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GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE A MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM ONE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025

INQUIRY INTO DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING IN TASMANIAN SCHOOLS

The Committee met at 1.58 p.m.

Mr WILLIE (Acting Chair) – Good afternoon. Just before you give your evidence, I would like to ask whether you received and read the guide sent to you by the Committee Secretary. If so, I would like to reiterate some important aspects of that document.

A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament. This means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any place or court out of parliament. This applies to ensure that the parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries.

It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings.

This is an in-camera hearing. This means your evidence is taken in private and will not be published. However, should the Committee consider it to be in the public interest to publish the evidence it may do so after consulting with you in relation to such issues as ensuring your identity is protected.

In addition, should you raise any issues of illegal activity the Committee may wish to refer your allegations to the relevant authorities to inform investigative and intelligence activities. Such evidence would be referred on a confidential basis.

Do you understand.?

WITNESSES - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - I will get you to introduce yourselves and swear yourselves in.

[REDACTED] WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you for making time today to help the committee understand your experience. I'll hand over to you for opening remarks.

Witness 1 - First, and I'm sure on behalf of us all, we'd like to thank you for calling us along to this final part of it and for your time in this. We hope that our collective stories are certainly going to make a positive impact. All we want is to be a solution to the problem, so thank you for that.

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I want to talk about just this document, which I think is called the *General Conduct and Behaviour Standards for All Workers*. It's a brilliant document, but I'd like to show you that there are some concerns about it. It tells what happens when there is a breach of behaviour in a school. You've got the option of going to the senior staff and then they will decide whether it actually goes to Learning Services. But it also notes that if your concern is with senior staff, then you can go straight to Learning Services.

Now, a colleague did that because, obviously, at a school we were at there was bullying going on by the said principal and senior staff. She went to Learning Services. There she was met with a manager actually saying, 'I don't have a problem with the behaviour of that said principal. That's normal behaviour'.

My point is, in Hobart, it's a small place and we have a lot of social networks where people know each other, so there was also a conflict of interest there. She left there and then she took another tack. She went to the AEU (Australian Education Union) where she was told that the head of the AEU was a personal friend of the said principal. This goes on all the time. So she took it to the Equal Opportunity, and it was an ageism complaint. So that's how - but the sad thing is why did she have to go outside the department? It then became a case, and she had to pay for her own lawyer. The Deputy solicitor and a DoE lawyer were provided for the principal.

My point there is that we need to look at another way and something else that's added onto this document that protects people.

Prior to 2000, there was a grievance officer, and we had districts at that time. You may, or perhaps you're too young to remember all those district offices that we had. The one in Hobart, you had the Clarence, you had the Derwent, and you had the Hartz. Each of those actually had a superintendent, an offsite superintendent, and it was more about management and improving outcomes in schools.

Now, if you had a complaint against a principal or senior staff, or even anything that was worrying you, you could actually go, you'd just ring up and say, 'Can I come in tonight?', and you would go in there. They would actually deal with that problem. There would be no timeframe, like we've got timeframes now. 'Oh, you can come and talk to Learning Services. I can book you in in a fortnight's time.' You'd go to the district superintendent, he or his offsider would talk to you, and they would activate a resolution.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] . I think we need an independent arbitrator. We need an independent grievance officer so people can go, not necessarily notifying the staff. [REDACTED]

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But also that old system of working in districts where there was - from 2000 on, they disbanded that because they wanted to centralise the Education department and they wanted to reduce the layers of bureaucrats so that more money would go to the schools. But since then, in 2022, I think they did research and whatever and found out that our literacy rates are down and health and wellbeing of staff are very low. That's one area.

I've just spoken to bringing back district officers. The other thing that - I hope I'm not holding everyone up.

Witness 2 - I was going to say something, but I'll wait for you to finish.

Witness 1 - Well, if you'd like to add to what I've said.

Witness 2 - I think regardless of who's in that position of mentoring, I think it comes down to accountability. There doesn't seem to be any accountability, not in our experience. That's one way to help victims heal, knowing that there has been some form of accountability. The fact that the victims are heard and in some cases compensated for the trauma that they live through. As we often say, it's not just the victims who are suffering, it's their whole families.

Witness 3 - The other thing to go alongside with that is the power of the people who you need to report against. When we first started this, it's probably been a few years now and the DoE said that they would put into place a number of things. I know of a case, two or three cases, but one in particular that worries me, is a second year out teacher who is having difficulties with her principal. She's going to lose a job if she makes any complaint. This thing about having someone that she can freely go to and know that she is safe, her job is safe when she can say that. That's not only the power, that's about age, experience. I mean, the second year out, they're too busy trying to sort out how to deal with the classroom without how to do the politics of the environment.

