

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO DIGITAL INNOVATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 19 AUGUST 2020**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Ms J.M. Freeman (Chair)
Mr Ian Blayney
Ms J. Farrer
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Ms S.E. Winton**

Hearing commenced at 10.02 am**Dr DEBRA SAYCE****Executive Director, Catholic Education Western Australia, examined:****Mr MATTHEW FERRINDA****Team Leader, Digital Learning, Catholic Education Western Australia, examined:****Dr EDWARD SIMONS****Director, Governance and Digital Technology, Catholic Education Western Australia, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thank you for coming. It is great to have you here. As you know, we did a previous report and we are now doing a follow-up on that report. I need to make an opening statement and then we will progress through some questions we have. We had your submissions, and they were really great, so thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide input and comment on remote learning, with particular reference to lessons learned as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This follows last year's inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education. My name is Janine Freeman. I am the Chair of the Education and Health Standing Committee, and I am going to introduce you to the other members of the committee. On my right is Mr Zak Kirkup, he is the Deputy Chair; on my left is Sabine Winton, and on her left is Ian Blayney. Ian is new to the committee, so it is his first meeting. He will ask you lots of questions no doubt. We have our clerks, our research officers and Hansard here today. It is important that you understand any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege, however, the privilege does not apply to anything that you might say outside of today's proceedings.

Before we begin, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

The WITNESSES: No.

The CHAIR: Did you want to make a brief opening statement, or are you happy?

Dr SAYCE: Just to tell the narrative of Catholic Education Western Australia. We serve 163 schools located out in the state, from the most northern being Kununurra, right down to Esperance. Amidst there, the different context, being primary, secondary, composite schools, which go from pre-kindergarten right through to year 12. We also have curriculum and re-engagement schools, CARE schools, which are those schools whose mainstream education does not serve them well. We have four—we just opened our fourth one up in Broome this semester. We also have early learning centres. We have two schools that provide long day care, if you like, or early childhood education; and we have one standalone early childhood education centre. So, 76 000 children, around 11 000 staff who work in our schools throughout the state. That is us.

The CHAIR: That is great. Thank you very much. At the start of term 2, according to the information you provided, some year 7 to 10 students returned to school while others remained at home—so some schools streamed lessons. Was this about making it easier for teachers so they did not have to teach two modes at once or so that all students were being taught in the same way and no group was seen as disadvantaged? Do you just want to take us through this? You can talk about what happened at the end of the first semester or term if you want to so that it makes it clear about what happened when you came back.

Dr SAYCE: When the issue of COVID was occurring more and more, our director for teaching and learning convened a group of staff—principals, deputies, assistant principals—to work on a game plan, so to speak, of how we go forward should schools close down, so the school response plan was formulated. In fact, as it was established with input there were some key questions that schools had to work out the narrative, because 163 schools all have a varying context and some schools, and the remote schools, would have a different context to city schools. In order for schools to respond, they had to work out for their own context. That happened very early on and we sent that information out to our schools, and from there the school leadership team then worked with their staff to develop a plan of how do we go forward with all of this; that happened around March.

Just prior to Easter, some of the remote Kimberley schools actually closed down earlier because of border closures. The communities made some decisions around what they were going to do, and we did not want to set up our staff to be locked down in a community, and also very mindful if they were to leave the community then that whole quarantine period had to be enacted. That was a long time for schools not to be open, but we had to make that decision fairly quickly for the remote schools. Then we had the week before Easter, where all our staff were preparing—actually I will go back a step. One of the key elements is working cross-sectorally with the Department of Education—with Lisa Rodgers, and with Valerie Gould, the executive director for independent schools—very close collaboration, meeting twice weekly at times with key people just talking through and making sure we were in sync. The schools in that last week of Easter, the teachers were preparing for what the four weeks would look like, because that is what we thought was the game plan; in fact, that was signed off during the school holidays, the Easter holiday period.

The CHAIR: If you could just go back, the game plan, was that in term 2 you would be off for four weeks?

Dr SAYCE: Up to three to four weeks.

The CHAIR: Which did not actually eventuate, did it?

