

Submission  
No 113

## INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Australian Teacher Support Group

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The Hon Mark Latham MLC  
Chair, Portfolio Committee 3 – Education  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY  
NSW 2000

### Teacher Shortage Inquiry 2022

Dear Mr Latham,

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Teacher Shortage Inquiry, 2022.

I began my teaching career in 1982 and have worked permanently for the NSW Department of Education for over 30 years. The inquiry into teacher shortages in NSW is an important step forward into identifying the issues in the teaching profession that cause people to leave this profession.

It saddens me to say that I am currently an Admin for the '*Australian Teacher Support Group*' which was started in 2018 to assist colleagues who have experienced workplace bullying during their teaching careers. The demographic of our group ranges from teachers in the first year of their career, to those who have taught for 20 years or more. There are men and women, teachers, executives and principals who belong to the support group.

The ATSG members are a group of people with the common goal of supporting bullied school staff and seek change in the profession to end unsafe workplaces.

Many of our members, the majority who come from NSW, have their teaching career permanently ended and can never teach again due to psychological injury, but some can never work again in any capacity. These teachers are not only left without a career but they have no income and often severe ongoing health issues affecting their families and their health for the rest of their lives.

Some members are currently on the Workers Compensation roundabout unable to return to their school, as it is unsafe and are waiting for the processes to assist them to return safely to their career at an alternate workplace or for suitable compensation for their workplace injuries, in many cases this takes years.

A few of us have navigated the horrendous system of Workers Compensation, complaint processes, medical assessment appointments and have secured a compassionate transfer to another school to resume our careers. Unfortunately, we all carry the burden of a permanent psychological injury for the rest of our lives, as well as suffering PTSD in many cases.

We have members of the ATSG who are regularly admitted to hospital for treatment and have ongoing medical issues that include depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder, suicidal tendencies and a level of stress that impacts their wellbeing, resulting in other health issues and even premature death. We lost a member of our group under these circumstances in 2019.

The majority of the members of the ATSG were targeted by Principals, executives and other staff for some known and many unknown reasons, some at more than one workplace. They were

competent professionals who were good at their jobs and passionate about Education. They were subjected to humiliating and demoralising treatment by other employees of the NSW DOE and in the majority of cases there were no repercussions for the perpetrators of the bullying, even though the Code of Conduct was clearly breached. In fact, quite often the perpetrators were promoted higher up to DEL or other Executive positions with no record of their actions and the clear breaches having no impact on their career advancement.

These perpetrators are free to move about changing schools and leaving many victims in their path at various schools across the state, serial bullies who left a trail of damaged teachers in their wake. The victims are isolated and many don't put in formal complaints for fear of repercussions and they merely disappear from their schools after becoming unwell, taking leave and being unable to return to teaching.

The internal complaints system in place in NSW DOE schools needs to be run by an independent body so 'mates' aren't investigating 'mates.' Those found to have breached the Code of Conduct and SafeWork NSW practices should be stood down and not considered to be promoted to higher positions within the DOE.

The social media teaching groups I belong to are full of teachers who have been bullied out of their jobs, placed on Teacher Improvement Programs or managed out by Narcissistic Leaders. Many just walk away from teaching unable to fight the system due to ill health or they are without the financial means to engage legal assistance. The personal stories are horrendous and heartbreaking.

NSW teachers have no voice and are unable to speak out as the Code of Conduct prevents it. If you write to Sarah Mitchell in any capacity, you are given disciplinary action, I have experienced this first hand. There are no other bodies to assist with the problems faced by teachers, the DOE are untouchable and the unions hands are tied.

The numbers of teachers affected in NSW are in the thousands, Workers Comp records as well as the number of payouts for bullying cases in the courts should be accessed and data analysed. This money is public money not being spent on Educating students but compensating teachers who have had their careers ended due to workplace bullying.

Please put processes in place to stop work place bullying in our schools and make those responsible accountable for their actions!

Too many great teachers have already been lost to the profession.

Yours Sincerely

Australian Teacher Support Group