I'm really distressed that even after we have already put some of our ideas to the - I'm going to call it the DoE because that's what my career was - it's still going on. I can't do anything to support that young teacher and keep her in the system, because eventually they'll just think, 'No, it's not worth it'.

We need to have something in place where the power is even and it doesn't matter who you are, you can go and say, 'This is happening to me', and know that you will be heard and that all efforts will be made to try to redress what's going on.

Witness 1 - Also, I think what should be in place is that when teachers leave the profession - and plenty have left, and I know being out and about, there are still people. I know of someone who's just a talented - you know, we can't afford to lose these talents. They're still in the system, still being bullied.

I think there should be an exiting questionnaire. I

- a list of questions, but the questions are fed out by the department. They are sent to the teacher and they are sent back to the department without the teacher, the

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principal or the senior staff seeing the answers. And then so be it. If the department wishes to qualify or bring it up with the principal, then they can.

But there needs to be feedback: 'Why are you leaving? What's happening here?'. We lost many - I saw a graph of actually how many teachers. We had the highest stress leave, the highest number of people leaving the system in retirement at our said school. Wouldn't that have rung alarm bells to someone? 'Hey, what's going on at the school? Look at the stats. It's worse than any other school in Tasmania.'

One thing I would love to see is a questionnaire that people can answer with no fear of reprisal.

Witness 2 - [REDACTED] can I just add to that question? I think, in fairness, you said the questionnaire was to override the principal, senior staff. I think in fairness they should be involved in that and say, look, so and so, I think they need to have their input as well, perhaps in some kind of a meeting together.

Witness 3 - But doesn't the public service do exit interviews anyway? That was never done with us. We didn't even get a letter to say, 'Congratulations, thank you for your 40 years' service. We are really grateful for all you've done.' All I got was an email to say, 'Well, I've accepted it now. Don't bother trying to change your retirement date.' That's all we got. Even if we were anywhere else, we would have got, no, maybe not a watch, but we would have got a nice morning tea or bunch of flowers. But nothing. I think we need to be looked after. Teachers need to be looked after much more.

Witness 1 - The department needs to celebrate people. They need to lift morale. Morale is very down in teaching.

Mr WILLIE - We have our own problems here.

Witness 2 - My point is, can you change the character of a person? No. There will always be bullies, there will always be victims. Yes, we can put processes in place. We can mentor leading staff, but the character of this - we would never dream of treating people the way we were treated. That's not in our character. But you can't change the character of some people. Power has just gone to their head.

Mr WILLIE - No, but you need the right structures in place.

Witness 2 - This is it, you need the right structures to refer back to and have some kind of accountability.

Witness 1 - When we first went into teaching, there was testing. I remember three days of testing and the third day I just petered out and I thought, will I still be accepted into teaching? So, there was psychological testing. I'm not quite sure that that goes on now, but that's a great idea.

But I think, and I was talking, I wasn't mentioning schools to this fellow, but he was pretty high up in private enterprise and I was just saying about the problem and what he finds in his organisation. He said, 'When you get to a promotable position, ie a salary over a certain benchmark, they are tested, they are sent - ', what do you call it? 'We use Chandler and

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MacLeod mainland to test for three critical factors: intellectual capacity, willingness to undertake role, and the emotional intelligence.' He said that in private enterprise, anyone going for a leadership role, that was quite a common thing. Then I think you can sort out - obviously there are some flawed personalities out there and they need to be nipped in the bud.

So, that is another recommendation. I mean, these are generalities, but it's based on our collective experiences, which may help alleviate that problem of bullying.

Witness 3 - [REDACTED] have you got a slightly different perspective to us that you'd like to on those points we've made for teachers, because yours is slightly different, being your role.

Witness 4 - I wasn't a teacher but I looked after everybody, so I saw many insights into things. I just had some points that I'd brought up, but I'd like to know if you had any questions to ask because we've just built it in and we heard no questions from you.

Mr WILLIE - This is the format. You usually make some opening statements and then we'll let that peter out and then we'll ask you questions.

Witness 4 - I'd rather wait to see if you have any questions to us and then I'd be happy to put my little tuppence worth in. But I've seen a lot behind the scenes that people, that I would never share with anyone, but I've looked after many broken souls.

Mr WILLIE - I guess that's a good point to start asking questions. I'll start. Are you aware of any changes? You said that you've put forward ideas. Have there been any changes at all?

Witness 1 - We were told that there would be feedback, we would be kept in the loop, it would be transparent. Nothing has happened.

Witness 3 - Except for that email that I got. Mark Watson emailed me to say that they were putting together a group to look at what they could do, I think it was for the emerging principals, the sort of people who might do that. He asked would I be interested in that? And I said yes, I would. I think I can include it in my thing if you wanted to check. That was, if I remember correctly, something like middle of 2022. I did not hear back from him for that. So, I did get offered a chance to be part of a committee, but that was the only thing I think we had, wasn't it?

