



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Hon. MC Bailey MP—Chair
Mr JP Lister MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr JP Kelly MP
Mr BA Mickelberg MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP

Staff present:

Ms M Telford—Committee Secretary
Dr K Kowol—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) (HELPING FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL COSTS) AMENDMENT BILL 2023

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 18 March 2024

Brisbane

MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2024

The committee met at 10.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. My name is Mark Bailey. I am the member for Miller and the chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the Turrbal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today, and offer my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share.

I welcome everyone and thank you for supporting the committee's work. With me here today are Mr James Lister, member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Mr Nick Dametto, member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Joe Kelly, member for Greenslopes, who will be here in a moment; Mr Brent Mickelberg, member for Buderim; and Mr Barry O'Rourke, member for Rockhampton.

Dr Amy MacMahon, member for South Brisbane, introduced this bill into the Legislative Assembly on 11 October 2023. Detailed consideration of the bill has been transferred from the former Education, Employment and Training Committee following the Legislative Assembly's dissolution of the former committee and the establishment of the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee in February of this year.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I do remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode, for obvious reasons.

MURPHY, Mr Patrick, President, Queensland Association of State School Principals (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mr Murphy: Good morning. Thank you for the chance to speak and provide what we see is an insight into government primary schools in Queensland in particular. I am also the chair of the Australian Government Primary Principals Association, which has over 7,000 members across Australia. In relation to QASSP, the Queensland Association of State School Principals, I am the president of that association. We have 1,300 members across the state, of principals, and 82 per cent of government schools are members of QASSP. A significant number of deputy principals are also members of our association.

We represent 337,500 state school students across Queensland. We have a strong interest in our schools getting 100 per cent of SRS. I have worked for 34 years in our education system and never once in that 34 years has there been a time when our schools have ever been fully funded around the Schooling Resource Standard. The Schooling Resource Standard, as I am sure all committee members would know, was proposed by Gonski. It was the minimum requirements that a school should be funded at. That was through the first report; the Gonski committee identified that in 2012. We did see in early 2013 significantly more funding, and I will talk in a moment about how that made a difference to me as a principal and my school and a student in particular. One of the things that is important is that in Queensland we actually only fund—and have only ever funded—89.6 per cent of that Gonski funding. Since 2012 we have never achieved 100 per cent of what Gonski identified as the minimum standard.

Recently the AGPPA, which is our national body, asked Pasi Sahlberg, who is an international expert on research, to do some research. One of the things he identified is that by us not funding 100 per cent of SRS it actually costs the country \$18.5 billion a year in GDP. That is in his research, which is known as *A better and fairer start for all*. Deloitte have done some modelling for him in terms of the report and projected that between 2016 and 2076 if we do not fund in this country there will be a hit to the economy of \$39 billion per year. That is a huge cost in terms of primary investment that our students will not achieve. We as a country and as a state will never realise our potential due to the potential underfunding in that space.

One of the things I want to talk to the committee about is the difference it makes on the ground to a student. In 2013 there was the Gonski funding and Queensland was the only state or territory to fund directly to schools. Now other states and territories do fund that. As a principal at Ashgrove State School with a higher ICSEA of close to 1,180, I had a student ironically called Bailey. I will not use his surname. Bailey came to our school in year 3. Bailey did not have a letter or sounds. He had an extraordinary teacher by the name of Cathy Mewburn. Cathy said to me, 'Pat, I will get Bailey reading, but I do need support.' Just by coincidence, that same year the first level of Gonski funding hit our school.

We were a school where predominantly both parents were professional parents. We were a high ICSEA school and we were able to generate good money from other sources. In this case, that funding made a huge difference. In my time as a principal I had only ever seen one increase in our grant. The money that came from Gonski actually more than doubled the grant I had into the school. I was able to assist Cathy by putting additional teacher aide time into her class. We were able to put that before and after school. We were able to put some speech therapy time in working with Cathy, with Bailey and with parents into that. By the end of the year we had Bailey reading at a successful level, at a level 20. He still probably would not have passed NAPLAN, even though NAPLAN was at the beginning of the year. By year 5 Bailey passed NAPLAN. I am happy to report that Bailey now has got into year 30 for the first time; I ran into his mother recently.

I went to a different school after that. I went to Woodcrest State College as the principal in 2016. Woodcrest had a different ICSEA and a different profile. It had an ICSEA of around 960. The difference there was: while Bailey was the only one in year 3 at Ashgrove who was not able to read, who did not have sound and sights, unfortunately at Woodcrest we had three or four students in each of our classes who could not read, did not have sounds or sights, who came without that. Often migrant families are coming to Australia without those basic levels of literacy and numeracy. Because we did not get the second and the third round of the Gonski funding after that first one, some of those children unfortunately are leaving primary school without what Bailey was able to leave with. That is the level and the difference that funding will make to each of our kids throughout the state.

The 960 ICSEA at Woodcrest is actually not too bad. We have many of our schools at 800; there are huge levels of disadvantage and a massive number of students who have no literacy or numeracy. This will make a huge difference in those communities for those students and it will allow our teachers and educators at school to make a difference for the kids.

CHAIR: That was very comprehensive. We have about five or six minutes for questions.

Mr LISTER: I want to ask you to consider some context regarding school resourcing. Would you conceive that it is better for a school to stay open than perhaps to close and its resources be diverted to larger schools? For instance, I have about 20 small schools in my electorate with teaching principals and two of them have been closed in recent times.

Mr Murphy: I guess what we are discussing here is not about closing or keeping schools open. What we are talking about is funding schools. One of the things we know as primary school principals is that our schools are not just places of teaching and learning; they are actually hubs of the community. Those schools provide much more to a community than just teaching and learning for our kids. I do not want to answer around individual schools or communities. What I am saying is that primary schools play a critical role in all of those communities and I think all of us understand the value of those schools, the heritage and the importance to those areas.

We do have places where sometimes there is the enrolment of one student. You then have to look at the viability of the school. Sometimes we lose enrolments but know there are enrolments potentially coming down the track for the school. Sometimes we have seen schools that in previous years have closed and then all of a sudden there is a wave of students coming to those schools. You cannot just make one general assumption that we should close schools and move to bigger schools. It does not necessarily work that way.

Also, some students work really well in a small school, one-on-one or with two or three students. Other students need a bigger school where they are provided with an opportunity to be in a band or a sporting team and other things that a bigger school provides. Sometimes it is very individual around that. That is why sometimes, even though students live in an area that might have a catchment of a small school, they will move to a bigger school—so they can be part of a strings ensemble, for instance. Likewise, if they are in a bigger school's catchment area they might actually drive out to a smaller school because that provides the best support that parents can work out for that child.

