INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: A/Prof Rebecca Collie

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Hon. Mark Latham, MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education
Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Latham

Re: Submission by Associate Professor Rebecca Collie to the Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the above inquiry.

My submission is attached and includes the following key recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Reduce poor workforce conditions within schools by decreasing four common job challenges that impede teachers: high teacher workloads, disruptive student behaviour, unrealistic or inconsistent expectations, and barriers to teachers' professional learning.

Recommendation 2: Improve workforce conditions within schools by boosting access to three job supports that assist teachers: input in decision-making within a school, prioritisation of strong interpersonal relationships within a school, and effective feedback and professional learning to assist teachers to improve their practice.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am willing to be contacted for further discussion on any matters relating to the inquiry if required.

Sincerely

Rebecca Collie
Scientia Associate Professor of Educational Psychology
School of Education
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Submission by Associate Professor Rebecca Collie to the Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in New South Wales

Relevant Background

I am an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. I conduct research in the broad areas of student and teacher wellbeing, motivation, and social-emotional development. As part of this, I am interested in how to create optimal learning and teaching conditions for both students and teachers.

Over the past few years, I have been leading a research project funded by the Australian Research Council focused on teaching workforce conditions and how these are linked with teachers' occupational outcomes, as well as implications for students and schools. Below I provide evidence and recommendations based on research stemming from that project, as well as other work on the topic.

Response to the Terms of Reference

(e) teaching workforce conditions

I provide below a brief summary of evidence relating teaching workforce conditions. I also describe the role of workforce conditions in impeding or supporting effective learning and teaching in schools, as well as teachers' and students' wellbeing.

Common Job Challenges Faced By Teachers

Research consistently shows that poor workforce conditions hinder teachers' wellbeing and their capacity to undertake their work effectively (Collie, 2021a; Collie, Granziera et al., 2020; Collie, Martin et al., 2020).

Research highlights four types of poor workforce conditions, or job challenges, as particularly essential to address:

1. High teacher workloads
2. Disruptive student behaviour
3. Unrealistic or inconsistent expectations from professional/registration bodies and parents
4. Barriers to teachers' professional learning

These four job challenges are linked with a range of detrimental outcomes for teachers, including:

- Lower wellbeing at work, such as reduced mental and physical health (Collie & Mansfield, 2020)
- Lower job satisfaction (Collie, Malmberg et al., 2020)
- Stronger intentions to quit the profession (Collie, 2022)
- Lower commitment to the profession (Collie, 2021a; Collie, Martin et al., 2021)

The four job challenges are also linked with harmful outcomes for students and schools, including:

- Teachers' reduced ability to adapt their instruction to match learners' needs (Collie, Granziera et al., 2020)
- Lower student achievement levels (Collie & Martin, 2017)
- A classroom learning environment that is less supportive of students' social and academic development (Collie, Martin et al., 2021)

Notably, teaching workforce conditions appear to be worsening. In a study of over 3,000 Australian teachers using data collected as part of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey in 2013, my colleagues and I identified that 34% of teachers could be considered struggling at work due to their experience of poor workforce conditions (Collie, Malmberg et al., 2020).

In 2018, we replicated that study among 3,000 Australian teachers using data from the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey in 2018 (Collie, Martin et al., 2021). Our findings showed that in the five years between 2013 for Study 1 and 2018 for Study 2, there was an increase in the number of struggling teachers from 34% to 47% of the sample. This indicates a rise of 13 percentage points between the two time points (or an increase of 40% over five years). Critically, the increase occurred before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and may be even more severe today given that teaching workforce conditions have become more challenging and teachers' wellbeing has further declined since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Kim et al., 2021; Collie, 2021b).

Recommendation 1: Reduce poor workforce conditions within schools by decreasing four common job challenges that impede teachers: high teacher workloads, disruptive student behaviour, unrealistic or inconsistent expectations, and barriers to teachers' professional learning.

Strategies Relevant to Recommendation 1

The following strategies have been suggested in prior research as approaches to reduce poor workforce conditions (Collie, 2022; Collie & Mansfield, 2022; Collie, Malmberg et al., 2020).

- To reduce workload
    - Streamline teachers' administrative work, reduce teachers' face-to-face teaching time, and provide more time for collaboration, planning, and professional learning.
- To reduce disruptive student behaviour
    - Provide teachers with access to effective, evidence-based professional learning opportunities that are ongoing, involve active participation, and align well with teachers' goals for improving their classroom management skills.
    - Apply effective mentoring and coaching programs to help teachers develop their skills in engaging students in learning.
    - Provide more funding to support students' wellbeing, mental health, and behavioural needs so that teachers can concentrate on the core business of teaching.
- To reduce unrealistic expectations
    - Ensure that teachers' perspectives are sought in any reform efforts and that trust is conveyed in teachers as professionals
    - Encourage schools to develop strong home-school partnerships to help ensure schools and families are aligned in their goals for students.
- To reduce barriers to professional learning and development
    - Ensure teachers in all schools across metropolitan, regional, and remote NSW have access to and funding for effective, evidence-based professional learning opportunities.

Job Supports that Assist Teachers in their Work

In contrast to the four job challenges listed above, there are helpful workforce conditions, or job supports, that can bolster teachers' wellbeing and aid their capacity to undertake their work effectively.

Three main job supports have been underscored as essential for teachers:

1. Teachers' opportunities to have input in decision-making within a school
2. A school environment that prioritises strong interpersonal relationships between teachers, students, and school leaders
3. Helpful feedback and professional learning to assist teachers to improve their practice

These three job supports are linked with a range of positive outcomes for teachers, including:

- Greater teacher wellbeing at work and lower teacher burnout (Collie, 2022; Collie, Granziera et al., 2017)
- Greater teacher resilience to cope with the everyday pressures of teaching (Collie, 2021b)
- Greater commitment to the profession (Collie, 2021a; Collie, Granziera et al., 2017)
- Lower intentions to quit the profession and look for other work (Collie, 2022)

The three job supports are also linked with beneficial outcomes for students and schools, including:

- A classroom learning environment that is more supportive of students' social and academic development (Collie, Martin et al., 2021)
- Greater student achievement levels (Collie, Martin et al., 2021)

Efforts to improve current teaching workforce conditions are critical. This is because the success of any future actions to attract new teachers into the profession will be curtailed by the high rates of burnout and attrition currently plaguing the profession in NSW (and Australia more broadly; AITSL, 2021; NSW Department of Education, 2021). Put simply, without improving the workforce conditions of existing NSW teachers, the causes of high burnout and attrition will not be resolved, leading to a "revolving door" of teacher turnover.

Recommendation 2: Improve workforce conditions within schools by boosting access to three job supports that assist teachers: input in decision-making within a school, prioritisation of strong interpersonal relationships within a school, and effective feedback and professional learning to assist teachers to improve their practice.

Strategies Relevant to Recommendation 2

The following strategies have been suggested in prior research to improve workforce conditions (Collie, 2021a, 2021b; Collie & Mansfield, 2022):

- To boost teacher input
  - Invite teachers to have input in decisions and school policies, provide choice and control over how teachers undertake their work (where feasible and appropriate), and listen to teachers' perspectives and needs.
- To build strong interpersonal relationships within schools
  - Implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs (see http://beyou.edu.au) to create supportive learning and working environments in schools.
- To boost effective feedback and coaching
  - Provide more opportunities for teachers to receive feedback on their teaching from colleagues and coaches, where feedback is targeted, specific, focused on teaching practice, and evidence-based.

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