Witness 1 - Yes, and we did make quite a few suggestions there and we were assured that we would be part of the solution. We said yes, we'll help inform, we wouldn't mind joining a working party or just getting the feedback. That's all we wanted.

Witness 2 - This was to a team, this is the Learning Services, so it's clear who we were talking to.

Witness 1 - I was just saying before, I felt we were nursed along, like, you know, you met in a coffee shop. I felt we were just nursed along till we retired and sort of out of the way. You got that incredible feeling. First of all, it's 'What do you want?', and I said, 'Well, you can't give me back myself at the moment, but you can certainly, if I could have a say about some things'. We don't want a shortage of teachers; we want it to be better for them and that's all we're here for.

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Witness 2 - But the interesting thing, ■ was that the said principal, at the very first meeting, the old PNF-type meeting, made it loud and clear that she was going to rid the school of older staff.

Witness 1 - I was there, and it wasn't documented in the notes.

Witness 2 - So, for no other reason but that we were older staff. We were also told by a reliable source that senior staff trained the upcoming senior staff on how to treat teachers to make them want to leave. So, they had professional development around how to bully people. And you could see it. I could see it, the whole team of them, the consistently bullying, the consistently not looking at you. You could talk to them as you were walking down the corridor and they wouldn't answer. Being excluded from emails; having very important information not passed. And they were all doing the same thing.

Witness 1 - The principal weaponised her senior staff with bullying and she demanded loyalty.

Witness 2 - Then they were promoted.

Witness 3 - And that's the thing I think we need because, for me, it came down to going back and facing it all over again or not, and I just couldn't.

I would have liked to have known I could go to somebody and say, 'Look, I'm in this really difficult position. What are my options?' If I'd have been smart - and we weren't smart till later - I had over 300 days of sick leave. I was part-time for my whole career, so you can imagine how long that took to accumulate. I could have just taken a year off, but that's not who I am, that's not how I was brought up. You don't take a sick day unless you're sick.

I think what we need is something where people who get into my position can say, 'Right, I'm desperate, where can I go?', and they can say, 'Right, well, we can get you to take a month off sick leave and then we can review it or maybe we can look at putting you in a new school', or whatever it is. I think that's a real positive, because we thought about it later, that we should have taken some time to think about it when we weren't so raw. I don't know if you've been bullied yourself, but you'll know that there's a point where there's nothing you can do. You're so raw that all you can think of is getting out of there.

Once you gain your strength back, with good colleagues, with family, you think, 'Oh, I should have done that', or, 'I should have been stronger, I could have done that.' But I think we need that way up at the beginning, not afterwards when you've made your decision.

Witness 1 - You're probably asking why some of the teachers who were bullied didn't come forward: mentally and physically, they can't. They can't.

The other thing I must comment on is counsellors. Like when a staff member tried to commit suicide and everyone knew about it, nothing was happening. So, I went to the principal and said, 'You need to get a counsellor in here. Everyone knows about it and they're upset'. Along came the counsellor and I thought, you are just talking about general things like, 'Here's a card if you all want a card, you can come and see a counsellor'. Then when I asked to talk to her and I said, 'Would you mind - ', because there are eyes on you, eyes beaming on you, I said,

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'Could you come into my room, please?' I said, 'What was your brief here?' She said, 'Oh, just to talk about counselling'. I said, 'Do you know what actually has happened in this school? Everyone knows that someone's tried to commit suicide'. She went, 'Oh my god!'; she said, 'What can I do about it?' I said, 'You're the counsellor'. Nothing happened.

The other thing is other staff wouldn't go to departmental counsellors. Everyone was afraid of information getting back. People went to private counsellors; people went to their local medical practice and got, you know, 10 days of mental health. There was so much going on.

Another counsellor heard our stories, and I know she cried when [REDACTED] - then the other thing is the communication. Every year you're meant to have a health and wellbeing, fill in a questionnaire, whatever, and I remember one year saying - and it's meant to be anonymous. So one year, I didn't - I just thought, 'No one takes it'. And the one year I didn't, and the next minute I got an email to say that I hadn't filled it in. Please tell me: how do you get to do that when it was meant to be anonymous. I don't know. So I filled it in, and I actually told them - I thought, 'I'm going to give this a go' - 'Please help me. I need help. I'm in a school where this is happening, I've got someone who has tried to commit suicide. There's someone who's suicidal, and that is not - I haven't got the skills to help'. I waited for an answer. There was no answer. So, the counsellors, the counselling process, needs to be looked at.

Another time, I just went to the principal and said, 'Look, I've got a colleague who's suicidal.' I said, 'You need to pass me on to someone so I can be given the skills'.

