in particular, are becoming increasingly administrators or disciplinarians. This is a great shame, because a lot of the discussion and a lot of the research in recent times is talking about the importance of having those master teachers. In fact, our head teachers used to be called subject masters. Their role was to mentor, to build the capacity of their assistant teachers and to help them develop their craft. We have turned them into administrators.

People, including deputy principals, now are looking at the principal's role and saying, "There's no way that I would do that job. You can't pay me enough, because I see the hours." Every two years we conduct a SPC principal wellbeing survey—it actually predates the work that Professor Phil Riley and the Australian Catholic University have done. Our figures show that New South Wales secondary principals are working anywhere up to 65-70 hours a week, and the workload has increased significantly.

The work that the department has done in recent times around reducing the administrative burden and trying to streamline some of our processes is welcomed, but it tends to be tinkering around the edges. It might be reducing the number of keystrokes to get to a particular report on Scout, or pre-populating the annual school report, and that's fine, but it's not really looking at the fundamental issue, which is the burgeoning workload. Reducing by a couple of minutes a job that I only have to do once a year does not reduce my daily or weekly work. That is turning people off the position. It is increasing the reporting of burnout and fatigue that we're seeing.

Again, we capture that every two years in those survey reports. What we've also seen in the demographic survey that we did in November last year—we had about 298 responses from either current principals or principals who had retired within the last two years—one of the questions we asked was, "If you've recently retired or you're planning on retiring within the next two years, what's the key reason?" By far the biggest reason was unmanageable workload. Planned retirement was a long-distant fourth or fifth.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We heard evidence in past inquiries around unspent budgets in schools. I wonder whether you might be able to give us an insight into what drives that circumstance where there'll be a budget allocation to a school but they won't be able to spend the money that's allocated.

CRAIG PETERSEN: There are many reasons. The two most common around that would be that I've got budget dollars. It's probably sitting in what we would call our equity loadings—sometimes called the Gonski money. The main reason that a principal won't spend that is that they can't find the staff. The second reason that principals won't spend significant sums of money is that they've got a capital project—renovations, a new room if they've got to build the conversion—and they're waiting for School Infrastructure to give them the approval to go ahead. Sometimes those approvals can take several years in some cases. There are other reasons. It can be poor planning. It can be a lack of available alternate resources. We know there's a new curriculum coming out, so we're reluctant to buy new textbooks this year. Let's wait for the new syllabus to come out. It can be those sorts of things, but far and above everything else is the lack of teaching staff and waiting for those approvals to make infrastructure improvements.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask also about the equity funding? One of the propositions that has been put to us is that it's a driver of the insecure employment in the system. People are engaged using the equity loading under the RAM funding model but people are engaged on a temporary basis because principals can't commit to permanent employment funded through that funding source.

CRAIG PETERSEN: That's certainly an element as well. Principals can use that fund to create what we call ACIP, above centrally identified positions. A lot of principals aren't particularly aware of that and, if they are, they're afraid to commit to that because if their funding decreases for whatever reason then they've guaranteed that permanent position will be funded out of school funds. They're reluctant to take that on. I've spoken about this to the department and the Minister explicitly that we actually need to encourage principals where they've got that flexible funding to use it to create those ACIP positions for a couple of reasons. One is because if I'm only creating temporary positions, I'm probably drawing on my local casuals, and then when I've got those 20 unfilled vacancies that I'm trying to fill I've got all my casuals sitting in those temporary positions. So I've got no casuals, and now I'm trying to do things like increase my class sizes so I can reduce the number of teachers I need. I might be cutting elective choices. I might be taking away some of the allowances that I've given to my staff to enable them to do particular projects. Let's make it really clear and easy for principals to understand how they can create those positions and encourage them to do so.

The other thing that we proposed to the department as well—it's actually in our staffing position paper, which I have multiple copies of here and I'm happy to make those available for you—is that where a school has a

well-established and stable equity loading, where we've now got several years of history about how that funding has been used, why not give the principal the right to say, "You know what, I'd like to have 50 per cent, or up to 50 per cent." It could be any figure but here's a figure where we're going to allow you, Mr or Mrs Principal, to convert that funding to permanent positions, because we know that you're always going to have an element of that funding. Keep some of it for flexible funding. It might be for non-teaching staff. It might be for resources. It might be for site licences for programs that we're using to support our literacy and numeracy programs, for example. But this element, I know that I'm always going to spend on staffing. Give it to me as permanent staffing, because then the department has an onus to provide that staffing for me as opposed to me having to find that from my local pool of casual teachers.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It has also been suggested that one of the drivers of the rise in insecure employment is principals using that as a device to effectively avoid having appointments via the central list. Would you offer some comments about whether that's a genuine phenomenon?

