

**INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## **A Personal Account of being unvaccinated**

**Background** - From 22 May 2017 I was employed as a term-time school receptionist and as their primary first aid officer (Independent school) on a permanent contract. I am 67 years old and believed this to be the employment I would remain in until I could afford to retire. I emigrated to Australia in December of 2016 with my husband and got my residents visa with full work rights in February 2017. We came on a parent contributory visa, the fee to the Australian Government being \$45,000 each with us being unable to apply for an Aus Government pension for 10 years. We are home owners here in the Northern Rivers, NSW. The school I worked in is in the independent sector (a Steiner School). I was awarded Australian Citizenship on 17 September last year.

**Mask Wearing** - On 21 July 2021 (first day of Term 3 for staff), when the mask recommendations had recently come in, there was a situation where employers were not permitted to ask details about a mask exemption, they were not permitted to ask to see a mask exemption and they were not permitted to ask the medical reason for a mask exemption. Masks at this point were only 'recommended' they were not 'required' or mandated. Out of approximately 70 staff I was discriminated against. One of the two Co-Heads consulted with two of my admin colleagues about how they felt about working with me as a non-mask wearer. After those conversations on 21 July I was immediately set aside from my work area and made to sit outside in the school grounds. Within 30 minutes I was sent home. Yes, I was paid but my treatment was abhorrent. I knew of at least two other members of staff in the same situation as me (non-mask wearers) but they were never challenged about their exemptions and never had to produce evidence of them. In August I was hounded by HR and the Co-Head to produce a medical report from my GP about my non-mask status (other colleagues weren't pursued in this way at all). I resisted doing this as I was the 'only' staff member being harassed for a doctor's report. My two non-mask wearing colleagues (Teacher's Assistants) were allowed to attend site and take part in the teaching of students maskless without proof of their medical circumstances. There was a lot of to'ing and fro'ing with regard to communication by email, most of it very unpleasant indeed and many points raised by me were never fully responded to and addressed.

Then, suddenly, out of the blue on 10 September, I got a call from the school's HR lady saying that I was able to return to site on 13 September. I didn't challenge their decision, no reason was offered by them as to why things had changed, but I decided to attend site and see how my work process might play out. There were a few precautions in place about the way I could work in Reception eg using a slatted window to talk through for communication and doors being closed throughout Admin but on the whole there I was unexpectedly on site maskless. I was however, prevented from doing my first aid duties. Other members in my team took those on.

**Trade Union** - I was a member of the IEU but they have failed 100% in representing all sides of the conundrum. They have favoured and discriminated against non-mask wearers irrespective of whether they had an exemption or not and they have abandoned liberty in freedom in support of a totalitarian system. Needless to say I resigned from the IEU and sought support from a more democratic and forward thinking trade union who took on support for those of us who were vaccine hesitant but the system is broken and corrupt. The Australian governments, federal and state, seem hell-bent on bringing the very people of voted for them to their knees. Utterly shameful.

**Vaccination Status** - Then email communications to non-vaccinated staff began to be raised with regard to vaccines. Dates were muted, coercion and pressure was applied as deadlines were notified. Communications came and went, some unpleasant, with deadlines getting ever nearer. Questions I asked in emails were often ignored. I always responded to the school's comms stating that I had reservations about the safety of the experimental, untried and untested vaccines. I believed they were still in a trial period. No long-term studies had been carried out and on asking often, the school, the Australian Independent Schools body, Steiner Education Australia and the school's insurers were not prepared to guarantee my safety from any possible harm or death. The risks seemed too great and beyond what was, in my opinion, far too risky.

The school set deadlines for staff to be vaccinated. Those of us who missed those deadlines due to hesitancy and concern for our own safety and bodily autonomy were banned from site as of 8 November.

From that date until 16 December I was offered to work from home for 3 hours per day, not the usual 7.5 hours, to cover emails and the entering of some new enrolments' details. On 16 December, the last day of Term 4, I was stood down from my role due to not meeting the demands of the school with regard to vaccinations. My salary was stopped. When the new term began in February 2022, the unvaccinated were informed to stay at home for the whole of Term 1 unless evidence of full vaccination status could be proved. I was put on leave without pay. A final deadline for full vaccination was set as 14 March, extended due to the region's recent devastating flooding. A termination notice was issued and my employment ended 8 April.

Please note that I regularly asked in email communications how, if the mandates were to cease, could the school integrate me back into the work place. I also asked if they would consider temporarily filling my role by someone on a 'casual' basis to give me an opportunity to return to my role, should the then present vaccination status rules cease. This request was ignored and my Reception role was filled by another member of staff who previously held a role as Canteen Assistant and who moved to a split role as Classroom Assistant / Librarian Support before being allocated my job. The Reception role, to my knowledge, was never advertised internally or externally. It is publicly known that one of the Co-Heads had spoken in a parent Zoom meeting about the possibility of mandates dropping so it goes to show there was doubt in the school's mind that the situation may need to be reviewed and that the school could plan for the possible return of their unvaccinated staff.

I find it interesting that myself and colleagues in a similar situation have had their contracts terminated, except one member of staff only who is the 'other' Co-Head. I don't know her 'personal' situation other than that she is still unvaccinated and her contract has not been terminated.

**My Opinion/Overview** - This whole debacle has been a living nightmare. I have worked in admin for 52 years and never, ever have I had a stain on my character. It has left me and my husband totally vulnerable with regard to our financial situation. We both cannot work. Due to the insistence of my school to keep the requirement of vaccination going even now as at 3.7.22, staff cannot return there even though other schools are employing unvaccinated staff. My medical privacy has been undermined and is public knowledge. I believe that I should be compensated for the discrimination, loss of past and future earnings, the damage to my health and well being and for the stigma that has been directed towards me for having stood for liberty and freedom when my bodily autonomy was and still is being challenged. Shame on the Government, shame on the governing bodies and shame on my employer. Whatever happened to democracy, liberty and freedom is unfathomable.

I believe history will look back on these times of discrimination and coercion and ask why this was ever allowed to happen. I truly hope that one day soon the shame of this will be addressed and acknowledged throughout humanity for all types of employment.

**Extended Note** - Of note: As the parent contributory visa I hold doesn't allow me to claim for an Australian Senior Citizen's Pension for 10 years (2027) and Centre Link deems me as retired, it seems there is no 'help' I can tap into. I am trying to navigate the system to see if there is any help for me out there, but as usual none of this comes easily (perhaps I am one of a few unique cases that officials in the agencies do not understand?). It's quite shameful to be honest. Centre Link holds \$14,000 that was paid as sponsorship by my son in October 2016 before our planned arrival here (he is an Australian Citizen). It was another rule of our visa. As Centre Link deems me retired, which really I am not as I didn't resign from my position, I was terminated, then technically I assume my son should now get his \$14,000 back. Why would they hold onto it if they have no intention of allowing me to claim from the system? Feels like the system is against us and yet we paid heavily to come here, we have invested in and supported the Australian economy whole heartedly. Notwithstanding integrating into the Australian way of life as exemplary citizens. So, here we are, my husband and I, seems like there is absolutely no support coming at us, we are highly likely to slip through the system into obscurity towards impoverishment. I am not seeing any care or loyalty reflected back at us, more shame on the Australian system. Seems like a costly \$45,000 that the Immigration Department has truly swallowed up and we seem to have no recourse!