Witness 2 - And she started talking about her cats.

Witness 1 - She started talking about her cats. Now there's this person at the top, and saying, 'I've got two cats and really, I would prefer that they didn't die separately, that they died together. It'll be only one lot of grief'. I went, 'Oh my god'. So a fortnight later, I get an email.

[REDACTED]

Mr BAYLEY - This is the principal?

Witness 1 - This is the acting principal. So, wouldn't you as a leader, say, 'Oh my god, [REDACTED] who are we talking about? [REDACTED]

Mr WILLIE - So, that health and wellbeing survey that you filled out, could that be added to to include some of the things you were talking about previously, or -

Witness 1 - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - So, they're obviously doing - I think I remember doing them when I was in the department.

Witness 1 - Yes, but nothing happens. I poured my heart out. I thought, 'Right, I'm going to test this process'. I said, 'Help me. I need help.' Then we found out about counselling. People were going to counsellors, departmental ones, and then we said, 'Well, where's all this going? Where's the follow up?' There was no transparency. You go, you have your say. The counsellor

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doesn't give you any advice; they give you a box of tissues while you cry. So counselling is a big issue for teachers [REDACTED]

Witness 2 - To add to the frustration, we also went to the then Minister for Education. Nothing. No response. We requested a meeting - no.

Witness 1 - There were too many brick walls.

Mr BAYLEY - Didn't get a meeting?

Witness 1 - No, too many brick walls. It's been the story, and it must not be like that, you know, from out of all of this. It must not be like that for our teachers coming in.

Witness 3 - The thing is, I'm sure you all appreciate that teaching is a very difficult profession. At the best of times, teachers need support, counselling, just to get through. Because you add a family, and you know, parents, and everything else. It's a difficult thing, because it is a 24/7 job. If you're a good teacher, it's a 24/7 job. To then add this kind of thing on top of that, it just shows there's a really great need to have support mechanisms in place. Even if - you don't expect one person to deliver them, but you need - like, I should be able to have, 'Oh, here's a list. I think this is the person I need to see today, because this is only a small family issue. I just need to do it; it's impacting on my work'. So I'd do that. Or, 'This is about work; I need someone who's going to look after me here and help me through, and help the other person as well'. So, there needs to be something like that.

It needs to not change when governments change. It needs to not change when money runs out, or we need to cut the budget or whatever. That needs to be in place, because that's the welfare of the people who are teaching the next generations. It's so important.

Mr BAYLEY - You mentioned mentoring as a solution, and I think we can all accept that that's a really good, positive step in your careers, long and experienced as they are. Have you seen it work well? Several decades ago, was it working well?

Witness 1 - Yes, it was working well when we had the district setup like in the Hartz - obviously in both the Derwent and the Hartz. We would be arranging professional development, and you know everyone and you could cross reference and say, 'Well, I need help with this,' if you were stuck. We did a lot of that.

Also in district office, according to [REDACTED], he said that they went out and they mentored principals if they were struggling, and they had such a relationship that they would go out and do it. [REDACTED]

Mr BAYLEY - That fell away with the sort of structural change, away from that three -

Witness 1 - Yes, they mainstreamed everything once again. The district system was an efficient model [REDACTED] to work under. We had consultants. [REDACTED]

Witness 3 - The thing is, what happens now, [REDACTED] is teachers are a really special group of people and they will just look after each other. So if you see a colleague struggling, then two or three of you will be there to support them. Without the structure - I know, [REDACTED] you did it in the office as well with your people - you just step up to the plate and you are mentoring. I guess mentoring may not be quite the right word, but it is that you look after them; you help them when they're struggling; if they're having an issue, 'Look, here, take this, this'll work in your classroom' -

Witness 2 - Because that's the nature of a caring teacher. That's part of our character, if you like, that we do care. I come back to the fact of can you change the character of a person? I don't know. I think with all the mentoring that that said principal would have received, and we were told that that said principal was not to return to a school after wreaking so much havoc in the past two or three schools, yet she did return.

Witness 3 - That was the biggest stab to the heart, that after six or seven schools, that we were told, 'You don't have to worry'. I can still remember - you think, 'Oh, who are we going to get while our principal goes off?' I didn't even consider it because they weren't to come back into a school. So, that was the biggest lie, I think, the department has ever perpetrated that I know of, and I'll never forgive them for that.

Mr WILLIE - Is part of it the employment conditions? It's very difficult for the department to performance manage principals and poor performing teachers, and you see very few being red-flagged and performance managed because it is so difficult to remove them.

