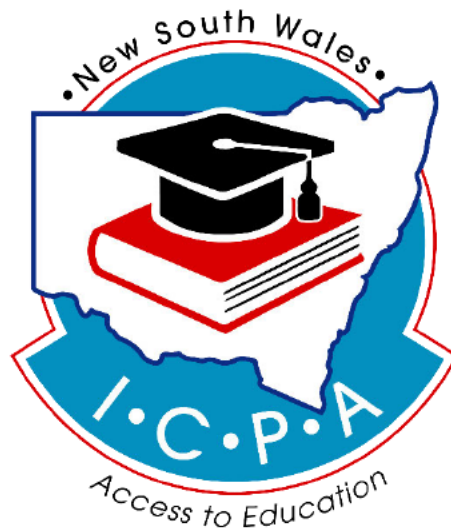


INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales
Inc.

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Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales Inc.



Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in New South Wales

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ICPA-NSW is a voluntary non-profit advocacy group that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote, and regional areas across the state. ICPA-NSW believes that all students - irrespective of where they live - are entitled to equitable access to education that enables them to participate to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of a community.

The NSW State Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association advocates for members who have children who:

- Attend a rural pre-school or access early childhood education through a mobile service
- Attend a small rural or remote school
- Study by Distance Education and School of the Air lessons
- Travel to school by bus or private vehicle (daily, weekly or at the end of term)
- Board away from home to access primary or secondary school at a boarding school, agricultural high school, hostel, private board or maintain a second home
- Attend a Tertiary institution- University/TAFE/ College

Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales

Terms of Reference

(a) Current teacher shortages in NSW schools,

The impact of teacher shortages/no casual relief teachers at some schools has meant that extra-curricular activities have had to be limited or have been left to parents to coordinate (e.g., CWA speeches, Sports carnivals, Footy Gala Days). Usually at least a teacher and a student learning support officer (SLSO) would attend these events with the students.

"Schools are now having to ask parents to take days off from their work to take them as we just do not have enough staff. A lack of casual teachers and not having a full complement of staff has meant that professional development, mentoring and coaching has been severely limited. Teachers are feeling guilty for taking a sick day or requesting a personal leave day to attend such things as a family weddings or graduations. It should not be a problem to attend family and personal celebrations or medical appointments but with the current shortage in casuals which covers schools in these times, teachers are being denied these days off or the Principal or AP needs to cover it, therefore taking away from their own work time. People should not feel they cannot take time off for essentials such as health but unfortunately this is the reality now. In some schools there have been advertised positions and these have gone unfilled for 6 months. We are aware that one Principal has been covering the release from face to face (RFF) teaching required under the award for classes for 6 months, taking away from his/her other strategic and administrative roles."

Teacher shortage is obviously now a crisis which is exacerbated in rural NSW.

Further issues which have negatively impacted being able to attract and retain teachers to rural positions is the lack of Director Education Leadership (DEL) positions' applicants being, in some cases, comprehensively informed of the culture in the communities they serve. The ability to communicate through genuine consultation with the communities in a regional and remote setting, would enable DELs to support the teachers effectively. This is a difficult attribute to learn or be instructed in through a set of guidelines. If the skill of genuine communication must be learnt that person is probably not a suitable Director Education

Leadership.

Incentive systems can still, in some cases, entice staff to certain locations. However, it is not always the right person that incentives attract and therefore often they do not stay. The interview process is vitally important and holds a heavy and significant weight in the welfare of the school, the teacher's wellbeing and most importantly the children's school experience. Systems that support staff to settle into a community for longer time frame would see less transitions for both staff and students with less changeover in staff.

The quote below helps describe the overwhelming situation of isolation which can occur when a principal (often the only qualified person) is not adequately supported.

"Access to support services – no one visits us.

Principal takes on the cover for all leave for other staff – no casual and none will travel the large distance for one day – I have even tried to get them for a week.

Limited ability to undertake professional learning as no cover or staff are already completing multiple roles but are unable to take the minimum release from class."

Lack of supply or casual teachers obviously has a ripple effect in small towns.

In some rural areas and in primary schools they have an Early Years Transition Centre (EYTC) that has a permanent full-time teacher, if this teacher knows in advance, they must take time off for medical, family or training reasons the EYTC is closed – parents are contacted prior to the day and are informed that the 4-5 yr old children/students are not to come in on that day. The flow on is parents may not be able to attend their scheduled work, take themselves or other to planned appointments. If the teacher is unexpectedly ill the students come in but have minimal supervision and their teaching/learning programs are halted till the regular teacher returns.