Dr SAYCE: No, because things changed very quickly with government, but Catholic Ed actually stuck to that, so the preparation—those four, five days that teachers had—we were honouring that, but also the work that they had undertaken because, all of a sudden, people had to move into the digital space and they needed time to do that and not have school. Schools were open for the vulnerable kids and certainly for our essential workers as well. We did not close schools. When term 2 started, Wednesday—because Monday was a public holiday, Tuesday was a staff development day—our year 11 students were back at schools, those who could be back at school. In fact, one of our schools, particularly around children with English as a second language and their families, rang every year 11 and 12 student to say “School is starting on Wednesday”, because the kids would say to their parents, “No, school is not open.” They were very astute in doing that! So, they did that. That Wednesday we were pretty much open.

[10.10 am]

But we chose one form of delivery, which was online support, apart from children in early years and so forth. That was a bit of a contentious issue, but we worked through that. Meanwhile, we always said that if there was a tipping point in that school, in that classroom, if more children—75, 80 per cent—then, of course, with the teacher, let us open it up and go back to classroom teaching face-to-face, what people are used to. That period of time was a little bit tricky but our staff knew they had prepared for three to four weeks of work on a different format. It was not classroom face to face; it was either hard packs for the younger children or whether it be for online learning experience.

From that, we also, every week, one of the great things with our platform, I was able to communicate with all of our principals and we had conversations, talking about the tipping point of the classroom, but also talking about what the needs were. Our directorate for teaching and learning, along with the other directorates, worked really in earnest with schools and problem solving.

Because it was not just that; it was all the issues that parents had, all the issues staff had, and all the staffing issues with our staff being unwell or caring for children or caring for elderly. So, it was a big movement through this period. It was not just the delivery; we had to care for our teachers as well. I think holding ground, if I can say it that way, to just having the first three weeks is going to be this format that you have planned for, it gave confidence and comfort to our teachers and then they were ready, when we reached that tipping point, to go forward.

The CHAIR: In terms of the tipping point, have you done any analysis of which cohort of students tended to come back versus which cohort of students tended to stay for that whole period, the three weeks? Were there socioeconomic issues around that or cultural issues around that, or was it just dependent on the school and the differences?

Dr SAYCE: It depended on the parents—the parents' confidence of the safety and wellbeing of their children and their capacity to work with them at home. I think that was the really important piece. Some parents, absolutely not a problem, and some parents struggled. Particularly children with disabilities, particularly children with autism, they needed a structured environment and maybe home life was not structured. We were very conscious of the children with special needs and those vulnerable groups—those families that had circumstances where members of the family were either aged or very young, and so it was a bit of a mixing pot.

The CHAIR: If it depended on the parents—and what you know now, it depended on the parents—and it is our hope that that should not occur in Western Australia, but if we had a situation where you had to go back to teaching remotely, how have you viewed the support of parents? How would you assist parents so they did not need to feel, “Look, I can't cope with this or I don't have the capacity for this remote learning or the hard learning”? Have you thought about that in terms of your post-assessment of that period of time?

Dr SAYCE: Yes. Just take a step back, and I might hand over to Matt. One of the things we just finished yesterday was a 10-forum roadshow, talking to all of our principals throughout the state. We had it in various locations where we actually debriefed significantly on COVID-19, and we have only just finished yesterday, so we are collecting that data. But, listening anecdotally, different capacities of schools and their arrangements, whether it be in the Kimberley or whether it be in the metro, required different responses. The schools actually listened to what the situation was and they responded accordingly. I am not sure, Matt or Ed, if you would like to add?

Dr SIMONS: I am happy to come in and start, Debra. I think we are fortunate. Catholic Ed, four or five years ago now, began a digital transformation process and we are now reaping the benefits of that in place, so one digital ecosystem across all school settings. In theory, that means that every student and every staff member gets access to the same digital resources. That came about to try to safeguard those schools that for resource or geographical settings just have not had access to that opportunity. In theory, it now means that every one of our nearly 11 000 staff members—the fifth largest non-government employer in the state—can communicate, collaborate, share resources, and that stood us in fantastic stead with the challenges that were faced. It is because of the work, therefore, that has gone on over previous years, and work that we share with the department, fully collaborating with them on further that enabled all the work of the teachers in

resources, supported through the office, but obviously at the coalface, which is where the real work went on, to deliver what was really pretty good at-home remote learning.

The technology stood up fantastically well. Catholic Ed WA is held up as a global case study on the work that has taken place through Microsoft in the K–12 space, and that infrastructure allowed teaching and learning to take place, which Matt can speak to.