Mr KELLY: Firstly, does your association have private school principals involved or is it just state schools?

Mr Murphy: No. Mr Kelly, in fact, I do know that your sister is a member of our association. We are only representing government school principals and deputy principals, and the vast majority of them are primary school principals.

Mr KELLY: I note that potential conflict of interest. I did not know my sister was a member of your association. You have surprised me. She is a very good principal.

Mr Murphy: She is an excellent principal in both a rural and now an urban centre.

Mr KELLY: Indeed. The Gonski report and policy is a policy that anticipates the federal government taking responsibility for the funding aspects around education and then the states continuing to play their role in terms of being distributors and, to a much lesser extent, contributors to the education funding; is that a fair statement?

Mr Murphy: I would not class it as that. One of the strange parts of Federation is the funding for state schools and public schools in the country, which sees states funded for 80 per cent of the SRS and 20 per cent from the Commonwealth as current. We see the reverse when it comes to Catholic and independent schools, where 20 per cent is meant to come from the state and 80 per cent from the Commonwealth. In our case, 20 per cent is only from the Commonwealth at the moment. I guess that is a bone of contention around whether the federal government would be willing to support states and lift their 20 per cent quota, because there is no research that actually says this is the best model. In fact, Australia is the only country in the world that has this funding split, where states or provinces actually fund some and the federal government funds others. As a principal and as a teacher, we do not care where the money comes from. Obviously as a taxpayer you do, but what we are asking for is that our kids are properly funded in government primary schools.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Murphy. Our time has expired. We thank you for presenting and also answering questions from the committee.

WISEMAN, Mr Scott, Chief Executive Officer, P&Cs Qld

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mr Wiseman: Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee. P&Cs Qld is the peak body supporting and advocating for and representing the 900,000 state school parents and the wider school communities throughout Queensland. We support the achievement of quality education outcomes for students through fostering parental and community engagement in a thriving and successful education system. Through our statewide network of 1,264 P&C associations and some of our 44,000 volunteers, we have the localised presence and voice to lead and enact change toward achieving our objective of giving every child every chance in education and in life.

P&Cs within Queensland are legislated to play a vital role in supporting and enriching the educational experience of the students. They provide a range of services and supports within the schools and the broader community. A key part of their support is the P&C run business units, such as tuckshops, uniform shops, out-of-school-hours care, stationery and book shops, as well as swim clubs. By utilising volunteers, P&C run business units are more cost effective and cost efficient to students and their families.

P&Cs, in consultation with local parents, set the objectives of these business units as to be either purely a service to the school or a service with a fundraising element to support the school. These business units also provide meaningful local employment, with 60 per cent of our P&Cs employing at least one staff member, with a total employment market of 6,500 staff employed in P&Cs throughout the state under a state-based award that considers the nuances of P&Cs working within a P&C environment.

In 2023 P&C members reported that: P&Cs delivered \$74 million in financial contributions to schools; P&C business units turned over \$335 million across the state; and there was a total of 44,000 registered volunteers across the state. We know there are a lot more than that, but we take that as our registered total. In 2023 the following percentage of P&Cs either purchased or made contributions towards: 81 per cent, school infrastructure; 76 per cent, event contributions such as graduations or formals; 69 per cent, books, learning and resources; 51 per cent, furniture and fittings; 45 per cent, technology in classrooms; 42 per cent, student representations in music and sports programs; 36 per cent, donation to the school budget; and 29 per cent, funding of education and school programs such as wellbeing programs. You will note that many of these items should be funded under the SRS.

In October and November 2023, P&Cs Qld in conjunction with QUT surveyed state parents on their views and opinions of state schools. We received over 670 replies, giving robust, reliable data. Families were asked to best describe their current financial household circumstances: 40 per cent answered they were just at break-even; a further eight per cent indicated they spent more than they earn; and 16.9 per cent preferred not to say. If you add those up, that is a sum of about 60 per cent of our 900,000 parents who are at just break-even or worse, and that is a big concern.

In the last 12 months, over 30 per cent of parents were worried about food or that food would run out before they were able to buy more, and a staggering 16 per cent of parents had run out of food and not had enough money to buy more. In terms of school expenses: 30 per cent of parents reported spending \$500 per child on an extracurricular activity; 13 per cent reported spending more than \$1,000 on extracurricular activities; 16 per cent were spending \$500 per child on individual student resources; and 20 per cent reported spending more than \$1,000 per student on laptops and technology devices. Our data indicates the average out-of-pocket expense for parents and caregivers to be over \$1,500 per student per year.

Parents through their P&Cs are already carrying their weight, assisting with the \$74 million being contributed, but there are many more costs now being added to this burden. These include items that are being more reflective of potentially school supplies that are being added into school book packs, such as ballpoint pens for grade 1 students, whiteboard markers and reams of paper. P&Cs Qld understands that the main objective of this bill is to reduce the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by families of children attending state schools by ensuring that Queensland state schools are fully funded. Fully funding means providing the Schooling Resource Standard, or SRS, as a minimum. SRS is not the total amount of funding the state government needs to invest into state school education.

We found that 81 per cent of parents said that their children's school needs more funding. They also ranked where they felt funding needs to be prioritised: rank 1 was additional teacher support; rank 2 was teacher-to-student ratios; rank 3 was classroom resources; rank 4 was improved learning environments; and rank 5 was teachers' pay. I note that these top five preferences are also directly applicable to the SRS funding.

The Northern Territory's recent funding announcement means that Queensland has the lowest Schooling Resource Standard contribution in the country. Queensland kids are missing out and Queensland now has the lowest funded kids in the country. Under the current government's plans, a grade 4 student of today will never see full funded schools. P&Cs Qld supports the proposed amendment bill which will result in the cost paid by state school parents and caregivers being minimised with the delivery of free state school education. The cost of providing state education should be met by the state government, including resources and the basic extracurricular activities. The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 needs to be amended to encompass all essential resources required for the delivery of a high-quality education.

CHAIR: Thank you, Scott. We will go to questions from the committee.

Mr LISTER: There is a shortage of funding, as you say. How much of that could be remedied by better spending of the money that the department currently has? Are you aware of examples where funds could be used better for the things you are talking about here, as opposed to a program or a spending that is not achieving what it ought to?

Mr Wiseman: We have a lot to do with the Department of Education through our general workings. We are all focused on the same objective of making sure that every child has every opportunity of every resource they could possibly need. I do not think it is a question of wasting the money that is allocated; it is actually the quantum that needs—

Mr LISTER: So it is all being spent well?

