

## Introduction and context

- Thank you, Chair and Committee members, for the opportunity to make an opening statement.
- I'd like to acknowledge the Dharug people, the traditional custodians of the land we are on today, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.
- This is the first week of the 2023 school year for hundreds of thousands of students across NSW – I would like to take this opportunity to wish them well in their learning endeavours.
- I also want to acknowledge all the dedicated teachers who ably guide and instruct these students on their journeys.
- Since starting in the Chief People Officer role in November last year, I have seen first-hand the care, skill and application of our educators.
- I feel privileged and proud to work alongside these dedicated professionals, as well as those in our education offices who support our schools and the teaching front line.
- This inquiry follows straight on from last year's inquiry into teacher shortages.
- I thank the committee for offering recommendations in its report on that inquiry, late last year.
- A significant number of those recommendations reflect existing policy and work underway, which indicates alignment on much of the work the department is doing in the teacher supply space.

- And while there will always be more to do, there has been solid progress and some significant achievements since.

## Teacher Supply Strategy

- The Committee has previously examined the Teacher Supply Strategy, and I'm happy to provide some high-level updates and go into further details as the Committee requires.
- The Teacher Supply Strategy is a 10-year program that sits in addition to existing recruitment programs and efforts, together providing improved recruitment processes and teacher support.
- To date, we have more than 460 people participating across our Teacher Supply Strategy initiatives.
- This includes almost 250 teachers who are teaching in the NSW public education system for the first time or who have relocated to regional, rural and remote areas.
- It also includes more than 210 people who are already or are beginning the process of training to be teachers, including 100 existing School Learning Support Officers who have been offered places to commence training as a teacher in Term 1 this year.
- The Strategy is designed to respond to what is now a well-known and understood national and global challenge.
- Several years ago, the department predicted that, *without intervention*, a supply deficit could occur in secondary settings between 2025 and 2026.

- This forecast showed that something had to be done, and so that was why the Teacher Supply Strategy was developed.
- As a result of interventions and progress to date, current modelling scenarios demonstrate improved outlooks for teacher supply, with a surplus forecast past 2027.
- Many of the Strategy's initiatives feature heavily in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, on which NSW is collaborating with jurisdictions across Australia.
- This national approach will offer significant leverage to our efforts. The National Plan also provides strong validation of the approach and work already underway in NSW.
- A number of Teacher Supply initiatives, particularly those focused on encouraging people to train or retrain as teachers, are performing better than expected.
- For example, the Grow Your Own program, which supports existing school support staff to retrain as teachers, is significantly oversubscribed above its target of 100 participants over 10 years.
- Other initiatives have taken some more time to gather momentum. The Committee knows, the initiative to recruit teachers from outside of NSW started slowly.
- I am pleased to say this is building momentum. We have 12 teachers in classrooms, 9 of whom started this week. We have 5 more starting in Terms 1 and 2, we have 23 at offer stage and 3 teachers at the Visa stage – so a total 43. As at 23 January, we have more than 500 qualified applications being shortlisted.

- The recent announcement by the Commonwealth Government to prioritise visa processing for teachers is most welcome, and will support improved supply through this channel.

## **Workforce profile**

- I'd like to share with you a sense of the scale of the undertaking and some perspective on how we are placed at a system level.
- As the largest employer of teachers in Australia, the NSW Department of Education has a workforce of close to 95,000 teachers.
- Over the past decade, the overall number of full-time teachers has increased by nearly 10,000 roles, or 14 per cent, compared with growth in student enrolment of just 7.6 per cent.
- Over the past 5 years the Department has permanently filled, on average, more than 6,000 teaching roles each year, with a record 8,600 teaching positions filled in 2022.
- In 2021, the NSW public schools student-to-teacher ratio continued a falling trend. While 2022 data is not yet available, we expect to see this downward trend continue.
- But I do not want to downplay the challenges here.
- We are also acutely aware there remain specific supply challenges in particular subjects and geographic areas, particularly in secondary settings, and in rural and remote areas.



- That's why we have made these focus areas for targeted interventions and initiatives under the Teacher Supply Strategy, and we're working hard every day to increase the supply of teachers in these areas, and across our system.

### **Impact of COVID**

- What I've been hearing when I've been out in schools, is that some of the challenges relate to the supply challenges in specific subjects or geographic areas, and others relate to the acute impacts of COVID.
- The Committee should be made aware that 2022 sick leave figures were up around 52% over 2021.
- During the 2022 school year, we received notifications from over 38,700 school-based staff that they had tested positive for COVID.
- Again, I take my hat off to principals and teachers for how they carried on through the significant day to day pressures over the last two years as a result of the unprecedented increase in sick leave.

### **Other developments**

- There are some other significant developments worth bringing to the Committee's attention.

- We have implemented the **Priority Recruitment Support initiative**, which has resulted in 450 permanent appointments in schools with a significant number of teacher vacancies that have been challenging to fill.
- It provides targeted support to help principals with recruitment and workforce planning.
- The **Rewarding Excellence in Teaching** reform will see the creation of new in-classroom teaching roles at significantly higher rates of pay.
- These roles will provide career progression for teachers without the need to leave the classroom.
- The **Temporary Workforce Transition** project will significantly increase the overall pool of permanent staff, provide mobility to move to other permanent vacancies over time, as well as contribute to better succession planning and leadership development opportunities.
- The Project aims to transition more than 15,000 temporary teachers and school-based staff to permanent employment.
- And supported by the NSW Productivity Commission, the NSW Government recently announced it would provide a **new one-year Masters pathway** that will enable more mid-career professionals with existing qualifications and experience to enter into NSW classrooms from 2024.

- We have also been working hard to simplify, modernise and reduce administrative process and practices so teachers, principals, and school-based non-teaching staff can focus on the core business of teaching, leading, and supporting learning.
- Under the **Quality Time** program, there have been a number of time saving initiatives and we recognise we have more to do in this space.
- I also want to assure the Committee that we are committed to supporting every NSW **student's mental health and wellbeing**.
- We are proactively promoting mental health and wellbeing, and increasing access to evidence-based prevention programs to build students' resilience.
- On the ground we now have more than 2,000 staff in non-teaching roles, who support students' wellbeing and mental health.
- This has been especially critical in the school communities which have continued to experience multiple, simultaneous natural disasters on top of the pandemic over the past few years.
- Lastly, I'd like to highlight that while many education systems across the world have seen significant academic decline through COVID, **NAPLAN results** show that NSW public schools have largely held steady in 2022.
- The proportion of NSW students in the highest NAPLAN band is above the national average in every domain and at all year levels.

- The latest data also reveals significant improvements in primary school Reading and Spelling, continuing a positive trend over the past few years.
- We are so proud of our students, and the brilliant teachers who helped them achieve those results.

## **Conclusion**

- As I sit here beside two teachers, I want to say how much we value our teachers, we know we have more to do and we will continue to work hard to grow and nurture a thriving NSW teaching workforce into the future.
- We do so because of two foundational and fundamental truths.
- Excellence in teaching and teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes.
- And teaching is a rewarding career that vitally contributes to the lives of our students, the community, and to NSW.
- Thank you.

**[END]**