Witness 1 - Yes, it is, and I've heard it's quite a process - that people won't go there. I remember one principal saying - I remember one day saying to her - she was saying, 'Oh, I'm really worried about the spelling, we've had all this professional PD and it's not transferring'. I said, 'What?' Isn't there a place for saying "Listen, darling, we all have the best research and I want you to follow this?" And she said, [REDACTED] 'I've been told by the department that you can't tell people, otherwise that might be the final thing that will tip them over'. That was the answer to that, so I just wonder how much of the behaviour that was in breach was just, 'Oh, I can't really say anything'.

I often wondered about that said principal. I remember she came into my classroom after the episode with the other teacher who tried to commit suicide, and I said to her, 'How are you travelling?' And she said, 'Why? Oh, I'm fine'. And I said, 'Well, I just want you to know I'm concerned about two people, but I know that the processes will take care of that situation'. She said, 'I demand loyalty. I am absolutely fine', and went like that and stormed off. Then the next principal in listened to every staff member for one-and-a-half hours and really did nothing. I went and said, 'I'm actually still being bullied.' 'It's not right in a school of the future' he said. And it went on until I left, and I just had to hold my head up high and get on with my love of teaching, which I did. So, there are lots of issues.

Mr BAYLEY - I'd just like to hear from [REDACTED]

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Witness 4 - Just talking about - we mentioned districts, and this is on one of my screeds I've got here. This is a chart of the Department of Education, so you can see there's a lot of offshoots.

I'm here thinking about things going forward. I would dearly love to bring the districts back. We had five districts, and the districts encompassed your superintendent and your senior staff. Your HR was situated there, payroll, queries to position, your staffing, you probably got a green bit of paper when you first got your posting to tell you you were going to Queenstown or something. That all came from a department.

The biggest thing now, and it was proven to us when we met with Mark Watson, Trudy Pearce and Liz Lester, who's a lawyer. We have so many pieces now. We have Learning Services, HR, workplace standards, all that. They do not talk to one another. When we're at this meeting in Letitia House, Mark Watson, who is very well travelled, very knowledgeable, approachable, was astounded about what we brought up because he knew nothing about it.

You've got Learning Services that is over the river in the old Lindisfarne Primary School. You've got HR that is up at Letitia House. We used to have part of us in Highfield. They don't talk to one another.

We bring back Hartz district. They were down Kingston way. Derwent were out here. We had our two up north. We had five districts. Work's impeccable. You could go, you could ring up about your HR; you could ring up about your transfer. They were all together and they were all incredible teams. We should never, ever - and that happened overnight. The districts were just disbanded and then. You know, you look at all that chart. I'm sure lots of people have work charts, and we've all got them.

But the most interesting part going through it - here is Learning Services. They've got principal, leadership and wellbeing. They've got a little section for that. Nowhere is there anything - I don't talk about teachers, I don't talk about TAs, I talk about staff. There's nothing there for where staff go with problems. I mean, when I went, I was ushered along a room because the person I'd come to talk about was best friends with that person and so that person didn't want that person to see me in the building, so I was ushered to - like a cupboard.

Witness 1 - We all experienced that, didn't we? Once again, the social networks that go on with teachers.

Witness 4 - I don't know how you go back to the future, and we don't often. How do we go back to the past? We don't, do we? But how good would it be to bring back districts? They were so workable.

Ms JOHNSTON - Keeping on that theme and thank you for your submission and thank you for coming with solutions and suggestions too, which is fantastic to see.

I'm interested in the district model and then picking up on that theme you talked about earlier and just then as well, [REDACTED] about everyone knows everyone in Tasmania and their connections.

How do you see that working in a district model where potentially the people you're dealing with are a much smaller pool than the current department model, and potentially there

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are relationships and friendships and all sorts of things within a district? How did that work then and how would it work now in terms of trying to manage those conflicts of interest?

Witness 4 - I think when people worked in districts, they were very proud, they were professional and that was our job. We were here. We were here for our staffing, and we were here to provide the best outcome for our children. I think, districts, they were very proud people.

Ms JOHNSTON - It was a cultural thing with those districts, so those relationships might have existed, but the cultures that have overruled those relationships?

Witness 1 - It was such a learning culture too. You had consultants that would come in. You'd go there and take part in professional development. You only had to come along and say, 'Look, you know, I just want to know a little bit more about this area in science'. The morale was good in those days.

Also, the superintendent would be in your school. He'd know you by name and you felt someone had your back. [REDACTED]. Now, I just feel as if we're all alone. We look after ourselves.

Witness 4 - With the districts as well, I was in Derwent, so I'm a northern suburb's people. The people that worked in our district, they knew our people. They knew the northern suburbs. We were different from Hartz. We're a completely different clientele, completely different needs. They knew how to look after our needs, and they were proud. The schools were very proud.

Witness 1 - It was personable. It's impersonable now.