Mr FERRINDA: The point that I will add is that anecdotally, from the roadshows, we have had a chance to review and think about our quality of education delivery. Whilst many of it was just trying to replicate face to face, and some schools were able to do that, better placed than others, depending on their context. Now, we are looking at: What does remote learning look like? If we had to go again, what are the capabilities that we want to focus on? We highlighted that on page 5 of our report. Is that focus on our digital skills, critical thinking, independence, collaboration? So, we are actually looking at how we deliver our curriculum and deliver the teaching and learning experience differently, so rather than just going from a straight face-to-face to an online forum.

The CHAIR: Yes. It is looking at that whole aspect of teaching somewhat differently. But you still had a number of schools that had physical packs, rather than digital online, and that interaction would have been much harder. How much was it a problem for their learning—the hard packs and the physical packs? Did you identify that in your roadshow and in your assessment as a disadvantage for those students? Can you give us a bit of background as to why that was chosen, given that you had rolled out for some number of years your IT strategies in schools? What caused that to happen?

Dr SAYCE: The hard packs were for children. We do not expect our children to be online or using devices all the time, so that was one aspect. It is also equity—do parents have access to the internet? We know, even in areas like down south, in beautiful areas like Margaret River, there are blackspots—there is no internet connection. That was equity of access of devices, but also connectivity, so the schools had to make that decision of what children needed. Some farming communities just do not have the internet, so they would have a hard pack and an array of learning opportunities through a hard pack. Then, of course, we have some students who have access to everything. We had to manage that space, and schools were in the best place to know what was required. We had to access dongles, just to access the internet, in order for kids to get on the web and so forth. We are very conscious about what the needs were for those children, and not having access to devices, not having access to the connectivity, that was why they would get hard packs. Younger children, as we said, we do not want them in front of a device a lot of the time, so how that was responded to through the hard packs was an important piece.

The CHAIR: Is the expectation for students at Catholic Ed schools to bring their own device? Is that the expectation when you come to school, or is that done on a school-by-school basis? Does that create a digital divide for those people who cannot afford that digital device and also do not have access to the internet? But, equally, is the hardware that you are requiring, the laptop, of such an age, like only four years old or whatever, to sit in your system, that they cannot even access old laptops and refurbished laptops for that school? Can you just give me an outline of how that works?

Dr SIMONS: I am happy to speak to that and I know Matt and Debra will also. There is a digital divide, like there is in any workplace, regardless, with connectivity and the ability to try to close that gap. Just in response to the earlier point—because I think that is an interesting one—about those that did have access and those that did not: we know that in a typical setting, digital can make a good teacher even better in a normal classroom setting, but digital and technology can almost also make a lesser teacher worse. Just because there is access does not mean that that child did or did not get a stronger or a weaker education opportunity. I think it is fair to say that digital provided opportunities for those staff who were able to realise those in a unique way. Every school takes its

own setting on devices and whether those are provided by the family or provided by the school. We are doing specific work in the Kimberley right now to explore how we can provide greater access to digital resources for those students and those families up in the 13, 14 schools across the Kimberley.

It is fair to say the technology businesses are also exploring how they can bring down prices to enable greater access for all. Obviously, we work very close with Microsoft and Apple in that technology space, and I think it is one that, across all system sectors in Western Australia and probably across Australia, we need to be clearer on who gets access, in what way, at what cost, at what age group, what security settings are in place. Again, we know because of one ecosystem, it meant all of our students, all of our staff, were on Microsoft Teams. We had no issue with Zoom security and people that could or could not get access to our system. We know the cybersecurity threat that was posed during that period and beyond has been heightened, and we are, obviously, tracking that back in the office. It is complex; it is complicated, but I think there is an interesting piece of work because of what we have now, which we will need to review closely to then share those findings with the department and with private schools, and also to receive their findings back to us also. As Debra alludes to, the three system sectors work really well in that space, so I think there is an opportunity to consider the statewide response to it and how we can all collectively improve from that.

[10.20 am]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I just want to follow-up, if I can, on just one point you were talking about—the teachers. I note in your report you said that during week 10 there was a significant emphasis on professional learning for teachers and the program that was rolled out. Can you tell us a little bit more about that in terms of was it to specific schools or was it a systemic thing that came in over the top to give everyone coverage, and how did that go? Further to that, is there more that needs to be done in preparation if we go again?

