

## INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 20 June 2022

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Partially  
Confidential

20/06/2022

Dear Minister Latham,

I am writing to you as a primary school teacher who has been a very dedicated employee of the NSW Department of Education, and ardent supporter of Public Education, for 29 years. All of these years I have worked at [redacted]. However, I am currently unable to work due to the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination mandates as I am considered non-compliant due to not being willing to get the vaccination. In addition to this, I have been stripped of my Approval to Teach and am in the middle of being investigated by PES for misconduct due to my non-compliance (that investigation is currently on pause)

In my employment with DoEd I have progressed from casual relief teaching to temporary engagement, before being appointed permanently in 2000 and then successfully interviewed for the position as Assistant Principal of [redacted] in 2005, which is still my substantive position. (During my time as AP I have also held the position of Relieving Principal on various occasions, in particular, in a mostly ongoing position for 13 out of 16 Terms from the start of Term 3 2013 – the end of Term 3 2016)

**Teacher shortages prior to the Vaccine Mandates:**

The education system was already near crisis point with significant staff shortages, especially in rural or remote areas of the state, before the COVID-19 vaccine mandates were instigated. The implementation of the vaccination requirement has very significantly impacted staffing and placed even greater stress on an already struggling system and exhausted staff.

Throughout my 29 years at [redacted] we have always experienced difficulty in sourcing teachers, particularly for casual relief when a staff member is absent or wanting to complete Professional Learning. There have been countless occasions when we have had to split classes when a staff member is away, or staff have not received their Release time (RFF) as the Release teacher has been put onto a class rather than splitting it, or the Principal has taken the class for a day, or even for several days.

For myself as a teacher, there have been many, many occasions where I have had extra students in my classroom due to a class split, or as Relieving Principal, when I went on class rather than splitting them.

I particularly recall a day (several years ago now) when I had a class of 32 Kindergarten & Year 1 students and a Year 5/6 class was split which resulted in an extra 8 students in what was already a small and crowded classroom. Those extra students had to sit on the floor wherever there was space for them. Fortunately, we now have lower caps on the number of students that Kindergarten & Stage 1 classes “should not exceed” but classrooms still become crowded and noisy when extra students are placed in there.

As Relieving Principal, there were many days where I stepped in and took a class for the day, rather than splitting them. However, this then impacted tasks that I needed to do as Principal.

I know that in Term 1 and Term 2 this year (2022) there have been many COVID positive cases at [redacted]. I know that at least 4 classroom teachers have been absent due to the virus (there are only 7 classes at the school). I also know that at least 3 SASS staff have been absent too. All of these staff members are at least double vaccinated, with two (if not more) having also had their booster. I also know that there have been significant staff absences due to colds and flu. When these staff have been away, either the Release teacher or a Learning Support teacher have taken the class, or in the case when 2 classroom teachers were away, one class was taken by Release & Learning Support staff while the other class was split.

I also know that early in Term 1, one of our Learning Support teachers was seconded to go to another school within our region (45kms away) to teach a class while that school had a staff member away due to COVID.

I would be certain that the same situation is occurring in every school across the state.

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### **My personal experience resulting from the implementation of the Vaccine Mandates**

It was on Friday 27th August, while I was busy interacting with my Stage 3 students on our Google Classroom, at 11:15am on (while the daily presser for NSW was being given in which Premier Berejiklian announced the mandates) that NSW Public School staff received an email from Georgina Harrison (secretary) saying that *'double dose vaccination will be made mandatory for all school and preschool staff from November 8<sup>th</sup> 2021'*. This email was received after 2 very challenging weeks catering for and providing lessons for the range of students in my Stage 3 class (having been very unexpectedly thrown into lockdown at 5pm on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> August). I was a complete mess crying for the rest of the day after getting that email.

In addition to the ongoing extreme distress I was experiencing from the Vaccination Mandates, on 25.10.2021 my school was advised of a positive Covid case and we were closed for 'deep cleaning and contact tracing'. Following contact tracing I was identified as a close contact and (under the guidelines at that time) I had to get a PCR test. I had my test in the morning of October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and was advised on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021 that my result was positive (this was at the time of the Delta variant).

Following my positive result, I could have tried to get a vaccine exemption, but I did not as there was much confusion around how long the exemption would be (anywhere from 4 weeks to 6 months) and I honestly did not have the emotional strength for that in the days /weeks following being 'de-isolated'. Additionally, I was aware that the DoE were rejecting everyone's exemptions, so I felt like "what's the point", especially as it was nearing the end of the school year.

Furthermore, I have literally felt sickened, and very upset by the discrimination and segregation I have experienced as an unvaccinated person... in particular, I asked to be able to go into my classroom at the end of the 2021 school year to collect some personal belongings. I was told I would have to get 'clearance' to do this. This response upset me incredibly! I was made to feel 'unclean' for being unvaccinated. As a result, I didn't seek that clearance as it was all **too** emotional for me to do and so my personal belongings are still at the school. (I was told that SLSO staff had put my things in a storeroom).

Throughout the whole Vaccination Mandates ordeal (from 27.08.2021 to present), I have experienced anxiety, a significant level of stress and emotional distress, interruption to my sleep patterns. I am feeling angry about being coerced, bullied and then threatened with disciplinary action and loss of employment for non-compliance. I feel harassed and disrespected (my right to choose what medical treatment is suitable for me has been removed). I have also felt discriminated against (by my employer and by society) and segregated.