Mr Wiseman: I cannot say that because I am not privy to the intricate details of the budget spending, I suppose. However, I think the objectives are all there. Parents, teachers, the department and schools are all focused on the same outcome, which is giving every child every chance.

Mr KELLY: I come from an area where the majority of my schools would have reasonably high ICSEA data. In fact, last time I saw the data, 70 per cent of parents of high school students chose to send their children to private schools. It also seems to me that in many of our schools families will always be looking to make even greater contributions to that school. Regardless of how much we fund, families will show up and want to make that school even better. I guess my question for P&Cs Qld is really around that ongoing relationship between parents and the school community—because it is not just about teaching kids; it is actually a centre point of the community. Do you see that P&Cs would change their priorities if we were fully funding the resource schemes?

Mr Wiseman: That is a great question. Many people see P&Cs as the funding body or the funding support of fundraisers for schools. Under the education act there are five functions of what a P&C should do. No. 5 is fundraising. No. 1 is fostering interest in education from parents. We know there is a significant amount of data—I am referring to Dr Jo Kelly's research—which indicates that where parents are engaged in education children are likely to do six times better in English and 10 times better in mathematics. The data is there, and that is a primary function of what P&Cs do.

The second function of P&Cs under the education act is building cooperation and building community. The third and fourth are around consultation around the school operations and around things like curriculum and the education system in itself. When you break it down, the fundraising—and \$74 million is no small drop in the ocean, and we commend all of our volunteers on their dedication—is not their primary focus. We find that 89 per cent of our members are now reporting that building that community is the key function of what they are focused on. In days gone by, that was previously the bake sales and those sorts of things of old where fundraising was a key priority.

Mr KELLY: I would just point out that I do not have a conflict of interest there. That is not me who did that survey.

CHAIR: You are still working on your doctorate!

Mr DAMETTO: Mr Wiseman, you commented on a lack of funding in Queensland schools being an issue. Do you think it is a contributing factor to some parents choosing to homeschool? If not, has P&Cs Qld had any indication of any shortfalls in Queensland education which is driving parents to homeschool?

Mr Wiseman: That is an interesting question. In relation to the consequences of this underfunding, we are seeing students where a standard learning environment is not suitable or not the best for them, which I guess is probably a better way to phrase it. In that type of environment, the underfunding has these consequences of potentially disengagement and we are seeing the youth crisis and things like that. With more funding going into schools, we see that teachers and classrooms can have teacher aides and extra support to keep these kids engaged. If a kid is in school, they are not on the roads, they are not out stealing cars and they are not out doing whatever. We support a whole range of opportunities because no child is the same. Where there are alternative modes of education or the delivery of education, we would certainly support that. I think homeschooling has a part to play. It is the same with distance education and special education, because no two children are the same. It is an offering of a variety, but what we say is the full funding option. If we make sure that all options are full funding, we are giving our kids the best chances.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wiseman, for your presentation. It is much appreciated.

BARNES, Dr Naomi, Education Policy and Evaluation Lab, Queensland University of Technology

HOGAN, Associate Professor Anna, Director, Education Policy and Evaluation Lab, Queensland University of Technology

THOMPSON, Professor Greg, Co-Director, Education Policy and Evaluation Lab, Queensland University of Technology

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Prof. Hogan: We are happy to forgo making an opening statement and move straight to Q&A. We are obviously all researchers here. We have been invested in a lot of this for about 10 years now in various guises. We would welcome any questions and we will do our best to answer them for you.

CHAIR: Terrific. We will go straight to the committee.

Mr LISTER: Your submission argues that fundraising by P&Cs for certain things ought to cease and be replaced by funding. Can you explain exactly what you are referring to?

Prof. Hogan: We just heard from P&Cs Qld. It was fabulous to hear their perspective. The research we have currently been doing has looked at how P&Cs have changed their mandates. They are moving from that hub of community—the fundraising that you often see at elections: the bake sales and the sausage sizzles—into driving profitable school-based businesses through the canteen, the book shop, the uniform shop as well as swim clubs. The way that P&Cs are now making up the funding shortfall is by driving profits—again, that cost shifting we are seeing for parents to drive the income that is needed in schools.

Mr O'ROURKE: Following on from the P&C presentation, fundraising creates that community hub. More parents get involved and then there is the flow-on effect to students in having their parents being involved in the school and that improves educational outcomes. Do you have a comment in that space?

Prof. Hogan: From research in terms of what P&Cs have been telling us, parents no longer have the time or energy to volunteer. We just heard that P&Cs are now employing people to run the tuckshops and the book shops. It is no longer the parent volunteer who is doing this work. There has been a marked shift in how P&Cs operationalise around that community-based funding versus the significant money they need now to run schools. If you are looking at a typical outside-school-hours-care provision, that is over \$100,000 of profit going into a school to reinvest into that public school. We are seeing the need. The funding shortfall is requiring P&Cs to generate significant money, not just the couple of hundred dollars that would typically come from those community fundraising appeals previously.

Mr MICKELBERG: You talk in your submission about the difficulty of obtaining data on income levels for state school families. Do you have any recommendations around how that might be remediated? What sorts of improvements could be made to that data source? Are there data sources that contain that information that you cannot access that might provide that information?

Prof. Thompson: It is an ongoing challenge. What drives Australian education policy is the ICSEA standard, which is the measure of socio-educational advantage. For a long period of time that was geography based, with the assumption being that within a particular location the average of the location was used to understand the make-up of the school. That is not quite true. You would know very well, representing your electorates, that there are some pockets of the electorate where there is significant wealth, other pockets of the electorate that do not quite have the same amount of wealth and so on. One of the issues with generating data in that space from a policy perspective—how you meet the needs of communities where there are disparate needs across those communities where some have more and some have less—is in understanding the data particularly around education achievement, education outcome and education funding in Australia for some time.

In terms of how we do it better, I am not 100 per cent sure. We are fairly confident that the idea of socio-educational advantage is a better measure than just basic income, because that also incorporates things like education attainment of the parents, language spoken at home and so on. How well we are able to collect that individual level data to understand where the points of need really are and even drill down into the points of need within specific locations is, I think, an ongoing research challenge. I do not have an easy solution for that.

Prof. Hogan: The transparency around the data that we have at the moment in terms of other sources of income displayed by My School and ACARA are the fees, charges, parental contributions and other sources. One of the things we do not have transparency and clarity on is how much P&Cs are fundraising on behalf of their schools each year. For instance, that is often a hidden income unless there is a direct contribution transfer from a P&C to a public school, but P&Cs can purchase on behalf of their schools. We are never quite clear how much of that fundraising is propping up the official streams of fundraising that we are seeing in public schools. That is potentially one avenue for greater transparency around fundraising.