Dr SAYCE: I think Matt could be well placed because his directorate was very involved with this. But, suffice to say, teachers need time to prepare and think through the needs of their children. If you are secondary, you have got multiple classes as well. It is not just, “Okay, we will just do online learning for this subject.” But what does that actually look like, because we are looking at not just delivery, but it is also about the engagement of that student and what is best for their learning needs. That certainly gave time and breathing space for teachers not to have the classroom. They could not do dual things—they could not be teaching and preparing for shutdown, so we gave them that time. The team worked hard with that.

Mr FERRINDA: Just before I explain what we did in that week, obviously recognising that this would not be a normal traditional method of teaching, you would not be delivering in an online-only explicit environment where there are large cohorts, it is normally a blended model or a hybrid model. That is something to consider. That was quite a unique time; it is not a normal delivery pedagogically.

What we did in week 10, cross-directorately—in consultation with our religious education directorate and our school improvement directorate—is we actually ran a series of around 50 online workshops and networking events, through Teams. That meant that anyone in the state could access at that time. We also recorded those online as well, that were uploaded into Microsoft Stream, so our teachers or staff could access that as they needed. It was done at the point of need, so some was on a needs basis, but some was also from the Office delivery app, so that meant that we were able to run specific forums around what does assessment look like and what does communication look like in this space, and helping contextualise that. I know that a number of

networks had their own meetings so regardless of whether it was a regional or other geographical location, they were able to stay connected during that time as well.

Dr SIMONS: As Matt alludes to, the power of the platform also means that the office can, at times, just get out of the way and we can let the teachers communicate and collaborate with each other across schools and within schools through natural networks that have evolved.

The CHAIR: Were there limits to the platform, though? Were you talking about a Microsoft platform, then?

Dr SIMONS: Yes, I am. We are in a call with the managing director of Microsoft next week, who has been close to the project for a number of years. It has been extraordinary and we are really well placed, and clearly it is fair to say that there have been challenges in a number of education systems nationally in delivering what we have done. The CEWA digital ecosystem case study is referred to globally because of what it has achieved, which has been extraordinary. Of course, there is further work to do and, of course, it will evolve over time, but it has stood us up in a really powerful way. We evolved from about 12 000 active users on Microsoft Teams, which is the hero product that we have used, to about 55 000 in the space of a couple of weeks, and that bolted together pretty seamlessly.

The CHAIR: What about cost—it is not prohibitive?

Dr SIMONS: Our school licensing covers the access to the Office 365 tool, so Microsoft Teams, and Stream, which Matt alluded to, where the videos are stored. These licences are already purchased by schooling systems—the department, such as ours, and private schools. It is a case of utilising them and switching them on in a way in which they all speak to each other. The decision that was made was to sweep all the legacy platforms aside and just create one uniform system for security, for analytics, which is work which is progressing, and for that connectivity and collaboration.

The CHAIR: What seems to be happening in public schools is that some people use a Google platform and some people use a Connect platform, so each school can do the other stuff. Some of it is free-sourced platforming and stuff like that. That does not happen in the Catholic system at all?

Dr SIMONS: It is still evolving, through the professional conversations, as to what teachers decide in their classroom because they found a fantastic app or a resource which can fly you into looking at a beating heart or whatever it might be, and it would be crazy for a central office to determine what can and cannot be used. We need to be mindful of the security settings on that—are we putting in kids' private data, which is then being stored?

The CHAIR: Are they taking photos of their eyes!

Dr SIMONS: Are they taking photos, putting in their dates of birth and their home addresses? So, we are always mindful of the safety and wellbeing of students. But at the system level, at the enterprise level, there is now very little choice; it is across a central ecosystem. That means that data that has typically in the past—much like the example of the department—been stored in different places in different ways, it is hard for that to be bolted together and for analysis to be put across it. That complication is no longer in place.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: You said you were doing a report into that and how the whole change, if you like, worked, I would assume. Is there some kind of analysis to try and judge the effectiveness of how that worked and, if it was, from what I have read and just watching my fourth year uni student son trying to work completely online, is there an effort to try and judge the effectiveness or was it not long enough to be really able to pinpoint that?

