

**INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES

I was employed by the Department of Education (NSW) since 2016, initially as a casual teacher in primary schools. I then retrained as a school counsellor, serving in primary and secondary schools before being dismissed from my permanent full-time substantive position in early 2022 as a result of not conforming to the Covid vaccine mandate. I'm also a parent whose two teenagers have attended NSW public schools throughout their schooling.

I have first hand knowledge of teacher and school staff shortages before and during the Covid situation and I will attempt to outline here.

As a newly qualified casual teacher in a small regional NSW coastal city, I struggled to find ongoing work in schools, picking up casual days here and there. At this time in my career, through networking, I heard about many teachers 'stuck' in casual work due to lack of contract or permanent positions in the area. A seasoned teacher told me that getting a permanent teaching role was 'gold', implying that it was rare and hard to find. After retraining and gaining a substantive permanent position as a school counsellor (on a two year deed), I moved to a different regional coastal area. In this location, I heard executive staff in schools talk about the difficulty of finding casual teachers with classes often having to be collapsed due to lack of casual staff. After the mandates were introduced, even though I was no longer able to work in my schools, through my networks and contacts I heard about even greater desperate lack of teaching staff.

As a parent, I did not feel that my children's education was affected by lack of teacher shortages prior to Covid. However, things changed during the Covid situation. I heard from my kids, and my contacts and networks that classes were regularly collapsed; teachers taught classes on subjects that knew little about, leaving kids struggling and at times failing to understand; my kids complained that they had to take tests and do assignments on topics that they hadn't received any (or enough) teaching about; staff in schools were struggling mightily with the additional workload caused by lack of staff; planned events, professional development activities, staff meetings, were cancelled or postponed to reduce the workload to help staff cope. I also heard of several teachers who had a medical exemption from a doctor that wasn't accepted by NSW DoE.

I connected with many teachers, counsellors, and other school staff who were not allowed to work because of the Department's mandate. I believe the Department sacrificed students' learning and staff morale on the altar of the Covid vaccine. Doing this decimated the amount of staff available to work in schools, caused fear and distrust and anger among its employees, demonstrated extremely poor and unethical decision making to its employees and students, and not to mention the emotional, psychological, economic, social and community impact of dividing their staff into vaxxed and unvaxxed, coercing their staff into participating in a medical treatment clinical trial, and vilifying those who declined as guilty of 'misconduct'. I heard from many staff members who complied with the mandate that they didn't agree with unvaxxed teachers being barred from working, that they felt it was wrong and felt bad for their affected colleagues, but felt helpless to do anything about it.

Before Covid, the Department was a typical example of the bureaucratic process interfering with effective teaching, learning, and progress but being brought up to an acceptable standard on the ground by committed staff and local leadership. Subsequent to Covid, the Department now appears to be in a shambles with extremely impactful decisions being made by politically-motivated paper-shufflers far removed from the 'coalface' who are out of touch with what school communities really want and really need, and with staff morale at an all-time low. Teachers' workload was already too high; now it is extreme. Teachers taught to be fearful of the virus by the media and public health, worry themselves sick and need to take more leave. The hygiene and social restriction methods used

by the Dept resulted in staff immune systems being sub-par, leading to increased sickness absences. I suspect that adverse reactions to the vaccines are also impacting sickness leave. Newly graduated teachers are going to be strongly put off by this situation resulting in even more teachers being turned off from working in the education system.

As for the school counsellor situation, it's well-known that the school counselling/psychology service is very much under-resourced. It's a rare school counselling team that is fully staffed. Senior psychologists frequently have to undertake counselling duties due to vacancies, with schools often not receiving their full quota, and smaller schools often going without for the same reason. This means students with disabilities, learning needs, and mental health concerns go longer without assessment and connection to services, with many slipping through the net altogether. The school counselling service, due to being spread so thin, generally is reactive, responding to urgent and crisis situations (particularly in high schools) with little time left for responding to quietly struggling students or for mental health education. This was the situation even before the 'pandemic'. Although I have no figures for how many school counsellors/psychologists were lost because of the mandate, the loss of any staff from this crucial resource is unacceptable. Again, those who lose the most are the students who are struggling, and struggling more than ever as a result of the government's responses to the 'pandemic'.

Many of the staff who lost their jobs due to the pandemic are highly-educated, highly skilled, and committed individuals who loved their jobs, and cared strongly for their students, and who now feel betrayed by the Department's actions and processes. Even should the Dept lift their mandate, many such valuable staff will turn their back on returning to work for the Department for this reason.

In conclusion, many schools struggled with finding quality teaching and other critical education staff even before the Covid situation. Thanks to the Department's actions and processes, that situation is even worse than before. As always, it's the students who suffer the most because of it. If children are our future, what lessons have they learnt in our schools from the last two years?