Mr KELLY: I want to ask questions around the ICSEA data and that whole process. One of the issues I see in my schools is that we do have high ICSEA data but we have students in those schools who have significant disadvantage. Often government policies and processes are driven by ICSEA. That means that if you have high ICSEA you often miss out on some of these additional services.

The other thing I would like you to think about or comment on is in relation to the ICSEA data. We know that high-performing schools are driving up property prices in certain areas in school catchments which will drive up ICSEA data. Is ICSEA data actually a useful tool in terms of designing government policy?

Prof. Thompson: I would say it is a blunt tool. It is probably as good as we have. To go to the first point you made, there is no doubt that the public school system in particular—and this goes back to not just the research that Gonski has done but subsequent research—even in relatively advantaged areas, is still the schooling system that is catching most of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The ICSEA may be higher, but that will be where the disadvantaged students generally tend to go. One of the challenges is that those schools also often need to be resourced to fund particular programs for students who, as we heard from the Association of State School Principals, may have some sort of significant special needs et cetera. The way the funding works is that that those schools may not have the funding to run those special and particular programs.

One of the things we have noticed from a research perspective is that, if you look across Australia, the more advantaged a school context is based on its ICSEA the more opportunity they have to charge parents fees, charges and parental contributions in order to offset that. One of the concerns we have as researchers is that a public education system philosophically should be about trying to create equitable provision and that if we set up a system where the affluence that parents have means they can fund core educational services differently then that is not a mechanism for creating an equitable system across a state like Queensland.

In research we did in 2019 we found that across Australia, regardless of which state it is, the more advantaged a school is the more funding on average it generates from parents in terms of fees, charges and parental contributions often flowing into core educational services. We think that is a significant issue across Australia.

Mr KELLY: You mentioned P&Cs running school-based businesses because of a lack of volunteers. I wonder whether your research has looked into the fact that perhaps the reason they are doing it is not necessarily the lack of volunteers but the complexity and the size of the businesses. I have tuckshops that have \$1.5 million turnovers and employ multiple people. It is not a business that you can show up once a month and run from a P&C meeting.

Prof. Hogan: Absolutely. I agree with that. The complexity of the role that P&Cs are performing is quite remarkable now. Yes, we wholeheartedly agree.

Mr MICKELBERG: You spoke about your research in 2019. I would be keen to get your view. Presumably that will exist whether this bill is passed or not. If we create a level playing field where all state school funding is met by the state and there is no gap, parents who have the capacity will no doubt still seek to support their local school in a different way. It might be through better infrastructure. It might be through some additional program. In many respects, I am asking for your opinion as to whether or not you think that is correct. I cannot see a way but maybe you have a thought about how the state may be able to mitigate that effect.

Prof. Thompson: I think that is a reasonable observation of human behaviour. People with more disposable income tend to be able to use that in more disposable ways. I think the issue is not so much how you make sure everybody is paying exactly the same necessarily as to how you actually lessen the gap between the people who can and the people who cannot in terms of their opportunity for core educational services. The bill does provide the potential to lessen that gap, I think. It will be interesting to track that in coming years.

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One of the big and ongoing issues is that we probably need to have a really clear conversation about what constitutes a core educational cost now in schools. For example, if a school mandates that there is a uniform that has to be bought, that is not a co-curricular or an extracurricular cost. That is core educational need—a necessity to go to that school. Often the data that we have, going to the point Anna made before, is not clear as to what constitutes core educational costs and expenses that the fees, charges and parental contributions are being used for and what are some other things that perhaps may be extra or co-curricular. It lumps them all in together. That does make understanding those patterns much more challenging and the picture is much more complex, I think.

Mr MICKELBERG: You talk in your submission about the government introducing a voucher program to support extracurricular activity. I am aware of some of those programs that already exist. I know that my local Lions Club, for example, supports kids in that sense. How would you envisage that working? Are we talking about a safety net to capture those kids who may fall through the cracks who exist in probably every school regardless of their economic advantage, or would it be a set amount? For example, one of my schools has a STEM team that goes to the United States and they fundraise a massive amount of money, and that is great. That is probably at the extreme end. Then you have the kid who cannot afford to go on the excursion that might cost \$8 or \$10 as part of the curriculum. We definitely want to capture that group. I am not sure whether it is the role of the state to capture the first group. I am keen to hear your thoughts.

Prof. Hogan: To give you an example of the context in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education have a donation scheme, which is \$150 per student per year. Any school that opts in to that will then get that funding but then they cannot ask for any additional contributions beyond school camp. It initially started with the more disadvantaged schools—in ICSEA terms, probably fewer than a thousand—as a lot of the funding streams are focused on already. There are opportunities like that. As you already suggested, the extracurricular and sporting associations are already given money to go into schools and deliver programs in that way. I think that is a really encouraging way to create opportunities and access for students in particular school locations who would not otherwise be able to afford it from a family cost point of view.

CHAIR: We might wrap it up there. Thank you, Associate Professor Hogan, Professor Thompson and Dr Barnes, for your comprehensive responses to questions from the committee. We appreciate your time and your experience.

SCHUTT, Ms Alison, Co-Founding Director, Stationery Aid Ltd

SCHUTT, Mr Jan, Co-Founding Director, Stationery Aid Ltd

CHAIR: Welcome to the committee. Would you like to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members might have some questions for you?

Mr Schutt: Stationery Aid is a registered charity and a public benevolent institution. Our primary objective is to support our most disadvantaged school students and their families with educational resources in the form of full student book lists and stationery packs to start the school year. We do this so that students have the opportunity to learn equally. This provides one student with resources for an entire year of learning. We collect used and unused excess school stationery that is renewed, cleaned and sanitised to the highest standard, creating a circular economy.

Founded in 2020, we have supported approximately 1,500 primary and high school students across 86 schools in Queensland to date; that is, 18 students per school on average as it stands. That is what we are able to provide. If you take that figure and multiply it by the schools in Queensland, it equates to about 23,000 students across Queensland requiring help with stationery and student book lists. That is only four per cent of students at Queensland state schools. Figures such as Mr Wiseman spoke about earlier—and we have found that 16.6 per cent of children are living below the poverty line in Australia—mean that 94,600 students across Queensland state schools experience disadvantage and vulnerability.