The CHAIR: Can I just add to that, because one of our questions is: the Grattan Institute had a report that cautions against the rapid use of digital tools in the next six months, which is the sort of thing

that Ian is saying. That information about what is most valuable—is digital learning actually as valuable as what we think? The education department came in and said that the primacy is still that teachers before kids is the best way to teach.

Dr SAYCE: Can I add that the other part to this is the social and emotional wellbeing of the child. We know one of the desires of young people to get back to school was to be with their mates, with their friends, and have that dynamic back, so recess, mornings, and probably during class time. It is not just the learning, it is the development of the whole child, because alongside all of this is what is happening at home. We also know that children have come back from environments—and the Commissioner for Children and Young People gave an address cross-sectorally, because we were looking at children’s mental health and wellbeing, and he said that one of the things from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was putting them into a context such as the home because that is the highest level where children are abused, putting them back at home, so some children have experienced trauma, and when they come back to school, we have to work through this.

Why I say that is this is really important, about the mental health and wellbeing of kids, because they are still dealing with how their family has experience in COVID, not just financially but the lockdowns, and all of those sorts of things, and we see that happening, certainly in Victoria. Why I say this is one of the key elements when we did this for a period of time was to connect with family and for the principals and the school leaders to call families and say, “Hey, how are you going?” It is about the teaching and learning that is occurring with the child but also to listen to them. Some of our principals were saying it took a 30-minute phone call for one family because they just wanted to say how they were feeling.

It is that whole picture of that child that we are very interested in, not just the learning engagement. If there is anything we can learn from this, it is how we can communicate with the family to support that child in their whole development rather than just the learning experience. I am probably not answering your question, but it is a really important piece. We talk about *Maslow before Bloom*—the child’s needs need to be met first and foremost before they can learn. So, if they are experiencing trauma or they are desperately unhappy and all the things that are associated when kids are by themselves, then we need to address that. So we need our staff to be very sensitive to the children’s needs and to work with families and ultimately support the family in that sort of circuitous way.

The CHAIR: I suppose the question is: is digital learning all that it is cracked up to be? It was a useful tool, but the question really is: has that period of time that you had, particularly the four weeks at the beginning of the year, given a better sense of what is useful in terms of online programs and what is not useful in terms of online programs?

Mr FERRINDA: I am happy to answer that one. Look, I think when you made the comment around the department’s comment around face-to-face learning versus online and instructional remote learning, if you are just going to substitute and use technology to delivery face-to-face method via technology, then absolutely get the students in front of you.

It is around the digital pedagogy and how you are actually constructing that learning experience, which requires craft and teacher capacity and also an ecosystem to support that as well. It is more around the digital pedagogy and the way of teaching rather than just trying to replicate and use technology in an online capacity. That is something that we have definitely highlighted and I think for us, obviously, it was not enough of a period of working in that space to see some real value in getting teachers thinking creatively and critically around how they can actually construct the learning experience for their classes and for their children. Some schools are better equipped

because they have been living in that space. I think our ecosystem meant that we were able to just get started and have a go, but then obviously returning back to face-to-face within a couple of weeks meant that we were not in that space.

[10.30 am]

Ms S.E. WINTON: If your staff were required to do it again, what sort of confidence have you that they are prepared in that scenario? Further to that, do you seek to get feedback on the Victorian experience and what is happening in Catholic Ed over there, in terms of helping you to shape your response or preparedness?

Dr SAYCE: Absolutely. We had a debrief last week in a national teleconference from Catholic Ed in Melbourne and how they are going through it all, too, so we are learning all the time. We have to expose our young people to different forms of learning. Technology is one important piece going forward, because all of us have multiple devices—those who have access to it. I think we have to be watching all the time. Our desire is to have the child in front of us, but we have a program called ViSN—Virtual School Network—which we reported on at the last education committee meeting. We are able to provide ATAR subjects to students in remote areas. In smaller groups, some of our regional high schools do not have the full complement of subjects that students can access, so that enables the student to be part of a virtual classroom somewhere around Western Australia, where the teacher can provide them an opportunity to learn in that subject area.

