

**Submission
No 10**

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Covid Timeline for me

COVID outbreak overseas (I thought it seemed to be a big response to something that was less than SARS had started out with).

Lockdowns started – I took it seriously, laid low, started thinking about possible outcomes. Taught remotely, juggled classrooms that could change from online to in class within a day. Juggled students being in class and learning virtually. This was all very stressful on all teachers and a huge increase in our workload.

COVID vaccine talked about – I immediately decided I would wait and see – no long-term outcomes. My thoughts went to Thalidomide and asbestos. Many friends said the same – wait and see.

People started protesting – I did not join in for fear of losing my job.

Government messaging was unclear – wear a mask, don't wear a mask. Sit at a restaurant, don't stand. No gatherings allowed but major sporting events went ahead.

Mandates were brought in for aged care. It became apparent that there were no records on who had and had not been voluntarily vaccinated. This was a violation of people's rights was the reason stated by the employers for not knowing who was vaccinated.

Mandates were brought in for Education in NSW, but the Prime Minister sent me a letter stating there were no mandates in Australia.

I knew my job was on the line. I started asking for information from my employer. I asked for risk assessments, other options. I received no reply other than generic letters telling me to get vaccinated or I was not allowed on school grounds after the 6th of November. In one of my early discussions with my Principal (way before the RAT tests were implemented) I suggested a risk assessment that would allow me to use covid tests to allow me to work. This was not considered possible. We were also working partly remotely but this was not an option offered to me to remain useful.

I asked the Teachers Union for support. I was told to get vaccinated. I left the Teachers Union but they were regularly recommended in the generic letters as a place I could get advice and support.

I took sick leave to the Christmas holidays (was sent a letter asking for my vaccination declaration whilst on sick leave). I went on holidays (my holiday allowance). I could see clearly that I was not allowed back to school without vaccinations so took extended leave. I had no intention of returning until it seemed safe for all. I applied for and was granted extended leave until July 2nd

I started to understand that being on leave was not enough for the department. As soon as sick leave was completed, I was sent another letter outlining the consequences of not showing my vaccination status. (3 strikes: 1. Not vaccinated. 2. Not showing my principal evidence that I was vaccinated. 3. Not uploading my private medical records to a Vaxattest) I wrote them a letter stating I had no plan to return to school until my leave was completed and would be happy to discuss my vaccination status at that time. I received no feedback to this idea.

2022 term one. Teachers and students who were on active duty were all asked to use RAT tests to show they were COVID negative to return to school. By this time there was ample evidence that both vaccinated and unvaccinated were catching and passing on COVID. Unvaccinated teachers were still not allowed to return to school. I was still on leave.

PES gave me a last chance to show due cause as to why I should not have three strikes. I reminded them I was on leave and had no intentions of going on school ground.

March 7 PES sent an email to my school email address. As the automated out of office reply was on, it was deemed as received and I was terminated. At this time, I was flooded out of my house (I live in Tumbulgun) and had no access to mail or email.

No one from my school (Principal/Deputy Principal/Head Teacher) has ever contacted me about my position, my mental health, my separation from the Department, the effect of the flood.

I worked at the same school for 20 + years. I was a Language Teacher and a Careers Advisor. I lead trips to Japan; I was acting head teacher as late as early 2021. I was part of a school group

who toured Sydney and took the ideas on innovative learning back to my school and was a leader in their implementation. I was good at my job. I worked long hours. I made a difference to many students and teachers lives.

We were asked to stop attending school a week before reports were due. I chose to write my reports as I could not leave that job to my overworked co-workers who were already put under pressure as no full-time relief was employed to cover my job, just day to day casuals. Day to day casuals are often just put on a class to fill their load, most would not have Language teaching or Japanese experience. In my mind, this was just another way the Department failed their teachers. It felt like they wanted my co-workers to be angry at me for leaving and made their jobs harder for allowing us to leave.

In May 2022 the NSW CHO was removed. DET continued to hold onto the mandates. All incomplete PES investigations were put on hold.

June 2022 all employees still being investigated were reinstated with pay but no duties. I am already sacked. If I had still been on extended leave, I would still be accruing holiday pay, I would still be receiving superannuation payments. These are not a part of a payout.

I am still struggling to come to terms with the end of a career in such a heartless way. I felt like I was pushed aside for following my morals. I could not and still struggle to see any way I could stand in front of a class and teach students that they can say no to people of power, that they have the right to decide who touches them, what they accept as ok, when I was not allowed to do this. I was told that I had to have a medicine that I did not want and did not think I needed. I was prepared to wear the consequences if I was to get sick without the vaccine. I was prepared to take time off school while the world saw where the pandemic was heading. I was not prepared for the way I was hunted down (that is what it felt like) and thrown away by the Department of Education, a group that pride them self on being anti discriminatory, a group that push the idea of being an upstander, of living the standards of Harmony Day.

Not only have I lost my Career, but I have also lost a lot of faith in what we taught. The idea of being open and transparent, the idea that people are treated with dignity, the idea that teachers matter, these are ideas that I wonder if the Department can still claim to teach our youth or tell their employees.

As a Careers Advisor, I advocated for the teaching profession. Do what you love was my mantra, and I did love my job. Now when young people ask me about becoming a teacher, I struggle to be enthusiastic in my response and really wonder if it is a good choice. The hours are long, the pressure acute, the paperwork endless and it seems that not just the parents, but the Department of Education as well, have no intention of showing teachers that they are appreciated.