We distribute through a number of ways including school chaplains, counsellors and leadership teams. They understand, know and see firsthand which students are turning up to school without the necessary resources. We also distribute via referral or requests from other charities. Since 2020 we have diverted approximately 40 tonnes of educational resources from landfill. We are one of many charities that provide resources to disadvantaged students and their families. These include and are not limited to Variety Queensland, the Smith Family, Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul, Zephyr Education, 3rd Space, Salvation Army, Lifeline, Soroptimist International and even the nuns from the Missionaries of Charity that I bumped into at Officeworks buying school supplies for children. We sit here today to witness and acknowledge that there are students who, sadly, attend school—or simply do not attend school—without the necessary educational resources.

Whilst we assist where we can with regard to school stationery and book lists, we cannot and do not support where it comes to additional areas such as uniforms, food, computers, tablets and such technology as well as the requirements for sports, music and other extracurricular activities. Thank you for listening to us. We welcome any questions.

Mr KELLY: Chair, I declare a conflict of interest. I met Jan through our membership of the Lions Club and activities there, and I have made significant representations on behalf of Stationery Aid to various ministers.

CHAIR: Thank you for that declaration, member for Greenslopes. Are there any questions from the committee?

Mr LISTER: I do not have a question, but I would like to say congratulations on what you do. It is a very onerous thing to reach charitable foundation status. I would love to talk with you later about some of the needy kids in my electorate.

Mr Schutt: Certainly. We welcome that.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for coming in and presenting to the committee this morning. I commend you both on the work you and your organisation are doing to make sure disadvantaged children across Queensland get access to the stationery they need to complete their learning. Also, congratulations on reducing landfill in Queensland. We all know how important that is. Does the organisation have any reach in regional and North Queensland?

Ms Schutt: Yes. We currently send to the Mackay region. We support a number of schools up there. At the start of this year we spread our wings into the Wide Bay area, out to Toowoomba and as far as Warwick. It is our intention as we grow to expand into the regional, rural and remote areas.

Mr DAMETTO: That is excellent. Has the organisation been successful thus far in gaining any state funding to help the cause?

Mr Schutt: Not yet. Our funding comes from varied means. We are a young charity, as we mentioned—only 3½ to four years old. We basically fund through some philanthropic donations, through grants that we apply for. Obviously that is a tedious experience and we are limited in where we can spend that money. We are run by about 150 casual volunteers. We have put submissions for

funding through to the department but have been unsuccessful so far. Again, we are young. Obviously this bill will give us an outcome, but if we still exist in this format we look forward to funding for the future.

Ms Schutt: Providing support where we can.

Mr DAMETTO: Excellent. That is great to hear. We have a program called Fuel for Schools in North Queensland that feeds children through breakfast clubs and such. It is a very similar funding model that they use at the moment. I again commend you on what you are doing with the stationery side of things.

Mr O'ROURKE: You have just answered my question, which was going to be around your number of volunteers. It is absolutely wonderful what you have achieved in terms of redirecting out of landfill. Are you set up in Rockhampton as yet?

Ms Schutt: Not yet. We are working on that. I have been looking at some opportunities up there with some of the other charities. I am originally from Central Queensland. I know the area and understand where the needs are in that vicinity, so hopefully.

Mr O'ROURKE: It would be wonderful to see you and to meet with you down the track.

CHAIR: You are clearly in demand.

Mr KELLY: I know that you are a very new organisation, but do you have any insights into why children are lacking in resources? Is it simply a lack of money? Are there other factors involved here?

Ms Schutt: I think the picture is far greyer. We are measuring and trying to gather as much data as we can on our beneficiaries. We have some data to date. The demographics we support are: single parents, 20 per cent; parents who are unemployed, 14 per cent; financial hardship, our greatest, 22 per cent—we see that that could potentially grow as we see further disadvantage in that space; prison affected families and mental health, six per cent; homelessness, drugs and alcohol affected families, four per cent; First Nations, 14 per cent; refugees, four per cent; and families from a domestic violence background, seven per cent.

CHAIR: Thank you for your presentation and for answering questions from the committee today. It is much appreciated.

ALEXANDER, Ms Matilda, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

WIGGANS, Ms Sophie, Principal Systems Advocate, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Alexander: Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this public hearing. We would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet, the Turrbal and Yagara peoples, and acknowledge the lives of First Nations Australians with disability and the intersectional disadvantage they experience. We pay our respects to First Nations elders past and present and in particular to our president, Byron Albury. Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, QAI, is an advocacy organisation and specialist community legal centre for people with disability. We are funded by the department of disability and the Department of Education to provide disability advocacy to young people in Queensland, including in Queensland state schools.

School is an essential part of childhood and a recipe for success in many aspects of life. An accessible and appropriately funded school system will ensure a future where people with and without disability live, work and play together. Kids who complete school alongside their peers can go on to live lives of full potential—economically, socially and personally. Funding is needed to stop practices such as gat-keeping, the overuse of school disciplinary absences, the use of restrictive practices and a lack of access to reasonable adjustments, which routinely deny students with disability their right to access education on an equal basis with others.

Improving funding to schools was recommendation 7.12 of the disability royal commission final report. The DRC said this funding should be arranged to ensure equal access and participation in education. Transparency on the use of disability funding in schools was also a part of this recommendation. Increased funding in state schools means that students with disability can get the reasonable adjustments and supports they need in the classroom. It can stop students with disability being inappropriately placed on part-time education plans or simply being asked to go home early because they are told by the school that there is no more teacher aide funding available.

QAI is alarmed that Queensland is reportedly not meeting its education funding obligations to fund 80 per cent of education costs alongside the Commonwealth government's 20 per cent contribution. Schools need better funding so disabled children can get the supports they need to complete schooling without unnecessary and discriminatory exclusions and suspensions. QAI is currently leading the A Right to Learn campaign based on research by QAI and the Centre for Inclusive Education which found evidence of disproportionate and excessive suspensions for First Nations students, students with disability and students in out-of-home care. For example, students with a disability made up only 18 per cent of enrolments in 2020 yet 49 per cent of all short suspensions. This equates to 2.18 suspensions on average per student. Our research also showed that for most students in one or more of these groups the risk of suspension is even greater. Students receiving socioemotional adjustments at school, such as for neurodiverse students, are issued repeat suspensions at a higher rate than students with other types of disability. Disability is the most common factor amongst suspended students, raising urgent questions as to whether students with disability are receiving the adjustments and support to which they are entitled under legislation. All of this is occurring despite overwhelming evidence about the ineffectiveness of school disciplinary absences in reducing behaviours of concern.

In order to ensure no student is left behind, Queensland must commit to funding and implementing a truly inclusive education system. Individualised teaching and solutions are fundamental to the provision of inclusive education. There is extensive research that demonstrates the efficacy of inclusive education and the many benefits it brings, not just to students with disability but to all students in the classroom.