An important caveat to that is that those students who are enrolled in our ViSN program, which is a virtual school network, come together for a camp at the start of the year. They get to know their virtual classmates so that that collaboration across students occurs. They also get to know the teacher who is teaching that particular subject. This is our third year, and we have just undertaken a review to find out—because we want to constantly fine-tune. We had five students who were locked down in China and were enrolled in our schools, and because of the relationship Microsoft has with China, those students were able to access the ViSN platform and continue on the best they could from such a distance away, and were able to continue their ATAR subjects as well. We were really quite pleased about that—that the students were able to continue their learning in a format that they were used to, but also engage with, if they had not encountered that.

The CHAIR: Have they been able to come back now, those students?

Dr SAYCE: Yes, but in an interesting, circuitous way back home!

Dr SIMONS: I think teachers will be more prepared, having experienced it once. I think teachers are very tired; I think everyone is exhausted, regardless of what school they are teaching in, in Western Australia. As we acknowledge, our experience is different from other jurisdictions and other settings internationally, but they are tired. Their role has had to change for a variety of reasons, including classroom space management and keeping it clean. Obviously that has presented challenges, especially in non-government schools, around the need to resource more cleaning requirements. But I think it is also fair to say that, to a certain extent, parents are also giving us triggers. They can vote with their feet, and we are very conscious of the fact that parents are fee payers. We have a variety of mechanisms to keep fees down in Catholic schools. Our Health Care Card program means it is \$1 a day for many, many families across Catholic schools in Western Australia, but the reality is that we were conscious of the fact that the financial implications of COVID-19 could well result in significantly negative impacts on enrolments. The recent census confirms that that has not been the case; parents have maintained enrolments at existing levels. In fact, they have grown in a number of settings. That comes to the point that parents have obviously experienced, whether it is through digital or through the pastoral care and wellbeing of students, something in Catholic Education where not only have they held enrolments, but have actually

grown. This is not about who has done what and who has done things differently, but what we have done has obviously been well regarded by the parents and the staff, to enable it to happen.

The CHAIR: You also said in your submission that attendance rates continue to be lower in remote communities, where digital learning is not an option. What is the likely impact of disruption to learning for these students, and what are you doing to prevent that and to try to address that?

Dr SAYCE: We are really conscious of that. In fact, cross-sectorally, we have discussed this. We have a meeting up in Broome in mid-September through sector systems with principals to learn, listen and say, “How do we go forward?” One gentleman, an Aboriginal man, said to us, “It is not just the child going to school; they are actually on land and they are learning culturally and they are with their elders.” To think that they are not at school in a formal setting is not an appropriate way, in some instances. We are really conscious of that. One of the key elements is the boarding aspect. We have a number of Aboriginal students from remote communities boarding in Perth. Trying to get them back into a school context has been challenging, but we have navigated that space because where we have a school—typically it is primary-age school—the students in secondary have been able to go into the school to be supported in their learning, particularly for access to connectivity and devices as well. But that is an issue, and it is always our concern.

Regional and remote students, purely by looking at NAPLAN results around the nation, are geographically disadvantaged. How we keep working with families and communities and schools in those contexts, to support the attention of students attending schools, is a really important piece. There is no answer other than to keep on working, and working collaboratively. Ideally, if children are moving from school to school, and families do that, and also interstate as well, to Northern Territory and South Australia, how we can land on the type of education they need for, say, literacy and numeracy, is crucial for them.

The CHAIR: In the evidence given by the Department of Education last week, they talked about their different strategies for ATAR testing. What particular issues are going on for Catholic Ed around ATAR if we have a situation of a particular school? I assume you do your ATAR at the schools.

Dr SAYCE: Yes.

The CHAIR: So what are the strategies around that?

Dr SAYCE: Again, we will work with the department and independent schools. If schools are closed down for cleaning or whatever, then we will work. Schools are very good at collaborating together. As I said, our roadshows have been at schools. We have halls where kids can be spaced out, if that is what is needed, to undertake an exam. At the moment it has not hit our radar, so to speak, but there are contingencies in which schools can work in larger spaces to undertake the assessment. The school curriculum assessment authority has been fantastic, and almost every contingency has been looked at, should anything happen. I can absolutely say that for a child doing year 12 this year, they will be incredibly supported going forward. I have also said of year 11 students going forward, their disruption and confidence and their capacity, that needs to be closely monitored, and perhaps the current year 10s as well, because we do not know; it could be two or three years before we emerge from this. We are always looking ahead, not just the current immediacy of the year 12s—they have only a few more weeks left of school—but also certainly the year 11s, who have had disruption as well. Maybe going forward, as a state, we have done extraordinarily well, and maybe that will hold us in good stead, but I am not sure; the year 11s and possibly the year 10s as well.