Difficulty of delivery continuity to senior classes.

As per NSW Department of Education (DoE) guidelines Stage 6 students must have access to the full HSC course however when teachers transfer or leave a school it can be difficult to replace them with a teacher with the same Key Learning Area (KLA) or VET Qualification. This results in students having to either remove this subject from their pattern of study or undertake Single Course Distance Education to meet their HSC requirements.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Consider DELs living in the region they serve
- Each DEL liaises regularly with a local community person/s to get fuller context of the schools
- Teachers are not required to undertake any extracurricular activity which prevents them from adequately teaching.
- Any allied health professional whose expertise is sought e.g., social worker, speech pathologist psychologist etc are made available to the schools which are having to fill those needs by the teaching staff. Teachers provide those roles seamlessly within the course of their teaching however cannot be expected to be responsible, especially in the schools which have many vulnerable students. While this would be extremely expensive for the government one has to consider the impact on the country if these needs are not met.
- NSW DoE plans for a continuous supply of teachers.
- DoE ensures isolated School Principals' appointments are always decided through the established rigorous interview process.

(b) Future teacher supply and demand,

There is no future workforce strategy in place for teacher supply that we are aware of in the diocese or the public system. In the Catholic system there is a recruiting officer who coordinates advertising and recruitment however the most successful form of recruitment has been word of mouth (friends of friends/police moving to town, local teachers coming back from parental leave etc.) The recruiting is done at a local level generally and is a constant battle. With the increasing complexity of behavioural, social and academic needs of regional, remote and very remote students, NSW DoE will require more SLSOs and teachers trained in special education, behaviour, and trauma informed support for mental health in the future.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- NSW DoE employs strategies which not only meet the demand for more teachers but for suitably trained support teachers and SLSOs. Please refer to terms of reference (a) 'possible solutions'

(c) Out-of-area teaching, merged classes, and minimal supervision in NSW schools,

In some schools they try not to merge classes, as they find it particularly unsettling for students to have more than 30 + students in small classrooms, however at times this has been the only option if more than two teachers are away on the same day. The leadership team covers classes if a teacher is away or needs to attend a professional learning day or meeting. Some schools cease interventions and learning support as well as putting off instructional coaching or supervision of new graduates to keep classes going. This not only puts the school leadership team behind but disadvantages new graduate teachers who are not getting the support they so desperately need. It is hard being a new teacher in a remote location, in a small school and we need so they want to stay or if they do leave, they have enjoyed their experience and recommend it to others. The leadership team being in class means executive administration and paperwork must be completed out of hours or unfortunately sometimes not at all.

"We fall behind and opportunities can be missed. Networking and strategy are unfortunately non-existent when you are simply trying to keep the ship afloat."

This all leads into a cycle of stressed or overwhelmed teachers taking days off and then there being more work to do for those at school; thus, no time to support the young teachers, staff are overwhelmed and 'burn out' all over again.

Schools' priority is always keeping the children learning and engaged safely in classes, but it is extremely difficult in the current climate.

Covid, on the other hand had afforded a chance for some university students to begin their teaching careers as they have been given their teaching numbers prematurely. In some cases, this has meant (when there is the staff to mentor them) that those students have had the opportunity to enjoy and perhaps consider teaching in a more remote location. This has been possible due to the funding which is attached to the student in the public school system.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Please refer to possible solutions (b)

- That the funding attached to assist the new teacher be continued and made available for all systems.

(d) The NSW Teacher Supply Strategy,

Schools are unaware of exactly what this is? Employment of fourth year University students to boost teacher numbers is not particularly helpful in the long term as teachers have limited time and opportunity available to coach and support them - leading to overwhelmed and stressed young teachers who are likely to want to change career paths early.

People who have or are working as home tutors (HTs) in Distance Education or School of The Air schoolrooms need to be considered for accreditation pathways with teaching qualifications. These positions are the very ones which are affording critical training for practical methods of teaching in multi-stage school rooms. Isolated schoolrooms rely on HTs to manage behaviour, program daily, motivate and assess the student's work and progress on the continuum, effectively report and work with the trained teacher in the School of Distance Education (SODE) or School of The Air (SOTA) centre. They are currently a wasted resource which the NSW DoE has failed to notice, remunerate or accreditate.

Amongst these are mothers and fathers who have successfully taught their own children in isolated schoolrooms and who are still living in the districts where it is almost impossible to attract staff!