CRAIG PETERSEN: I'd reject that out of hand. From my own experience from the schools I've worked at, colleagues and principals I've spoken to and worked with really closely, most principals that I know say, "Give me the central staffing. I'm fed up with convening merit panels." Some colleagues have reported having to convene up to 15 or 17 merit processes a year because central staff at HR cannot provide them. Every one of those panels requires a minimum of four people. You've got your convenor, your parent rep, your AECG rep if you've got an Aboriginal community, and your staff rep. Depending on the level of the position, there might be additional people on top of that as well. That's a significant impost on the school and on the principal who is convening that. Most colleagues would say, "Give me the staffing. Let me choose those key positions, which I think really are critical, that I need to advertise for because it's such a specific role. My executive, absolutely, I want to choose." But if it's the case, it will be isolated.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The local selection process, it would be your evidence, actually contributes to principal workload.

CRAIG PETERSEN: Absolutely. The process itself can take up to six weeks, and at each stage in the process—the convening of the panel, the writing of the ad, the shortlisting, the interviewing, the referee checks—you can be looking easily at several days for each. Shortlisting takes a day. Interviewing takes a day. The process is onerous. It can be really positive, particularly if you get a good field of high-quality applicants. It can also be an absolute frustration, because if you're only getting one or two or no applicants and then you're having to reconvene that panel multiple times, it just ties up time that you cannot get back.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That's for permanent appointments, but for temporary appointments, there's no onerous process, is there?

CRAIG PETERSEN: No, temporary appointments are much easier but, again, the principals will use that because they're concerned about creating permanent positions because of the funding implications. It may also be because they have a short-term project that they know is only going to be a short-term project, so I don't want a permanent position there because at the end of that project, that person won't have a job. I can make that clear to the temporary teacher. The process of appointing a temporary teacher is much easier, but in terms of your permanent staffing, principals would much prefer for HR to be meeting that obligation to provide that statewide system of employment.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you, Mr Petersen, for your attendance. I just wanted to ask you first about what I would call an obsession of the Government with short-term fixes for things. The idea of a one-year masters program in order to try to increase the number of new teachers coming into schools, what's your view on that idea?

CRAIG PETERSEN: I canvassed colleagues across the SPC executive about this in term 4 and I got a mixed response. Some people said, "One year dip ed worked fine in the past. We've got such a shortage we need to get people in", or, "Sometimes the masters program doesn't do much other than give some beginning teachers a greater sense of their own importance." My view, and the view that I've articulated on behalf of the SPC, is that I find it ironic that at a national level we're saying we need to increase the status of the profession but we're willing to undermine the academic rigour of the qualifications we require.

The complexity of teaching now compared to five, six, 10 or 20 years ago is so significant. It is not enough to be a subject matter expert in maths or science or English for that matter. You have to know how to convert that knowledge into a teaching program. You need to know how to convert that into a program that's appropriate for year 7 students, for your HSC students, for the bottom year 9 class that are really struggling to engage, for our large numbers of non-English speaking background students, our Aboriginal students, and our kids with

disabilities. If you don't understand pedagogy, if you don't have a deep understanding of childhood psychology and the way that cognitive development occurs, you're going to be really struggling.

I'm concerned that the moves to reduce the two-year degree to one year—I understand the drivers. I understand the barriers that that creates for mid-career professionals, for example, and even our initial teacher education students in terms of loss of salary. I believe we need to address those issues through other means rather than simply slashing in half the length of the degree. I think we run the risk of creating a short-term fix which has long-term implications for the quality of education we are providing in schools, but also the management of staff for our leadership teams.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. Do we have data, or do you know if the department has data, that sets out the average class size in a secondary school? I'm particularly interested in your comments and your opening statement around the way that teacher shortages can lead to not just the combination of classes, but growing class sizes. Is there a correlation between this teacher shortage crisis and the numbers of students in each class, and do you have any sort of data that would back that up?

CRAIG PETERSEN: I wish I did have data. Unfortunately, I don't, and I doubt that the department would either. Even prior to the current situation, the department would not have held data around the class sizes in any particular school. Is the current shortage driving an increase in class sizes? Absolutely, I believe it is. It drives it from a couple of perspectives. One is that if I can't fill the positions that I've got, I've still got to run a timetable for the beginning of the year with the teachers that I have. The maximum class size, in general, in the junior school, is 30, and for the senior school it's 24. There are some variations around some of our practical subjects, and in the senior school there are some instances, for example, in hospitality or in some of our vocational education courses, where the workspace itself may mean that even though technically the class size is 24, I can only physically get 18 into the space and meet the requirements of that course.

What principals are doing at the moment—and this has been reported to me over the last 12 to 18 months now, is that because I've got those unfilled vacancies, I'm really having to strip back two things. One is, as I mentioned before, the allowances that I am providing to teachers to run programs. For example, the timetable—timetabling has been mentioned a number of times today. You normally don't expect someone to run a timetable and do their full teaching or administrative workload as well. You'd give them a period allowance. People are stripping back those allowances that would previously have supported the programs like your timetable, like your school musical, like your sports coordinator—and, in some cases, like your literacy or numeracy small-group withdrawals, or your HSC tutorial programs. Because to get people to do that, I need to give them time, and then I need to backfill the teaching that they would have normally done on their regular load.