Dr SIMONS: ATAR is clearly a consideration for all of us, as is vocational education and training, and ensuring that those kids can get workplace placements. For the ATAR students, absolutely, but also for all students in year 12, regardless of what pathway they are following.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Just a quick question. I understand in your submission about the issues you have had with regard to entering the Kimberley, obviously particularly for teachers when intrastate borders were put in place and the biosecurity zone, which was a good move. In that context, if there is a possible suburb-by-suburb lockdown or postcode-by-postcode lockdown in Western Australia, where you cannot enter, similar to Victoria where we have seen that you cannot enter that postcode, what is the capacity for Catholic Ed, if one of your schools is subject to that lockdown, to quickly move to basically re-orientate to entirely digital? The challenge in Victoria seemed to be that some people were in it, some people were outside the postcode or section, so there was that mix of people who can and cannot participate in going into the school setting. Have you put strategies in place to deal with that?

Dr SAYCE: Yes, our school response plan, which all schools now have to submit, and we have them all now, they are vigilant to that. What is the need to activate that plan? It is not just COVID; it could be anything, but that response plan is going to be really important and unique to that school. The plans have been submitted to us and we are there to support and help, and we are familiar with it. We can, for that period of time, certainly work through it. It will not just be in digital. Some small primary schools, young children, they will not get that sort of learning experience; it will be hard packs and so forth. I think we are confident that every school is prepared, and what that will look like will be tested, I guess.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Thank you, I appreciate that. How quickly can one of the schools, on average, respond to a lockdown? If we use the Victorian government model, I think the Premier and the government in Victoria gave 48 hours' notice on a Friday for effect on Sunday. As part of the school response plan that has been put together, is there an understanding about how quickly those schools might individually reorientate in that event?

[10.40 am]

Dr SAYCE: I have an expectation that they would. It will take mad scrambling, no doubt, to get communications out to families. We have had 39 communications out to our school principals. Every time Health or government made an announcement, we would follow and parallel it to our contacts and send it out, so principals are very aware. The most recent one is "be prepared". The school response plan is a really important one that you have to make sure is shiny and ready to deliver. Therefore, I would be confident to say that our principals and leadership of the schools will be able to activate that very quickly.

Dr SIMONS: To echo Deb's comments there, it would be Health who would take the lead on any school closure and we would obviously take instruction from them through COMS and point there. Catholic Ed are confident that we would then be able to flip to remote learning with immediate effect.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So, effectively in that case, Catholic Ed does not see there being any real constraint on, if you were advised, for example, on the Friday noon I think it was—due to the Victorian context—for the Sunday midnight, you would be able to reorientate quickly enough for that not to be too disruptive to the students and teachers?

Dr SAYCE: I am sure it would be!

Mr FERRINDA: I think our schools almost had a dry run of it, so I think they are very mindful of what is happening in Victoria. We echo to our principals and our leaders in our roadshow to review your response plans and not to be complacent, and obviously to have those conversations with staff as well. I think teachers are probably thinking, "This might happen, so I could pivot quite quickly back to that space, and what would I do differently moving forward?" But also, that wellbeing aspect as well. Those first couple of days are going to be about establishing that pastoral care and wellbeing

with your students in your classrooms, and then looking to how we can get to that really high quality impact.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I have one final question, if I can: what I understood to be the constraint, it could not have been just for schools, but certainly for other services that were offered to the community. Was that obviously in the postcode? There was an expectation that because you could travel within your postcode, some students could still participate in schooling, but of course there were teachers and members of the school community who were outside the postcode, so the crossing of the boundary presented, as I understand, a significant challenge for schools to respond. I realise that we might not know. It might be a postcode; it could be a suburb. We do not know what we would possibly be looking at in the event of an outbreak, but that seemed to be the real challenge: there was still the expectation that because you could transit within your postcode, there would be school services on offer, but of course the challenge was staffing in large part. I appreciate the work. It sounds like Catholic Ed have been leaders in this and I appreciate the work that you have done. I found your report, particularly with the distance for Kimberley access as well, was really quite interesting to me.