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Develop a supply strategy of teachers through appropriate teacher training to accurately meet the demand
- Identify possible Home Tutors who would like to teach in a regular school environment, communicate with the SOTA/SODE community, quantify the body of work they have achieved as Home Tutors and offer them accreditation and or further training. Common sense!

(e) Teaching workforce conditions,

Teaching workforce conditions are impacted by lack of casual staff available as replacement teachers, COVID19, flu, sickness etc. Administrative burden is a major issue for teachers for example much of the NESA teacher learning plans, NESA graduate program, NCCD, IEPs, PLPs, NESA and systemic compliance requirements etc are unnecessarily time consuming and do nothing to support and improve student learning. The current requirements for programming, planning, data collection and analysis, reporting and administrative tasks are impossible to be completed in a normal working day.

"Staff are at school from around 7:30-8am and usually leave around 5:30pm, and often as late as 6 or 7pm. They all complete further work such as planning, marking, and recording at home after hours, on the weekend and in the holidays. A conservative average of hours worked in a week for teachers at our school would be 50+ hours. Often in the holidays the teachers report being sick or needing time to 'recover' from a busy term. In what other profession would you need to recover from your daily work? This really underlines the need for urgent reform in the conditions teachers are working under."

When District Offices are being asked for more staff to fill classroom positions to ensure schools are able to be operational, there is severely limited support.

"This is the case in the Western Region where Vocational Education and Training (VET) Senior Pathways Officers (SPO's) are simply not available to the schools or VET trainers they supervise and support as they are face to face teaching. Lack of support can impede a trainer's ability to support the student's attainment of competencies or the completion of a

full VET qualification. There are also excessive administration requirements of such roles to remain compliant to both NES and the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) regulations."

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Please refer to possible solutions (d)

- Continue to refine the curriculum

(f) Initial Teacher Education,

Regional, remote, and very remote schools' experience with graduate teachers is that they are underprepared in curriculum knowledge and content when they leave university. More emphasis on curriculum knowledge and learning capabilities and leaving extracurricular units such as child protection, WHS compliance and even cultural awareness training for onsite - context specific professional learning would be helpful. The enormity and complexity of the job only becomes apparent once someone is in the school, with their own class and responsibilities.

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Amongst these HTs are mothers and fathers who have effectively taught their own children in isolated schoolrooms and who are still living in the districts where it is almost impossible to attract staff!

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

- Teacher education needs to continue throughout the first few years of employment through mentoring and monitoring. Offering practical teaching opportunities at the beginning of a school year to learn how to set up class routines would be a helpful starting point as well as more practical teaching experiences overall in a university degree. Internships may also be a practical option but only if schools are adequately staffed to be able to fully support student teachers.
- Identify possible Home Tutors who would like to teach in a regular school environment, communicate with the SOTA/SODE community, quantify the body of work they have achieved as Home Tutors and offer them accreditation and or further training.
- Increase practical training for four-year trained teachers – The 4th year of teacher training could be like an apprenticeship in a school. The student should be employed as a Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) learning from an experienced teacher with the university student continuing university. This would allow university students to gain confidence and prepare themselves for what happens in the classroom environment. When at a school a practical teacher is being accessed constantly, this is over a short period of time and can be stressful for the new teaching student.

Thus, for some practical teachers it is not a positive experience, leaving them to wonder if they have chosen the right profession. If you have 12 months in the classroom as an SLSO you would be learning for a longer period and covering all aspects of teaching on a day-to-day basis. This would allow the university student a much longer time frame to feel competent and ready for the teaching ahead. Skills which could be learnt are:

1. Setting programs
2. The four different learning styles and how to teach them competently.
3. Dealing with behavioural students
4. Time management
5. Lesson plans/individual plans which result effectively in preparing for a multi-stage cohort
6. Getting to know students
7. Over the year experiencing different stages of teaching.
8. Learning to work within the school policies
9. The most effective way to learn how to teach is watching an experienced teacher daily tackle the various issues that arise in a classroom.

(g) Impacts related to COVID-19, including the impact of government responses such as remote teaching and safety restrictions,

Schools have experienced a much higher rate of staff and student absenteeism and sustained absences- in some cases up to 3-4 weeks for some families. COVID has really amplified concerns for already poor attenders and at-risk students. Schools believe the vulnerable have become more vulnerable due to COVID. At home learning was extremely difficult for some schools for varied reasons- many students did not have access to home internet other than a phone and out of town students had problems with connectivity, bandwidth, and data limits. Contacting some families was almost impossible and necessitated home visits over the fence in some cases. In many cases poor literacy at home meant many families could not help students. Thus, students were at further risk of becoming disengaged, as they were left to try to complete schoolwork by themselves or just not do it at all. As always, the priority was and is the students, but the stress and demands on teachers, especially those who had their own children at home, was immense.

