

Submission

No 68

## INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

Organisation: NSW Teachers Federation

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8 May 2008

In reply please quote: 597/08/KA:tc

The Committee Manager  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re : Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW**

Please find attached, the NSW Teachers Federation's submission to the Parliament of New South Wales on the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW.

Yours sincerely

John Irving  
General Secretary

*Attach.*

Submission also sent via email : [childrenscommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:childrenscommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au)



NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION

SUBMISSION TO THE  
PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

FOR THE INQUIRY INTO  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

**Authorised by**

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**John Irving**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
08 May 08

**NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION**  
**SUBMISSION TO**  
**PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES**  
**FOR THE INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND**  
**YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW**

The NSW Teachers Federation (Federation) is a registered trade union which covers NSW public school teachers. The Federation represents all teachers in New South Wales public pre-schools, infants, primary and secondary schools and TAFE Institutes. Teachers in schools for specific purposes, corrective services and adult migrant english centres are also members.

Federation has wide ranging interests that are reflected in its engagement of, advice to, and negotiation on behalf of its members. It also regards public education as a strong foundation for a sure future of NSW. Thus, it campaigns for betterments for all students who attend public schools so that they will receive a quality education.

Federation has long believed that a public education system must deliver equal opportunity for all children to develop their abilities to their fullest, regardless of gender, ethnicity and level of advantage or disadvantage.

In regards to the specific needs of children and young people aged 9-14 years in NSW, Federation is particularly concerned about:

- class sizes;
- transition from primary to secondary education;
- the right to be taught by fully qualified, professional teachers;
- access to a full array of professional services to address the physical and mental needs of young people;
- resources to ensure literacy and numeracy standards are met;
- appropriate care for students in outside school hour settings, with smooth integration between school and care;
- ensuring a fully accessible public education system which is free of bias based on gender, race, sexuality or religion;
- special Education.

**Class Sizes, specifically with respect to transition between primary and secondary schools**

Studies overseas have conclusively demonstrated that smaller class sizes lead to improved learning outcomes.

In recent years Federation campaigned for the reduction in class sizes for Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2. This campaign was realised from 2004 with the NSW Government's class size reduction pProgram. The benefits for children in these early years of school have been embraced by school communities across the state.

At the time of writing, classes in Years 3 – 10 are organised on the basis that no class need exceed 30 students. (Different formulas are taken into account for technics, industrial arts, home science, textiles and design, and design and technology classes).

Federation believes that a reduction in class sizes for children and young people in the middle years will lead to improved learning outcomes.

In particular, young people making the transition from primary school to secondary school would benefit from smaller class sizes. Transition in the middle years not only involves a change of schools (usually) for the student but also a change of class and curriculum structure. A year 6 student in primary school is accustomed to having one teacher in one classroom for the whole year and a flow of curriculum activities that are not always outwardly defined into separate Key Learning Areas (KLAs). When that student begins secondary school they are confronted with a variety of teachers and learning environments. Smaller class sizes (particularly in years 7 and 8) will enable those students to make the transition from primary to secondary school confident that their individual learning needs can be better assessed and catered for due to the smaller class sizes – leading to improvements in learning outcomes.

While acknowledging that the specialist knowledge of secondary teachers within KLAs is important, schools should be assisted to implement arrangements for smaller numbers of teachers for each class in the early secondary years. Well funded and well managed transition programs for every school that accommodates children and young people in the middle years will improve student learning outcomes.

All this happens at the same time as most young people are experiencing the upheavals of adolescence.

It must be stressed that the implementation of smaller class sizes for students making the transition to secondary school cannot be at the expense of other students. Such a program would most likely require an increase in teacher appointments across the state which would need to be funded by an increased government commitment to the learning outcomes of children and young people in NSW.

### **The right to be taught by fully qualified, professional teachers**

The NSW public school system has historically been staffed through a state wide transfer system for teachers. This system has enabled the appointment of professional and qualified teachers in every school in all regions of the state. A transfer system that rewards teachers after serving a specific amount of time in difficult to staff schools by giving them easier access to the less difficult to staff schools through transfer has ensured that every student, regardless of where they live, are taught by professional and qualified teachers.

In February of this year, the Premier, Morris Iemma, acknowledged that the NSW public education system is world class: *"Our education results are simply outstanding. Our Basic Skills Test results show primary school literacy and numeracy standards are at a record high. International assessments confirm our high standards, with a recent OECD study ranking 15 year olds in NSW among the best in the world in reading, mathematics and scientific literacy"* (Sydney Morning Herald on 29 February 2008).

Federation believes that a negotiated staffing agreement between the Federation and the NSW Department of Education and Training (the Department) that maintains the right to transfer for all classroom teachers, executives and principals has helped NSW public schools to achieve world class results.

Fundamental to a transfer system is a guarantee of an equitable allocation of fully qualified staff across the hugely diverse public education system.

