

**PETER BROELMAN** Mark Knight is on leave

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**MALCOLM ELLIOTT**

Jab push is not up to schools

**S**HOULD I get vaccinated? This question was asked of a primary school principal by a parent recently.

It was not the first time the principal had been asked this and it is unlikely to be the last. After a few minutes, the parent left, saying she would have the Covid vaccine.

This encounter is an example of many things that our schools, teachers and principals are so good at. They are held in high regard and are people who others turn to for guidance.

There are two things that really count in education – relationships and trust. The parent in this story feels she has a relationship with her children’s principal and that she can trust his views. What a responsibility and honour that school principal has.

As our world continues to change, with trust lost in many of our institutions, schools have remained a constant, with our 10,000 school principals seen as highly trusted community leaders, relied upon for advice about education and raising kids.

Where we need to be careful is how and when this advice is given.

A parent or guardian choosing to turn to their child’s school for help or advice and schools actively encouraging families to make healthy choices for their students is one thing, but the line sits at encouragement, not coercion.

Where we must be careful is not to place our school leaders and teachers in a position of conflict with parents by being the stick to push parents and their children to be vaccinated.

Such measures must be the job of the government, laying out the message that vaccination is safe and for the benefit of the entire community – which the majority know it is.

When school staff and parents come together on issues that can hit emotional highs, conflict can spill over into aggression, and there are few issues that hit such emotional highs as the health and wellbeing of our children.

As a double-vaxxed member of the community, I have shown where I sit on vaccination and as an organisation, the Australian Primary Principals Association fully supports the Victorian government decision to mandate vaccination for teachers.

When it comes to rules around those who choose to not be vaccinated, it is important that our government sets those rules and communicates its expectations to the broader community, leaving our teachers, principals and support staff, who have done a mighty job during this pandemic, to focus on education.

**MALCOLM ELLIOTT IS PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION**

**Brutal actions of our police are indefensible**

**V**ICTORIA Police must remember they serve the people, not just the Premier.

Their conduct during the pandemic has damaged their standing and given further weight to accusations the force has become highly politicised.

It’s hard not to come to that conclusion when one hears some of the inflammatory commentary from police command or considers the police response to protests; the likes of BLM and Extinction Rebellion have been treated significantly differently than anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine passport protesters over the past 18 months.

Then there’s the fact Dan Andrews’ former chief of staff was appointed an assistant police commissioner.

But what has been most disturbing, and has received coverage around the world, is the level of force officers have exercised in enforcing health orders, whether it’s putting a frightened pregnant woman in handcuffs in front of her children over a Facebook post, or harassing elderly women sitting on a park bench, or pepper-spraying photographers covering a protest.

When did excessive force, including liberal use of knees, fists and batons, become acceptable? When did the indiscriminate use of pepper spray and pepper-ball rounds become OK?

And when did Victoria Police deem it necessary to throw people who are not resisting to the ground and have multiple officers climb on their back?



**RITA PANAHİ**

One of the more remarkable videos of last week shows multiple officers driving their knees into alleged protesters who were already on the ground, as well as one officer striking a man with force with the butt of his pepper ball rifle. These are scenes I never imagined seeing in Melbourne.

This week footage of an absurd interaction in St Kilda between a group of officers and a man and woman went viral and prompted commentary from Hollywood comedians to athletes and political commentators.

The footage shows a man handcuffed on the ground because as one officer explained “he has no valid reason to be out today” and “he wasn’t wearing a face mask” despite his kebab-wielding female companion trying to explain they were just a few hundred metres from the man’s home, and his mask was only off because he was smoking a cigarette as she ate her lunch.

The footage is a fine example of the lunacy that’s afflicted this state but thankfully it was devoid of the overt violence we’ve seen in other viral clips including an officer choking a young woman who was

maskless (she had an exemption) and more recently an elderly female protester being pushed violently to the ground and then hit with pepper spray by two officers even though she clearly posed zero threat.

Members of the Dan Cult have started insane rumours claiming the older woman is actually a young man, despite photographic evidence to the contrary.

There are many other similar clips that have come to light since the start of the Covid-19 crisis.

All this has contributed to data published late last year showing trust in police had plummeted in Victoria with only 42 per cent rating the police highly.

Just three years earlier 76 per cent rated police highly, according to Roy Morgan research. The two reasons identified for the dramatic fall were the Lawyer X scandal and the manner in which Covid-19 restrictions were enforced.

Respondents’ comments included the following: “Because we’ve seen some disappointing incidents of police brutality recently”, “Head stomping, pulling people from cars, raids on people’s

houses for Facebook posts”, “Too heavy-handed, I have lost trust”, and “They behave like they are above the law. For the first time ever, I’m scared of the police” — the latter from a someone aged 65-plus.

Of course not all officers have behaved in this manner but there’s been enough instances of overreach and too many ill-judged fines giving the impression Victoria Police’s cultural problems run deeper than police command. It would be fascinating to see what a poll held this week would show.

One of the more remarkable headlines I’ve seen in the past year comes from the ABC and reads: “Watchdog finds Victoria Police acted lawfully when head-stomping mentally ill man during arrest”. That incident saw police using a squad car to ram a man having a mental health crisis.

The footage shows the victim, Tim Atkins, lying on the median strip and when he tries to get up an officer stomps forcefully on his head. Despite the victim ending up in an induced coma, the police’s actions were deemed to be “lawful” force.

Overzealous officers, excessive force and selective policing has undermined public trust in the thin blue line.

Anyone familiar with my work knows I strongly back the police but some of the footage that has come to light during the pandemic is simply indefensible.

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**IN SHORT**

The approval rating for the Andrews government’s handling of the pandemic has dropped to 44 per cent in the latest Essential poll, the lowest rating in the country. And most Victorians say they do not have confidence in the state’s road map out of lockdown.