We provide the following suggestions for programs and supports to require an urgent increase in funding, noting it is by no means exhaustive: No. 1, reasonable adjustments for students with disability; No. 2, multi-tiered systems of supports; No. 3, the collaborative and proactive solutions we have outlined in our submission; and No. 4, circles of support. Additional staff are needed to fully implement this list such as teacher aides, inclusion officers, NDIS navigators, qualified mental health professionals and advocates as well as occupational therapists, speech therapists and psychologists. We should commit the resources to ensure children with disability have the support they need to stay in school and learn alongside their peers.

Mr LISTER: Thank you both very much for coming in. In my electorate of Southern Downs we had a special education unit at Warwick East State School and that was closed. I have had approaches from parents who are concerned that their children needed to be in a separate stream because that was the best way for them to learn, they would not interrupt classes and so forth. They actually raised with me the prospect that disciplinary absences may flow from their child being in a mainstream classroom. The term 'mainstreaming' has come a lot to me as an MP recently. What do you say to those parents or to teachers and principals who favour the option of students having educational opportunities in a special education unit as opposed to in mainstream classrooms?

Ms Alexander: That is a great question and one that the disability royal commission looked at in extensive detail. All of the commissioners on the disability royal commission who identify as having a disability recommended the end of segregated education. Closing schools never sounds like a good idea, but what I think we need to do is move towards opening up schools, opening up special schools and opening up disability-specific education so that people with disability can learn alongside their peers. At the same time, focus on getting mainstream schools so that they are truly accessible and are not doing school disciplinary absences excessively and really are inclusive places for kids with disability.

This is a long-term project. The disability royal commission has recommended a long time frame to do this within, but we need to start investing in non-segregated solutions because the disability royal commission found that once you keep kids apart then it ends up with segregated employment and a segregated society. Building a world together starts with our kids.

Ms Wiggans: We totally understand a concern that many families experience, because the reality for some families is that mainstream schools currently are not offering an inclusive education. Of course, the prospect of enrolling their child into the mainstream school is very daunting when they know that the reality is that the supports are not there. We need to be striving towards creating a truly inclusive mainstream system. There are a lot of resources that go into the special school model that could be diverted towards mainstream schools becoming more inclusive and so that teachers are skilled and trained in order to support all of the students in the classroom with diverse learning needs. We recognise it is big-scale change that needs to happen but, as Matilda was saying, it is what was envisaged by the disability royal commission, it is what our obligations are under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and it is where we need to be heading.

Mr KELLY: It seems that we have strayed into a different bill but I am happy to ask questions about this as well. Near my community, although not in my electorate anymore, we have a Catholic school that is primarily aimed at people with a range of disabilities. Catholic Education has announced that they will be pulling out of that. The backlash and the community concern around that has been driven by the parents who want that opportunity. It seems to me that there are people who have family members with disability and actually want those sorts of options rather than to go to a mainstream school.

Ms Alexander: We are not saying to close down existing schools that are working; we are saying to open them up so that all kids can benefit from those resources. The special unit that you are talking about might have also benefited kids from non-English-speaking backgrounds or kids who were not so academically inclined. Let's keep what is working in those schools but end the segregation. Make them more accessible to more kids so that it is not just for kids with disability.

Mr KELLY: I spend a lot of time at the Nursery Road State Special School in my electorate and I have a background in working with adults with intellectual disabilities. In that school I interact with students who I think would pose significant challenges in terms of their behaviour in an integrated classroom. They would be significant disruptors to other students' learning. How do we manage that situation?

Ms Wiggans: I think it is about adopting the social model of disability and our understanding that it is not the person with disability who is causing the disruption, to use your language; it is the environment they are in, which is inaccessible to them, that is creating in many instances the issues. If they were in an environment where the teachers fully understood their learning needs and they were able to adapt the curriculum to provide the right support for the person so that they could engage meaningfully in a way that suited their learning needs then that is a different scenario. When a person is in an environment that is not accessible to them and people are not skilled or trained to understand their needs and the support is not there then that can lead to disruptions and escalations in behaviour, which then leads on to the use of suspensions and exclusions disproportionately for certain students. This is what the campaign we have been leading is all about. We know the long-term and short-term impacts of that for students, families and the community as well.

You mentioned that idea of parent choice and families wanting to elect a school where they feel their student would be better supported. The idea that that is a choice is questionable, because when the alternative is a mainstream school that is not currently set up to support them then that is not really a proper choice. It is what people are forced into doing. Again, that is why all of the evidence is telling us that we need to be building truly inclusive mainstream schools, so that there is not a segregation. As Matilda was saying, we need to have all students with diverse learning needs living, working and learning alongside each other. It is up to us to make sure the education system is accessible and inclusive for everybody.

Mr DAMETTO: Firstly, what a balance we are trying to strike in making sure that Queensland children are getting the best education possible by trying to balance the whole idea of inclusion in our classrooms. It is definitely something that I imagine most parents are concerned about and also most teachers are finding challenging at the moment. You talked about a lack of funding in the current Queensland public school model. In practical terms, if the funding was there, how do you think we could improve the outcomes in the classroom for those students who have a learning disability or are living with a disability?

Ms Alexander: There are a range of different ways and it will vary from student to student. Each kid with a disability needs an individualised plan, and a lot of that is going to need money behind it to get the OT in, to get the adjustments, to get the teacher aide. It is going to look different for every kid—and so it should, because every disability is different and every kid's aspirations and goals in life are going to be different. There is not one answer. There is an answer to the question of whether or not we are currently funded to do that: we are not, so there are kids who are missing out on their education and their life goals.

Mr DAMETTO: Talking about individual plans, do you think this is a space for the NDIS to be funding and not Queensland Education?

Ms Alexander: The NDIS funds about 10 per cent of people with disability so there will always be a huge gap there. Many kids with disability will not meet the permanency test or the functional impact test. This kind of bill is talking about a range of different extracurricular and other basic things like uniforms, laptops and things like that.

One thing that I found really impactful was thinking about the research on disability tax that is coming out of the US. It says that people with disability have to earn on average 28 per cent more than their non-disabled counterparts in order to have the same quality of life. Someone with one person with disability in their family is going to have spent a lot more on transport, on health, on equipment, on interventions. They are already paying out of pocket for all of that. Then you add in a school laptop, a school uniform and maybe a school uniform that needs to be adapted and a laptop that needs to have an additional program on it. The tax on disability is real. The research shows that the poverty line for everyone else might be here but when you take into account that 28 per cent difference in income it is not reflective of the poverty line for people with disability, who could be above the regular poverty line but are actually spending so much more of their money on disability related things. The NDIS is only a partial solution for 10 per cent of the population for that issue.