“Personally, supporting my own four children with home learning (one doing the HSC) as well as trying to do my job as additional needs and Assistant Principal was very challenging. Being able to balance the demands of remote teaching, supporting our staff and teaching my own children was very difficult and not something I would ever like to do again.”

On a somewhat positive note, the recognition that “poor literacy at home meant many families could not help students and they were left to try to complete schoolwork by themselves or just not do it at all” has helped the argument that NSW DoE must now supply SODE/SOTA students who are in that situation, with SLSOs.

(h) The impact of workplace mandates,

Vaccine hesitancy had some impact on staffing when some staff did not want to be vaccinated.

“At a school in our area they were unable to find a replacement cleaner for many months and so the cleaning of the whole school fell to the responsibility of the leadership team.”

Teaching staff hadn't an issue with vaccination in some schools but had and still have concerns around exposure. Some teachers resent the expectation that teachers come to work every day with very little protection in place against COVID and that there currently is not the knowledge about the lasting effects of multiple exposures.

(i) The status of the teaching profession,

Teachers are undervalued!

The complexity of student needs and the variety of strategies required for success in a school environment is unknown to the public. Many people would believe they understand teaching as they have been to school without acknowledging how much has changed in terms of administrative requirements, student diversity and parent expectations. The expectations that parent and society in general place on schools is immense.

“The breadth of things schools are being asked to cover is ever increasing it feels- anything from oral hygiene to road safety to social skills and mental health seems to be the responsibility of schools and there’s just not enough time to fit it all in.”

Teachers need time to teach literacy and numeracy. The other material needs to be arranged around literacy and numeracy and taught by people who are trained in that area. Teachers are expected to be educators, sports coaches, event planners, administration officers, counsellors and much more yet are only paid to be teaching students to read and write. The level of expectation is not matched by the rate of pay.

Where education itself is undervalued, so are those that choose it as a profession. Changes in our youth and young children has altered how they learn and communicate. Although teachers are constantly updating what and how they communicate, it is still hindered by school curriculum, processes and education requirements set by governments and their education departments.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Please refer to terms of reference (a) (e) (f)

(j) The impacts of the Staffing Agreement on the ability of principals to effectively staff schools and manage performance,***(k) The administrative burden for principals associated with recruiting for and appointing roles,***

This is a huge burden. Recruitment and employment contracts should not be the responsibility of the principal.

(l) The impact of central appointments prioritisation for teaching and principal roles,***(m) Support for Principals to effectively staff schools above base allocations,***

In Catholic schools there is very little support for the principal to attract and retain staff. He/she generally creates the advertising and shares it through networks. At present, schools are just trying fill base allocations so everyone can do the job that they have been employed to do. This would create a flourishing and effective school community. In the public school system when staff are not applying, there is an avenue through the DoE to assist with recruitment.

Please refer to (e)

(n) The impacts of incentives and the transfer point system on regional shortages,

It has always been hard to get staff in remote and very remote areas. The differences between the two systems which cater to remote and very remote regional NSW are significant. There is no transfer point system available in Catholic system. For example, the public-school teachers receive up to 25K in incentives to teach in some areas, whereas Catholic school incentives are approximately 5-7 k and are only to be used for relocation allowance.

“As a teacher of 20 plus years in the Wilcannia Forbes diocese I do not receive any incentives to live or stay in our area which I must say feels a little disheartening when I hear of other less experienced teachers receiving huge incentives such as subsidised rent and cash bonuses.”

The transfer point system in the public schools is an extremely effective DoE policy lever as it has become a fundamental incentive in attracting and retaining staff to rural and remote communities. Some staff may stay even longer which is hugely beneficial to the school and community. It would be positive for staff who would like to stay in these rural and remote areas to be incentivised in some way for their dedication.

The reality in remote and very remote schools is that the staffing accommodation standard is, on some DoE school sites, appalling and needs to be highlighted in this document as it is part of the suite of reasons for teacher shortage in remote and very remote schools.

Over successive decades and particularly in the last decade some of these schools have received minimal improvements to their teacher's residence nor have provisions been made for extra staff.

Many towns do not have any other accommodation that is suitable. Currently we have teaching staff in accommodation that is minimal however rental expense is elevated. We also have current issues in keeping SLSOs as they are having trouble finding accommodation so our situation may become compounded, shortly.

