

**Submission
No 35**

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Leonie Mahon

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The Hon. Mark Latham, MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
17/06/2022

Re: Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

I would like to present the following submission for the consideration of the above Committee.

I am writing this submission as a dedicated and experienced Primary/Early Childhood teacher of over 30 years. During this time, I have continually endeavoured to keep abreast of new methodologies and participated in numerous ongoing Professional Development courses, including completing a self-funded Master in Education (Inclusive Education) in 2017. Over the last 30+ years I have worked in Early Childhood, Primary Education, High School and Special Education. In view of this I feel more than qualified to speak to the issue of teacher shortages in NSW.

What follows is my own personal experience, however I know that I am not alone in this experience as a great many of my colleagues feel the same way. Firstly, **the most immediate remedy to relieving the teacher shortage in NSW is to allow unvaccinated teachers back to work!** I am currently unable, *although very willing*, to work because of the introduction of mandated vaccination for teachers in NSW. Now that Covid-19 is in the endemic stage and Omicron is proving to be a much milder disease, **the fact that highly educated, dedicated and experienced teachers, such as myself, continue to be locked out of schools makes absolutely no sense at all**, especially considering schools are desperate for staff and we now have easy access to Rapid Antigen Tests. All of my teacher colleagues attest to the fact that staff and students at their school are getting sick with Omicron, even though they are vaccinated, and there simply isn't enough staff to cover absences. Clearly the vaccines are not working! **I believe the number of teachers that are currently unable to work due to mandates is far higher than what is being reported.**

The next most immediate remedy to relieving teacher shortages, as I see it, is to **let teachers focus on teaching!** As early as 1995 I began to feel disheartened by the changes that were being introduced. I was working in Early Childhood at the time and Individual Portfolios for every child were being introduced. These required an enormous amount of documentation, including photos, observations, work samples etc. What was so disheartening to me about this was the fact that the documentation and collection process started to become the focus and took away from valuable interactions and engagement with the children.

A similar thing happened in Primary Schools. **Documentation, Accreditation, Meetings and Professional Development all became more intensive and required increasingly more administrative time – time that I would much rather have put into planning engaging lessons based on the needs and interests of the students unique to my class!** Time I would much rather have used to resource materials for hands on learning experiences to engage and deepen my students learning. Time I would much rather have used to research, to share with colleagues, to create an awesome learning space! **Instead, all the box ticking left me depleted of both energy and time.** I had nothing left.

Teachers are professionals and should once again be trusted to provide the learning experiences appropriate to their unique class – all classes are different and what works for one doesn't necessarily work for another. **Box-ticking, over-regulation and an overcrowded curriculum only serve to suck the joy out of teaching and learning.**

Teaching is multifaceted. However, when teachers are free to focus on what they do best, teaching can return to the joyful, creative and intuitive endeavour that it is. Only then will highly experienced and dedicated teachers, such as myself, continue to hang around rather than leaving the profession in droves, because **what is currently expected of teachers is unsustainable and that is what is at the core of the teacher shortage!**

Even though I can't currently work in schools I remain a teacher. Teaching is my vocation. I love teaching and I am a great teacher who has always earned the love and respect of her students and their families. It saddens me to see how much the teaching profession has changed. It saddens me most of all for the students!

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Warm regards,

Leonie Mahon
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