

Submission
No 98

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Date Received: 2 July 2022

Today I begin my leave after a 42 year career as a teacher and leader in Catholic schools in the Lismore Diocese. I have loved most of the minutes of this career. I have loved working with students and being part of their lives. I have loved assisting families in the educational journey. And I have cherished all the staff I have worked with. I am also proud of those achievements along the way.

I worked hard to gain a diploma of teaching, a degree in education and a masters in educational leadership. They cost me money to complete as well as time and effort. I gave up time with my family to complete this study. My family missed out on my presence as I trained myself for the job I loved. And I have given up nights and weekends to ensure I am doing my best job for the students in my care. I have paid for resources, made resources I couldn't afford, and driven all over the place to get items I needed for the learning in my classroom. I've spent hours on the phone sorting issues, sourcing requisites and organising events. Not to mention the times where my brain was just so full of school stuff I couldn't focus on family, friends or life.

I haven't done my job for money. I haven't stayed in the job for fame....none of that comes my way.

I have watched my colleagues during these years. All of us have struggled with constantly increasing accountabilities, paperwork and compliance. We have dealt with rapid change in educational expectations and an ever increasing, greater call on our time. We have managed increased student needs. We have coped with all that was asked of us during Covid. And we have supported students devastated by fire and flood, family break ups and the shortage of support for them.

And we continue to do this because we do this for our students.

But enough is enough.... Sarah Mitchell, do you even begin to understand all this? Are you in any position as Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning to know what it is like in a school today? Likewise Jason Clare, our Federal Minister for Education. How long since you studied? Or actually spent time in a classroom? Have either of you looked long and hard at the statistics around teachers and workers in schools? After all this time I could tell you a thing or two!

The people that 'bag' staff in schools say we have lots of holidays....the reality is most of the holidays are spent in preparation or marking or programming. And the holidays don't make up for the late nights or weekends during term time spent doing more of the same. Those that tell us we are a lot of whingers have never set foot in school since their own school days. And the media campaigns are so politically driven that they have forgotten they deal with people's lives in their cynicism.

In my job our greatest gift is empathy. We need to understand that other side of the thinking and place ourselves in another's shoes. We need to work hard to improve life for our students and their families. I wonder what your greatest gift is Sarah Mitchell? Or yours, Jason Clare? What is your responsibility in this crucial time?

Because, from where I sit there is no empathy, no understanding, rather it is contempt for the wonderful people who today strike for our cause. This cause isn't really a pay increase. It is actually

recognition for the many things wrong in education that we are all seeking. We are all appealing for support. Listen to all the voices!

Staff in schools aren't by their nature whingers. Rather they are seeking a better life for the students in their care. They know the students need staff in front of them every day. And now we are making a big stand for that.

Without some support (and quickly given) our staff will continue to walk away. Then our students will suffer even more. Where is the empathy here?

There is a lot wrong with education. It is very broken from years of neglect and blame by bureaucrats telling us we aren't doing a good job.

Who do you talk to when you arrive at your ideas and your thinking? Are you even talking to the staff in actual schools? It may be time to talk to that teacher in Year 2 in a small primary school, the Assistant Principal of the High School in the country town or the teacher's aide working with that student with a disability. Speak to the Principal running the school badly affected by flood or fire. Ask the students displaced from class by the staff shortages and lack of casual replacements. They all know the reality of school. They know the worth of having staff in their schools who are valued. They know how much better school could be if the people working in them were respected and valued instead of ignored or vilified.

And staff need to be paid a decent wage for what they do in order for the education sector to encourage people to take up this noble profession.

So, Sarah Mitchell, Jason Clare - this is your challenge! Try a little bit of empathy. The schools are in desperate need of it right now.

I'm off! It is time for me to enjoy life.