Witness 4 - But on top of that, going into the future, if I had a magic ball, this is what I would wish for schools.

I think now the impact on schools is getting great and, in the future, we may need two senior people in the school. One is a principal who is across all educational matters that impact our children, but underneath the principal, we need a senior CEO that looks after the school building, the staffing, the administration side. So, you have two people working side by side running schools. Principals are too busy worrying about their EFA or dealing with -

Mr WILLIE - When you say 'EFA' you mean education facility attendant?

Witness 4 - Cleaners and groundspeople; now they are EFAs. He or she doesn't need to be worried about that, but you have a senior administration, and you have a principal who's across all education matters.

Mr BAYLEY - In each school, in an ideal world, if you brought back the districts, who would be -

Witness 4 - You probably wouldn't need that. You would have your district looking after your staffing. The worst part now, and I've dealt with HR a lot, I have a nice person that looks after me for six months, so you get to know my staff. Six-months time you take over, they shift them, they rotate them. That may have been a lot of things, but you get relationships with people, and they know your staff. So, district office, you'd have your HR and they would know

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that you're a teacher and you're a kinder teacher and you were senior staff. They would know you as a person. You're not just a number.

Mr WILLIE - Anyone online like to ask a question? Just put your hand up.

Mrs BESWICK - Thanks, Josh. I think you've sort of touched on it a bit, but my curiosity is around the percentage of staff who are, say, admin versus teaching and in, say, a district model as you've described, would that be less or more? You did talk earlier about a school where you got to a point where there were so many senior staff and then no one seems to be doing any work to actually support.

I guess I am asking, where is that balance and how? Because we've obviously gone to a more centralised model. Is it actually saving us any money? Is it making it worse? You're saying it's making it worse from looking after us. Do we have just as many admin staff but they're just not as effective?

Witness 2 - Is that up to the principal's discretion though, the number of senior staff? At our last school there were five - six, including the principal - when the teachers are stressed to the max. I would often ask how that benefited our children. Why weren't they coming in taking little reading groups, taking little maths groups, assessing children? No, but they would be seen and heard laughing up and down the corridors.

So, is that up to the discretion of a principal how they use their senior staff?

Mr WILLIE - I was going to say because it is unusual, that set up.

Witness 2 - There were five senior staff plus a principal.

Witness 4 - Josh, it's become very in vogue now to have senior staff. Like my last one here less senior staff and more funds into teaching staff and all staff within the quota AE that's approved to establish student funding. So, when I went to New Town we had a principal, a second in charge and that was it, and we had 300 and something students. Now we ended up with five senior staff.

Ms JOHNSTON - How many children during that time?

Witness 4 - Probably 300 as well, and when I asked, and I was very brave at a staff meeting, 'Could the senior staff, when we need relief, step up?'. I was cut down, 'Are you saying we don't do our job?' and I really wanted to say, 'Yes, I am saying you're not doing your job'.

Our relief budget was like \$400 for relief, and we had to do that out of school resource package. That was \$400 that I could help a worthy family that needed a uniform or pay for their books or something.

Mr WILLIE - They were probably paying for the senior staff through the SRP as well.

Witness 4 - Or some of them buy it.

Mr WILLIE - Because the enrolment figure wouldn't give you that many senior staff.

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Witness 4 - That is what happened. They changed the quota, and they go into their SRP to put senior staff on. But that's the principal's call, that's the principal's discretion.

Witness 1 - And it's such a waste too of personnel because in the department when supposedly someone goes for promotion, they have the skills, they're seen as leader material, and they have skills. Yet all these people are off class, with whatever little areas that they're working on, but not utilising their skills in classrooms assisting.

Mr WILLIE - They're leading education outcomes.

Witness 1 - The other thing is, too, that the higher you go up, there's a premise that if you're an excellent practitioner, you go into leadership. But not all people who get leadership are excellent practitioners. Sometimes you ask yourself, 'Why are they out of the classroom and heading that way?' Then they get up to the principal's level, and it's probably touching on what you were saying, and then all of a sudden, it's expected that a principal, who started off as a teacher in education, has to have that managerial expertise as well as educational expertise. I've rarely met a principal that can do both. That's why I support the model that the principal should be the educator and have another person doing all those other things in the school.

They must be able to talk education. I chose leadership in the classroom. I love it. But you must be able to go to senior staff and discuss ideas and become a better teacher and seek professional development the whole time.

Ms DOW - Thanks very much for coming in today. I know that it can't have been easy to come and share your experiences, but we've really gleaned a lot from you this afternoon. I just want to thank you for doing that and having the courage to do that.