Federation recognises a need for the professional development of teachers specifically aimed at pedagogical change to suit the needs of students at risk in this age group. Many students in their 'middle years' disengage from school teaching and learning programs and the need for appropriate pedagogy for these students cannot be underestimated.

### **Access to a full array of professional services to address the physical and mental needs of young people**

Federation agrees that for children and young people to develop resilience they need easier access to appropriate activities and support.

A coordination of provision from relevant government agencies and departments is essential for these opportunities to develop. Federation believes that this could be achieved by the representation of particular agencies on public school sites so that children and young people do not have to rely on transportation, parents / carers or restricted timetables in order to access them. For example, a young person who does not hold a driver's licence and does not live close to public transport and has to work a part time job on week nights and weekends has difficulty accessing certain services. These services may include youth workers to provide social and emotional support and health workers to provide physical and mental health support.

In his 2002 *Inquiry into the provision of Public Education in NSW*, Professor Tony Vinson recommended *"that a ten year recruitment and training plan be instituted to increase the number of school counsellors by 700 so that an effective counsellor/student ratio of approximately 1:500 is attained; with the spread, in all but exceptional circumstances, of each counsellor's services being confined to two school communities"*. (Vinson, 2002:173)

Federation supports Professor Vinson's recommendation and will continue to campaign for increased funding to support the training of additional school counsellors.

Professor Vinson discusses some schools' need *"for more specialised 'social' assistance"* (Vinson, 2002:164). Federation can see a role for social workers as additional resources that schools could access within strict guidelines. The use of social workers in a school setting would have to be determined by the Learning Support/Welfare committee in consultation with the School Counsellor or Principal.

Federation believes that the current model of a school based teacher counselling service for NSW public schools demonstrates the best quality counselling service. The link between teaching experience and School Counsellors is essential in order to continue this best practice model.

Federation does not believe that streaming children and young people in their 'middle years' towards specialised vocational areas at an early age is beneficial towards their development. Children and young people require a well rounded education that allows them to develop a variety of skills and knowledge in order to make decisions as young adults.

Federation specifically opposed the Board of Studies' introduction of vocational education and training (VET) industry courses in Stage 5, as did the Primary Principals' Association and the Secondary Principals Council.

### **Resources to ensure literacy and numeracy standards are met.**

Recently, the Minister for Education acknowledged *"teacher quality as the factor with the greatest potential to improve student performance"* (Sydney Morning Herald 18 April 2008). The Federation agrees with such sentiment but is concerned with the lack of resources provided by the state and federal governments to assist with the continual focus on teacher quality. An increase in resource accession is fundamental to realise the Minister's claim. Quality teachers need resources such as classroom aides and support, technology, consultants, professional learning and development, safe and practical teaching and learning environments (classrooms) and safe and practical staff areas.

### **Appropriate care for students in outside school hour settings, with smooth integration between school and care.**

Currently children and young people in primary school settings may have access to appropriate before and after school hours care activities. Most "Outside of School Hours" (OOSH) childcare cease taking children once the child reaches high school age. These 12-14 old children still require supervision as many become "latch key" children as parents or guardians are still at work. Federation would recommend that funding be made available to create and maintain appropriate OOSH care for children aged 12-14. This could be done by means of tax rebates, funding appropriate home work centres and/or other community run facilities between the hours of 6-8.30 in the morning and 3-6 in the evening.

Appropriate safe transport also needs to be created or maintained either publicly or privately to allow these children to travel to and from home to attend centres. This is particularly relevant in the outer suburbs of Sydney and other large regional centres and in particular more isolated rural areas.

**Ensuring a fully accessible public education system which is free of bias based on gender, race, sexuality or religion.**

The NSW Department has produced appropriate policies concerning access and equity for all students and staff in NSW public school; including policies on gender, homophobia, Aboriginal education, racism, multiculturalism, learning difficulties and disabilities. Federation supports free, secular public education with universal access for all students and staff and acknowledges the Department's policies on such matters. However, the Federation is concerned in regards to the lack of support and resources provided to ostensibly promote and uphold such policies in all Department worksites throughout NSW.

**Special Education**

Federation is committed to ensuring that special education issues are a high priority for children and young people 9-14 years in NSW. A 2007 Annual Conference decision of the Federation called *"on the State Government to restate its commitment to the retention of a continuum of placement options"* Federation's commitment is applicable to *"maintaining and improving levels of service and support for all students with disabilities including those in special classes, special schools and integrated mainstream settings"* (Federation, 2007 Annual Conference decision: Special Education).

Federation also emphasises a requirement to ensure that all teachers of special education *"receive ongoing support, by way of relevant professional development, time and resource allocation for effective supervisory/mentor support as well as networking opportunities, to meet the needs of their students with special needs"* (Federation, 2007 Annual Conference decision: Special Education).

Federation stands by this decision and reemphasises the specific needs and requirements of students and teachers in special education settings.