Dr SIMONS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We have talked about it in terms of postcode, but what I would like to talk about—you spoke about it briefly at one stage—is teaching students with a disability. Putting the universal design for learning into practice for teaching students with disability, can you just go through again how successful it was and what you have learnt in that period of time in terms of helping those students?

Dr SAYCE: For the children who have disability, and there is such a varying context of disability, I guess the concern is always the need of children with autism spectrum for structure. I think struggling families with a child who needs structure and does not have structure has been an issue. I was just talking to our coordinator for disability this morning. She said, by and large, because of the strong communication the school has with the family, there was that very close connect. We have teaching assistants—education assistants—who work with children, particularly in that classroom, or whatever the needs are. They were really instrumental in keeping that close contact. It is not just the teacher; it is the education assistants that we had to draw on. If I can add, in terms of our 11 000 staff, we had 10 staff in the entire state who were stood down for a period of time because of boarding. All other staff were redeployed, and our education assistants, who work with children with disability, were on the phone; they were touching base with families. As you would notice in the paper, they were able to communicate via Teams. They were able to talk to the child. They were able to see the context and a lot of facial descriptions were given—why the child’s response to that educator, whether it be the teacher or the education assistant. It was always on the needs basis. The family knows the score, because it is their close link and the school certainly knows that child and that family. It is that level of one to one that I think, sticking with the individual education plan that schools are able to say, “Okay; this child needs these sorts of things and these are the types of activities or arrangements that need to be provided.”

In that space, it was really hats off to those educators who work with the children, because they worked in earnest with that child, always listening to the parent, always wanting to support that child. But, at the end of the day, the children, by and large, did come back to school because they needed to. As I said, our schools did not close down. For those families that needed for that child to be at school because they could not cope, or whatever the reason was, they had that provision. It was hard, because children do not learn; they learn by facial cues, so it was hard for the families and the child. But I think the schools handle that well and I think the learning going forward is that close

communication with home in order to meet the needs of the child, whatever that looks like, with the constraints around that as well.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I think your issue with an autistic kid would be that the autistic kid thinks that you do school stuff at school —

Dr SAYCE: Yes, of course.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: — and then being asked to do the school stuff at home, they just would not get it and it would cause a meltdown or would not be expected.

Dr SIMONS: On that point, there was interested dialogue, again, about what school attendance is. Just because you are at home learning remotely does not mean you are not attending school. So the whole concept of what school is and where it is located—the same argument that you have got an excursion to Perth Zoo, you are still learning. You might not be sitting in a school classroom. I think that conversation will evolve over time. School geography: we have been speaking about boundaries and borders and who can travel from one to another. Digital, to a certain extent, means that school geographical locations—there is room for exploration about what school is, where it is delivered, in what way, by which teacher to what set of students.

The CHAIR: That is right. You are going to have the competition with some of the top Catholic education schools in Melbourne and Victoria very soon on the basis that it will be delivered in that sort of way. You may not, because you are delivering such a quality service at this point.

Dr SIMONS: We will be competing with them!

The CHAIR: Yes, that is right; you will be competing with them. That is exactly right; you will be getting the students from Melbourne and Victoria. That is exactly right. I have watched the Microsoft TED talk or the talk on education and delivering education. Are we anticipating that the Catholic Education will be featuring in one of the TED talks around delivery of the platform, given that it is such a leading —

Dr SIMONS: We are really well placed. We are fortunate that we have a direct link into their product group over there in Redmond outside Seattle, so we are evolving the Microsoft Team's platform for education. The educators have pleaded for changes to the product. We know those come internationally, but we are really well placed to shape what Microsoft is doing in this space.

The CHAIR: That is very impressive.

Dr SIMONS: Yes. We have been fortunate to showcase what CEWA have done on the global stage and in America. In the UK, it has been award-winning visions and award-winning calls. We are just really excited to share the learnings across WA and nationally, because it is really well placed.

The CHAIR: That is great.

Thank you very much. We have got the independent schools coming in to see us next, so we really appreciate it. If there are any questions that we have that come from today, are you happy that we write to you and ask you questions?

Dr SAYCE: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. It has been great to talk to you and we really appreciated your submissions and we have learnt a lot, so thank you.

Hearing concluded at 10.48 am