You're obviously all passionate educators who've had [inaudible] worked in education, and passionate about education and providing for young people across Tasmania. One of the things that we grapple with, I suppose, in politics, is around attraction and retention of teaching staff across the state. It's a significant issue that continues to come up through this process. I just wondered - you've talked about valuing teachers and the importance of that, but do you have some ideas about how that could be done better across the state?

Witness 1 - I know years ago they used to have - for first-year out teachers, they would go to Diamond Island and they'd all meet from across the state. They'd have people speaking to them, and then they'd have discussion groups where they could share what is working well, what isn't working well. I guess that stopped because of the financial situation, but that was great.

On staff also, and I can remember when I was on the north-west, that you're asked - a new teacher comes along, and you're asked to mentor them, to support them. That still happens in schools. [redacted] the other thing that concerns me is the number of young teachers who have all been sitting in the northern suburbs for so long. They need to come out and experience the other side of teaching. You know, go down to the schools in Sandy Bay- I mean, when I left [redacted] one teacher is still down there, 23 years later in total.

Witness 3 - Need a transfer policy.

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Witness 1 - Send her out to some of the hardship schools. If she fails, then she's got to think about where does she stand. But take some of these young teachers out and give them the opportunity so they can flourish. [REDACTED]

Witness 3 - I think the transfer policy has always been a big problem, because if you knew someone, if you could cry well, if you played football, you could virtually get a transfer from wherever. But if you were just a hardworking person who got Edith Creek, then getting back home was difficult.

The thing for me, when I think about my time teaching, nobody ever came up to me for no reason and just said, 'By golly, you're doing a great job. We thank you for what you did with that child and that family today'. The only time I had anything like that was a more general thing. I had one principal who often would say, 'It's been a day. Everybody go home now'. You know, 3.00 p.m., you had to stay until 3.30 p.m., but he would send us home. That was the only time you were valued, and that didn't happen often enough, because that kind of thing can't happen.

Who walked down the corridor and said, 'Wow'? The only time you heard anything was when you had complaints. Then said principal would have an interview without you with that parent again, and you would have no idea what was ever said about you. No support, no support.

That was part of the reason that I couldn't go on, because I did not have the support of my principal. I knew I had done nothing wrong. The parent was being difficult. Everybody from previous years with this parent knew they were difficult, but that principal has to have your back and say, 'Thank you. Gosh, that was a hard parent, we'll have to watch that. Look, come to me, we'll do this together,' all that kind of thing.

Being valued; I mean, we do that in our families easily, we do that with our friends, we say thank you for having my back, but teachers are never told that for anything. I think, if you want to retain them, you need to show them just how valuable you are, you need to treat us - because I still think I'm a teacher - like gold! You need to treat us as if you can't do without us, and I think we're getting to a point where you can't do without us good people.

Ms DOW - I agree. Thank you very much, just one last one, Chair. Just the things that you've mentioned that you'd like to see improvements around was a questionnaire, the health and wellbeing survey, more available counselling, mentoring, the district model being implemented again, and that split leadership model of education and then more governance, business administration in a principal role. Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to leave with the committee around changes to the current system?

Witness 3 - I think it was your point, wasn't it, [REDACTED] accountability for when it's been recognised.

Ms DOW - Thank you, I have nothing further.

Mr SHELTON - First, thank you very much, ladies, for coming in. It's marvellous to hear your experiences. Josh is a younger generation of teacher that's come through post you, yourself, and, I must admit now, I'm a 30-year veteran of the TAFE system, an automotive

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teacher. A couple of questions. One, Josh mentioned performance management of principals. Are there processes in place to performance manage principals through the education system?

Witness 2 - We used to have the school review.

Witness 1 - You're right, and now they have a system where three or four principals are asked to go to a school. They will ask questions, they will talk to all the teachers about what's happening, they'll interview them, and then, ideally, it all comes back to a conversation with the principal of what's happening in the school. So, yes, and there are recommendations that are made to the principal about the school. That does still happen.

Witness 4 - But probably once every four years.

Witness 1 - Yes, you're right, there's that, but there needs to be a lot more and perhaps with principal indoctrination -

Mr SHELTON - Because as one of you have already mentioned, and I have a sporting background, and the reality is, through life, not all good AFL players make good coaches and not all good teachers make good principals.

WITNESSES - Absolutely.

Mr SHELTON - So even though individuals may have aspirations and they are very good at promoting themselves, it doesn't necessarily mean they'll actually turn out as a good principal. That's the first thing.

In my teaching career, I ended up as an AST-1, teaching and mentoring some of the younger people coming through, The question in your system is, are AST-1s still utilised in that fashion or is it seen as a promotable position and turned into management? I mean the aim of an AST, advanced skills teacher, was to allow good teachers that encouragement to stay in the classroom and to show their skills. I'm just wondering what's happening in the system, if they're being used as promotable positions.