In 2021 'non-compliant' employees were subjected to coercion, threats and bullying in the push to be vaccinated. We were threatened with being investigated for 'misconduct' and 'non-compliance' for not taking the medication. We were threatened with disciplinary action and with being put on the 'Do Not Employ List' for not taking the medication. We were threatened with termination of contracts or permanent employment.

In addition to the threats, and then consequently being put under investigation for misconduct, I have (on three occasions this year) been personally subjected to bribery and coercion in the push to take the COVID-19 vaccine. This occurred on the following dates:

1. 28.01.2022 – I was informed in writing that if I decided to be vaccinated with Novavax, the investigation into my misconduct will be put on hold. (See highlighted section in Appendix 1)
2. 03.05.2022 – I was told in a telephone conversation with PES employee Jason Kennedy-Davidson (about my Approval to Teach being taken away from me)  
*"if you would like to become compliant we can get the flags removed very quickly and get you back into school"*
3. 16.06.2022 – I was informed in writing again, in an email from Ross Perry (PES investigator)  
*"I remind you that should you become fully vaccinated, your PES matter will close and you may return to the workplace immediately"*

Over the past 29 years as an educator I have been responsible for implementing anti-bullying programs, for teaching students that they have rights, and to be critical thinkers and to make good (**informed**) choices and that it is ok to say NO.. in fact, that they should say no to taking drugs. I have been responsible for preparing and

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providing inclusive lessons for all students in my class whatever their capacity is. Yet, I have not been afforded any rights, inclusivity or respect as an employee!

### **Teacher workloads, expectations and relatively low income impacting staffing**

In my career as a teacher I have experienced increasing workload, reduced student and staff support, an ever increasingly crowded curriculum, teachers having to teach students skills and values they should learn at home, huge increases in data collection and analysis... the list goes on.

Teachers regularly complete work beyond average working hours... with lesson preparation and teaching and learning programming requirements; completing Individual Learning Plans for integrated students and Personal Learning Plans for our indigenous students; marking student work; playground supervision; data collection, input and analysis; staff meeting requirements; mandatory training requirements; parent teacher meetings; student report requirements; completing Professional Development courses; etc.

The classroom is a very busy environment - catering for the range of learners and abilities, dealing with behaviour issues, supporting students experiencing trauma.

All of these factors, as well as the lack of respect for teachers from students, parents, bureaucrats, the media and the relatively low wage for hours actually worked, all make teaching a less desirable career path.

### **Where to in the future?**

Teaching is not a job, it really is a calling. Through the implementation of the mandates, the DoE are currently excluding thousands of highly experienced staff and hence losing decades of experience and knowledge from staff who have dedicated years to their employment with the Department.

Additionally, by excluding thousands of qualified, experienced teachers who are ready, willing and able to teach, the education of hundreds of thousands of students is being significantly impacted for the third year in a row. This means that students in Grade 2 this year have never known a normal year of learning. This will no doubt show up in their NAPLAN results next year. This means that a student in Year 12 has not had a normal year of learning in their senior secondary years. How will this affect their Year 12 results and then their chances of following a desired career path and future?

The education system needs to be overhauled.

- Teachers need to be respected for their professional judgement
- The curriculum needs to become much less crowded – Literacy and Numeracy need to be priorities. Without mastering the basics in these, all learning, no matter the subject, is impacted
- There needs to be much greater funding and support for effective integration and effective behaviour support
- Education staff need to be paid a respectable wage that recognises them as professionals

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours sincerely

**APPENDIX 1**



**Education**

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

**COVID-19 Vaccination Requirements**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You are currently the subject of a disciplinary investigation into allegations relating to your non-compliance with the COVID-19 Vaccination requirements.

You may be aware that on 24 January 2022, the Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt announced that Australians would have access to a fourth COVID-19 vaccine, Nuvaxovid (Novavax) from 21 February 2022. Some non-compliant employees have previously raised their interest and willingness to be vaccinated with the Novavax vaccine. While the investigation into your alleged non-compliance is still progressing the Department is providing you with an opportunity to commit to being vaccinated with the Novavax Vaccine, should you wish to do so.

If you decide to be vaccinated with Novavax, you will be required to book a vaccination at the earliest available appointment and supply us with evidence of this booking.

The investigation into allegations of misconduct would then be placed on hold until PES receives evidence that you have received your first dose of the vaccine. At that point you would then be able to apply for recreation leave (if available), extended/long service leave (if available) or leave without pay.

Upon receipt of evidence that you have received your second dose of the vaccine you will be able to return to duty with the Department of Education.

If you decide that you wish to take advantage of this opportunity, please contact [covid19PES@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:covid19PES@det.nsw.edu.au) before close of business on Friday 4 February 2022, otherwise the disciplinary investigation will be progressed in accordance with the procedures.

Yours sincerely

Daryl Currie  
**Executive Director**  
Professional and Ethical Standards (PES)  
28 January 2022

**PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL STANDARDS**

T: (61 2) 7814 3722 E: [covid19PES@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:covid19PES@det.nsw.edu.au)