Mr MICKELBERG: In my electorate I have a state high school, primary school and special school in one precinct, recently opened by the current state government. When the special school was announced and through the process, I was surprised at the level of vitriol that was evident from parents who were opposed in a similar manner as you spoke about. I understand the objective, and I am sure we all agree that greater resources for disabled people and ensuring inclusiveness are good outcomes for every Queenslanders, but the reality is that we are in a constrained environment. For example, the special school supports 200 students, the primary school supports 1,000-odd students and the high school another 1,500. The special school would get the most resources out of those three schools in terms of individual support for students, not on a per head basis but on a collective basis. If we allow more students into those environments, is that not going to dilute the support for these students who need it most?

Ms Alexander: I think funding for kids in education should be tied to individual kids and not to the bricks and mortar. Some of those kids, if you invested that amount of money, would want to go to a different school. If we are committing to give more funding to kids with disability, do not make them go to a school down the road for that. Give that to the parents so that they have choice and control over how they spend that so the kid can choose to have a range of different options. What the DRC conclusively showed is the poor outcomes from those schools. They are not a successful model for a successful life.

Mr MICKELBERG: I do not pretend to be an expert by any means—far from it—but it strikes me that there is a compromise position here which is what the state government has implemented in my electorate. To be clear, I am an opposition member of parliament. You have a special school that is next door to a primary school that is next door to a high school. In my electorate there are kids whose siblings go to all three schools. There are opportunities for a kid who may not be able to go to the primary school full-time but can interact with some of the programs offered there while still being a student at the special school. Presumably, on the outcomes for that child, their parent has decided to place them there for whatever reason. They live it day in, day out. In that example, presumably the outcomes are viewed by the parent as being superior to sending them to the primary school. I take your point that if the resourcing followed them to the primary school then it might be a different story. I am not sure if that is the only factor. You live this day in, day out. I am keen to hear your views on that.

Ms Alexander: I would definitely agree that less segregation is better than more segregation. An integrated school with the high school and the primary school is better than not having an integrated school. The research from the DRC said no segregation. Maybe that is a building block on the way, but we need to keep that end goal in mind. How many years did they say?

Ms Wiggans: I think they put a very long time—

Ms Alexander: Like 20 years or something. We are saying it can be done in 10 but they said longer.

Ms Wiggans: We have acknowledged that there is a lot of disparity and inequity between the funding of the schools, as you mentioned. However, this is long-term change. We do acknowledge that shutting down special schools overnight would not be a good move. We are not wanting to put students, families and teachers in situations where the system is setting them up to fail. Nobody wants that. It is long-term change that needs to be properly planned over time. There are examples internationally of provinces and states where segregated education has been successfully phased out. Not only is it our obligations under the human rights instruments that we have signed up to but there are also best practice models and other examples that we can learn from in terms of achieving this over the long term, which is what we are obliged to do.

Mr O'ROURKE: My question is on the NDIS side of education. We have seen that NDIS participants are sometimes charged at a higher rate than someone who is not receiving NDIS funding. Does that happen in the school system—for example, someone with NDIS funding gets a laptop at a certain price and someone who is not funded gets something similar for cheaper?

Ms Alexander: There might be the odd case where someone could justify a particular laptop with a special program, a special keypad or something like that if it reasonable and it is one of their necessary supports, but not generally speaking. It could be a specially adapted uniform because of their disability. If they have an NDIS plan it might cover some of that, but I do not think that would be a huge factor in the decision-making.

Ms Wiggans: I think there is a lot of complexity between the NDIS and state funded systems and that does cause issues for students and families. We learned recently that some students are trying to access therapy supports through their NDIS funding onsite at the school but, due to a lack of funding, some schools are charging the therapy providers an access fee of maybe \$50 per visit. That access fee, rightly, cannot be put onto the parents and it cannot be put onto the NDIS package so it is going to the provider. That sounds all well and good, but if the providers are not able to sustain that financially then they are withdrawing from coming in to provide that level of support, which ultimately leaves the student without support. That is just one example of the complex interplay with NDIS funding that is negatively impacting students and their families. It is an issue.

CHAIR: That is our allocated time. We appreciate very much your presentations and answering all of our questions today. Thank you for your participation.

RICHARDSON, Ms Cresta, President, Queensland Teachers' Union

WOOD, Dr Craig, Research Officer, Queensland Teachers' Union (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of two to three minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you. Thank you for being here today.

Ms Richardson: The Queensland Teachers' Union is pleased to appear at today's Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee public hearing regarding the inquiry into the Education (General Provisions) (Helping Families with School Costs) Amendment Bill 2023. My name is Cresta Richardson. I am the President of the Queensland Teachers' Union. I am joined today by Dr Craig Wood, QTU research officer, who is presenting via teleconference. I acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Yagara and Turrbal peoples and that Dr Wood is joining us from the lands of the Gubbi Gubbi people. We pay our respects to all First Nations peoples and we recognise Queensland teachers and students who are First Nations people.

This year the Queensland Teachers' Union celebrates our 135th anniversary. That is 135 years of representing the professional, industrial and legal interests of Queensland state school teachers and school leaders as well as educators delivering vocational education and training in TAFE.

In 2024 we have 48,000 members. Our members work in every community in the state. I am a teacher, a parent of two boys and a partner to a miner. Prior to my election as president of the Queensland Teachers' Union, I was a classroom teacher in the Central Queensland region of Emerald. In the two weeks since I was last here I have been to see members in Hughenden, Cameron Downs, Prairie, Pentland and Homestead. I have also chaired our QTU executive and attended the ACTU women's conference. I mention this because my own experience and experiences of our teachers and parents mean that I and the QTU have a deep understanding of how cost-of-living pressures are impacting our families. School uniforms, football boots, fees for programs, school camps, excursions and other special events are all costs that impact family budgets. We understand that.

Turning to computers and technology, the QTU has long held the view that government has a responsibility to fully fund the use of ICT in schools and ensure every Queensland child has equitable access to effective teaching and learning in the classroom. Should current or future enacted curriculum require one-to-one devices, it is our position that these devices should be fully funded by government.

Notwithstanding family budget cost-of-living pressures, the QTU has also long campaigned to ensure all state schools in Queensland receive a minimum of 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard, SRS, which has been spoken about today. In solidarity with our federally affiliated Australian Education Union, we call for the Commonwealth government to remove the 20 per cent cap on the SRS payments to state schools. Underfunding schools means underfunding students' learning conditions. The QTU knows that teachers and school leaders often make up the shortfalls themselves from their own pockets and from the additional unpaid hours of work that our members deliver. That is why our submission recommends that the committee calls on the Department of Education to produce a workload impact statement on measures contained in the bill and that this becomes a public document.