Witness 4 - AST 1, 2, and 3 have gone. We just have senior staff. They're just all senior staff, same level, but your 1, 2, and 3s are well and truly gone, which is something else they could bring back. But we can't turn the clock back, so [REDACTED] move on, I don't know how.

Witness 3 - The other thing is, there's no encouragement to be - like, for me, I wanted to be a classroom teacher, but I also wanted a leadership role. I took on those leadership roles and I did it within my classroom time and that. We, as a group, sort of said that was needed to recognise these people. I can't remember the name of it, but there was a whole group of teachers met nationally and there became a something you could apply for, and you would have to meet criteria. Can you remember the name of it, [REDACTED]

Mr WILLIE - Lead Teachers?

Witness 3 - Yes, Lead Teachers. But it costs \$10,000. If you didn't pass, you lost your money and you had to pay that money again. All the classroom teachers who were leaders just said, 'No'.

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Witness 1 - And they hounded you. I remember being asked to do it. Then I said, 'Well, I'm interested in helping, mentoring other teachers'. Then I got, 'Oh, it's going to cost you \$10,000'. I said, 'No way, I'll do it for free'. How many people would apply for that? You know, \$10,000.

Mr WILLIE - The department should pay for that.

Witness 1 - Can't, they're too busy. And that's only one shoot. Goodness knows what I've missed out.

Mr WILLIE - Anything further, Mark?

Mr SHELTON - That's it for me, thanks.

Mr BAYLEY - I have one more.

Mr WILLIE - You go and I'll summarise.

Mr BAYLEY - I wanted to tap into your collective experiences less around the department and more about teachers, and what the university is producing when it comes to teachers. How school-ready are they, how classroom-ready are they, et cetera? What has changed over the decades that you've been involved and what do you think has precipitated that change?

Witness 2 - That's a really interesting point. I often found that a lot of uni students, like the fourth-year trained uni students that came out, weren't really well equipped to step into a classroom. Unfortunately we were told that if we failed them, they needed to stay with us until -

Mr BAYLEY - This is when they were on their pracs?

Witness 2 - until we could - yes. Looking again at training these teachers at the course, yes, I don't think they're really ready enough to step into a classroom.

Witness 1 - I totally agree with you. If I can just relate to my own experience, I started off at teachers college. Teachers college, advanced college, and then I went back and got my university degree. The most beneficial experience was teachers college. We had the most passionate teachers. I can remember them. I don't know that they were the most well-qualified. It didn't matter. But now you have to have a certain standard of degree to teach [REDACTED]. They were passionate about their subjects. We actually were in schools: every week a different school, taking notes, watching children. We learned about pedagogy, we learned about behavioural management. We all demonstrated in front of each other. I loved it there. That's where I learned absolutely everything and my passion for teaching [REDACTED] - because I had these incredible people.

[REDACTED]

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I agree with [REDACTED] I've had some very academic university students and you have to spend extra time with them. I had another one for seven weeks. I said, 'I think I can get her there, but just took' - I mean, I didn't want to be paid for it. We got her there, so -

Witness 2 - Does there need to be a closer relationship between the university lecturers and senior staff - let's call them experienced teachers -

Witness 1 - Yes, that's right.

Witness 2 - Working together to design the courses?

Witness 1 - Yes. Also, they did at one stage take teachers out - I remember going down to the university and talking about the beginning of the year and spelling programs. Those university students were lapping it up. What they need is what you're saying: more contact with professional teachers.

COVID interrupted it but teachers are not getting that experience. I had six weeks' country experience out on pracs to different schools, lower socioeconomic, and then into another area. It was fantastic. They're not getting that and they're actually expressing how nervous they are about getting out because they haven't had that experience.

Witness 2 - They're not prepared.

Witness 3 - The thing is, the university needs to look at their teachers. When's the last time those teachers were passionate about being in a classroom? How long is it since they've been even close to entering a classroom? When you think about those teachers who you got the most from, who gave you the best, they were the ones who really loved what they're doing. They loved their topic. They were not so far away. You have to be close to it, and if they can't do that, then they need to direct their students to the teachers who are in the classroom.

Witness 1 - And they should be a chosen lot of people who are excellent practitioners. I have seen some miserable university students who just think, 'Oh, if this is what teaching's about, I'm not going to do it.' So, they have to be very careful about the selection of teachers that they are mentored by as well. But there needs to be work done, definitely, at that level.

Mr BAYLEY - Great, thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you for your contributions today. You've made some excellent recommendations. The trouble we have, though, is because it's in camera, we have to have evidence in the public domain to make recommendations. My question would be whether we could review the transcript potentially, go through it and highlight any areas that are concerning. These excellent recommendations you've made today, we can potentially publish those?

WITNESSES - Yes.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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The committee adjourned at 3 p.m.