If I've got no-one to backfill that load, I can't release that teacher for that program. That's one impact. The other one is that technically I might have enough students to only run four classes in year 8 but because of the staffing pressure, you know what, I can maximise the class sizes and I can get by with only running three. Technically, I'm not breaking anything; I'm not asking a teacher to work above load. But what I am doing is making their job as a classroom teacher and a classroom manager much more difficult because they've now got less time to spend with each of the students in their class.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Then it's cyclical, because then you get increasing burnout, you get people leaving the profession, and then you've got even fewer teachers for the next year. I guess it's that—it's a bit of a spiral, this crisis.

CRAIG PETERSEN: It absolutely is. The other place where it impacts as well is on subject choice. I made a reference to this earlier on, as well. We know that we have some schools—particularly in regional areas, but not only in regional areas—where they have not run metalwork for nine years because they just don't have a metalwork teacher. That's an example. I was reading that through some material that I prepared earlier on. What happens then is, instead of creating a curriculum pattern that meets the need of students, we are now focusing more importantly on what are the teachers that we've got, and we'll run that program. If you've got a student, a son or a daughter—if you've got a child who is really passionate about doing a particular subject and they can't do it at their local school, then a parent will often make a choice about where to send that child where they can access that education.

You get a rather ironic—and again it's a cyclic effect, where we privilege our HSC courses. If I've got an industrial arts teacher, I'll put them on the HSC class. But if their full load is taken up teaching two or three HSC courses and year 11 courses, I can't give them a junior class. Instead, I'm covering that junior class with a really keen, enthusiastic, professional teacher, but they're not a trained expert in that area. The likelihood that those children are going to choose that subject for the HSC diminishes as well. It creates this never-ending spiral where not only are we not necessarily meeting the potential for all our students in terms of their academic achievement; we are, in some cases, losing our students to other schools because they can offer the courses that we can't.

The CHAIR: Unfortunately, we're running out of time. One last question from Aileen MacDonald.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Thanks, Mr Petersen. I have to apologise because it's been 10 years since my youngest finished school, and from a regional area. I just wondered, because of your involvement with the secondary principals and being in a regional area—just humour me. As an idea, rather than competing with other schools, in Armidale the three non-government schools collaborated. When they put out the subject choices for year 11 and 12, knowing that each school couldn't offer those subjects, the schools collaborated. Obviously, because of the distance PLC students ended up going to TAS and a few others.

I don't know if you could do this in Sydney but I know schools are competitive. Yes, they still remain competitive in sports, music eisteddfods, debates, and things like that. But there was that friendly rivalry, because they had that relationship because they were in the classroom. Is there a way that that could be offered? If you know you have a teacher that specialises in a subject at that school—and someone else—and there are enough students within that cluster—I don't know; I'm just putting an idea out there. Because you're in the principals secondary, maybe you can have a discussion and say, "Is this something that we can do?"

CRAIG PETERSEN: Absolutely, it is. It is happening and it has been happening for quite some time.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Okay.

CRAIG PETERSEN: I know we're short of time, but I'll give you a couple of quick examples. Going back probably 13 or 14 years in Orange, there was the e2 collaboration between Orange High School, Canobolas Rural Technology High, Blayney High and Molong Central School. It was around stage six and it was around ensuring that students at both of the large schools in Orange had equitable access to curriculum, but also bringing in those smaller centres of Blayney and Molong. In Bathurst, at Denison College, we share our stage six. In fact, we have always shared our stage six curriculum. Across both campuses, we run shared courses. We offer in excess of 90 subjects for the HSC. They don't all necessarily get up—it depends on student choice and staffing. We've expanded that into stage five, so years 9 and 10 can now access that shared curriculum, as of last year, I believe. They are a couple of examples straight up. There are other places—it often happens in regional areas.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: Yes, that's what I'm saying.

CRAIG PETERSEN: I'm also aware of some metropolitan areas where it happens as well. Yes, we are proud of our own school. There is a degree of healthy competition. But, above all, one of the things that I promote with colleagues, and we believe strongly in, is we want to have the strongest possible system of public education in New South Wales. That means 2,200 schools, 500 secondary schools, collaborating and building each other up and maximising those things. At the moment in the Bathurst network, the two campuses of the college, but also places like Oberon High School and Blayney High School, are having a look, particularly around the TAS area, around how we can work as a consortium to make sure that students aren't missing out. Because even in the larger campuses in Bathurst—Kelso and Bathurst High—we are struggling to get some of those specialist teachers in the TAS areas.

The CHAIR: Our time has expired, unfortunately. Thank you, Mr Petersen, for your time and contribution, which has been very valuable to the Committee. The hearing is closed.

(The witness withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 14:20.