The QTU is deeply concerned about legislative and regulatory changes or other policy and procedure changes that occur without timely consultation with the union. As the professional and industrial voice of the Queensland state school teachers and with members who are teachers and school leaders throughout the entirety of the state, the QTU has deep knowledge and understanding of the work and workload in our schools.

On workload, 56D(1) of the bill proposes an amendment that requires the chief executive to report on the cost of individual student resources, extracurricular services and school uniforms for each school. The QTU acknowledges that the explanatory notes state that this is to provide basic information to the minister. However, the QTU forecasts that, if legislated, this section of the bill will result in the Department of Education delegating additional compliance reporting to school principals. The QTU contends that this is incremental workload creep and is an example of why legislative and regulatory amendments should be accompanied by workload impact statements.

The public reporting on cost of individual student resources, extracurricular services and school uniforms also establishes points of differences between schools. It feeds into the narrative of parents as consumers who make market-based choices about school enrolment. That narrative is South Queensland centric in its thinking. We know that the further you are from the south-east, the fewer school options there are. There are fewer sporting, cultural and academic specialist offerings. A

consequence of this bill could be flooding the south-east corner with private providers of extracurricular programs, paid for by the state government, and without addressing the disadvantage and equity of opportunity in rural and remote Queensland. The QTU also recommends that the committee calls on the Department of Education to prepare modelling on the budget impact of the proposal for the state to meet costs associated with extracurricular activities.

The QTU submission to this bill called for a budget impact statement. The Department of Education might assist the committee in this regard. The QTU's submission also contained table 1 that showed sample cost items that the bill would establish become cost items from the Queensland government. The table includes examples of costs that are reported on the websites of schools or service providers for music, sport, academic programs and school camps. Based on the table, a conservative estimated cost to the budget could be \$100 per student. For clarity, in this example the QTU does not suggest parents be allocated a \$100 voucher; the QTU opposes the introduction of voucher systems. To estimate the cost to the budget, the Productivity Commission's report on government services states that in 2022 there were 569,353 students in Queensland enrolled in a government school. If each were to be conservatively allocated \$100, the annual cost to the Queensland government would be nearly \$57 million. That amount will not be enough to ensure all state schools in Queensland receive a minimum of the 100 per cent of the SRS, but \$57 million could replace instrumental music assets. One trumpet is about \$1,000 and, across the life of the asset, could introduce 20 to 30 students to music. A five-piece drum kit costs about \$1,500. It could mean 50 or more students enrol in percussion. A piano costs \$7,000 to \$10,000. A volleyball net could be replaced at \$300, and \$2,000 could replace a school's Rugby League goalpost pads and some footies. The Queensland state budget submission does not refer to all of these items, but asset replacement is important, and our budget submission has 84 recommendations.

In closing, the QTU offers five recommendations that appear in our submission to this inquiry made in November 2023. The QTU joins with previous speakers and other stakeholders. We understand the cost-of-living pressures experienced by Queensland families. Many of our members are these families. The QTU welcomes the opportunity to address the committee this morning and also welcomes the opportunity to engage with all members of the Queensland parliament to consider the teaching and learning of students in their school communities in regional and remote parts of the state.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Richardson, on behalf of the Queensland Teachers' Union. I will open up to questions.

Mr LISTER: Your submission argues that SRS funding allocations should not be used for things such as textbooks and so forth, but the union is in favour of schools funding those things. In effect, are you saying that the SRS, which you want 100 per cent of, is not enough?

Ms Richardson: Yes. The SRS is a number based out of the 2012 Gonski review, and it is a base amount. It is about 80 per cent of what might actually be required, I think might be the numbers. Craig might have a little more clarity. No, it is not enough; it is a base rate.

Mr KELLY: There would be almost no kids in my community who go to school without their mobile phone, even though we have technically banned them. For an item that is not required at school, nearly every person in our community somehow makes that available to their children. It suggests to me that families will work out what they want to give to their children. If we introduce a system where the state effectively provides every single thing that theoretically a kid needs in school, does that remove some agency from families in their capacity to provide for their own children, and would we be better off creating a system where we target the assistance at families who need it when they need it?

Ms Richardson: Our position is: should it be required that one-on-one offerings are a requirement of the curriculum then the state government should come to the party. However, what we know at the moment is that we have many families in significant difficulty of being able to access a device. While they might have a mobile phone, the ability to access the bandwidth or the internet around that is of concern. A digital divide for students in our sector is unfair.

Mr KELLY: The question is also around whether we go down a targeted assistance path or a general assistance path of everyone getting the same. Do you have any thoughts in relation to that?

Ms Richardson: I personally do not have any thoughts in relation to that, but Craig may be able to offer something additional.

Dr Wood: Thank you to the committee for the time to talk with you today. The position the QTU has is supporting the implementation of the Gonski recommendation, and that is targeted funding to support and to meet the factors of educational disadvantage. We just heard about students with

disability, but we also note disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, regional and remote schools—and we were talking about those just two weeks ago—students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with language background other than English. The Gonski report is a crucial document. It talks about targeted funding rather than taking an approach of money going out to all families and all students—targeted funding from government.

Mr DAMETTO: Firstly, I want to put on record my support for teachers across Queensland. They do a fantastic job in what I would say are challenging times. The feedback I get from some of our teachers—and I imagine the Teachers' Union gets similar information feedback—is around behavioural issues in classrooms. Do you believe we need more funding to address behavioural issues in classrooms, or do you think it is more of a policy change that is necessary to give teachers the tools they need?

Ms Richardson: That is a really great question and it is probably multifaceted. Craig talked about getting to 100 per cent of the SRS. What that means is that we can provide additional behaviour supports. We might be able to provide alternative pathways or flexible learning centres—whatever that might be. I think it is important that we meet the needs of all students within the state school sector. Craig outlined the five additional areas that were identified in 2012, but I think, based on the federal government report that came down in December, it has extended even more than that so that identifying student wellbeing and behaviour is part of that as well. We need to be resourced properly so that we can meet the needs of the students in our schools.

Mr DAMETTO: If we were able to fund that better and maybe address some of those behavioural issues, do you think it would play into retaining more teachers in Queensland?

Ms Richardson: Yes.

CHAIR: We will close now. Thank you very much, Ms Richardson, for your presentation and also answering all of the questions of the committee. It is very much appreciated. I also thank Dr Wood online. That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thanks to our Hansard reporters, who are always there and very reliable. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11.29 am.