There is no affordable accommodation. So, when a casual teacher or visiting consultant needs to overnight it is not feasible for them to do so. There is no additional funding which allows for this extra expense if there was somewhere for them to stay. Or they are having to accommodate them in their school or own house which may not be sufficient. Our visiting APCI is sleeping on a fold out sofa bed when they visit – which is not satisfactory.

This is yet another disincentive for Principals as they cannot leave their position for any amount of time as the school would not be attended by a teacher.

We have a teacher unit for our second teacher, within 3m of the teacher house – both dwellings are basically on top of each other and there are not sufficient garages or carports nor privacy between the dwellings. You spend all day together working then basically go home to live within 3m of each other. Some space would have been appropriate with own yards and garages.

Garages are a necessity so our own cars can be able to be out of the extreme elements that we experience and can be protected and be in a secure location.”

An incentive must include high standard of housing suitable for a family, which is comfortable, safe, and appealing for a family, couple or a single person to come to a remote location.

Many regional, remote, and especially very remote schools have long distances on dirt roads to the nearest town. Obviously, even if there was to be an increased salary, it is an expensive decision to accept a position as an incoming Principal or second teacher at these schools because, currently, to accept the position the applicant needs to buy an appropriate vehicle. Therefore, without a vehicle attached to the school, these very remote schools are at a further disadvantage in attracting staff.

Attaching a car to the position as an incentive, allows the principal to pay to use it for personal use (as happens within other government departments) and to use it to attend school events with the students.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- As discussed, the teacher shortage is felt most acutely the further schools are from urban settlement. In regional, remote, and very remote context there needs to be provision of multi types of accommodation i.e., family, couples, or singles.

For housing in rural and remote areas there needs to be the following.

1. Appropriate air-conditioning
2. Rainwater tanks and water for housing
3. Ceiling fans
4. Outside blinds for protection from extreme heat
5. Storage for refrigeration and food stuffs as distances do not allow regular shopping
6. If any work needs to be completed to housing in remote areas teacher housing must consult either the principal, staff, or community as to their ideas (as in what works best in that environment) before any work is started.
7. When employing trades people, teacher housing needs to stipulate that the works need to be completed and carried out as specified as quickly as possible.
8. In remote schools that have only one house for the principal there should be other suitable accommodation on the grounds for consultants and relief teachers as there is often no affordable accommodation in the villages. Without this, when a principal needs to take time away from the school for personal reasons, the only accommodation available is the principal's house which has all their own personal furniture and belongings. If there is no other accommodation available for a relieving principal this makes it difficult to fill the position.

- An appropriate vehicle for very remote schools would be described as needing to be a four-wheel drive, have a passenger capacity of seven, be equipped with driving lights, bull bar and phone boosters. All these features are safety requirements.
- Do not change the current policy of attracting and retaining teachers through the transfer points' policy.

(o) The approval to teacher process in New South Wales,

"In my opinion the NESA accreditation pathway is very detailed and generally fair. However, with the struggles we have with staffing it is difficult to fulfil the instructional coaching and mentoring aspects that support graduates to become proficient. The approval to teach in our diocese is quite straightforward and simple."

Please refer to (f) for added comment.

(p) The impact of casualisation, temporary contact and job insecurity,

Temporary contracts for staff lead to a feeling of uncertainty. It creates unnecessary tension towards the end of the year when people are wondering if they will have a job the following year. It is hard to plan for the future when you do not know what is happening until late in the year.

Staff are understandably less inclined to relocate to rural or regional areas for temporary or casual work, due to its uncertainty and financial insecurity.

(q) The measurement of staff turnover particularly regarding temporary staff, and

"Schools in our area have a high turnover of teaching staff - generally they stay 1-3 years. Often, we get them as graduates and support them through the NESA accreditation process and then they leave to go to the coast or more desirable locations which can be frustrating after all the hours we try to put into mentoring and coaching them. Support staff in our schools are more stable as they are local people who want to live permanently in the area, however again temporary hours given each year mean uncertainty and can lead to staff looking elsewhere for work due to not knowing if they will have enough hours the following year."

Regarding remote schools' principals' turn over, please refer to (a)

(r) Any other related matter

"Teachers need more time to teach, less administrative tasks and better quality professional and wellbeing support for them to continue to provide the best education for our students. Current workloads and expectations are not sustainable, and NSW is not only losing wonderful, passionate people to other professions, but we are seriously damaging the mental and physical health of many teachers."