

Submission
No 143

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales

*Note: If this submission is to be published in whole or in part as part of the inquiry, I request that my name be suppressed or a pseudonym be used on account of the risk of reputational damage to individuals or schools. Consent is **not** given to publish this submission with my personal details attached.*

I am a secondary teacher with extensive experience working in both rural and metropolitan schools. My wife works as a primary school teacher and has also worked in both contexts.

Our experience of the NSW public education has many highlights, and we are both proud and committed to the profession. However, aspects of our daily work have taken a significant toll, often to the point where it impacts on family and private life and at times pushes us close to burnout. When our stories are added to the experience of our direct colleagues, there is much to learn in terms of improving the public education system for the benefit of our students.

The biggest impact on all teachers right now is simply the overwhelming demands of the profession. While any individual task or requirement may appear to have value when isolated, the sheer number of extra demands means that teachers are working themselves into the ground just to stay on top of the most basic requirements. The explosion of data collection, monitoring, mandatory training, policies, procedures, reporting and so on keeps teachers endlessly chasing their tail just to stay afloat. In addition, day-to-day processes often require the use of different technology platforms – attendance in Sentral, staff meetings in Teams, parent interviews on Zoom, PLAN data in ALAN, leave in SAP, professional learning in myPL, accreditation in ETAMS, NAPLAN data in Scout, and so the list goes on with dozens more of the same. Each platform and process demands a little more time, taking us away from our core business of teaching.

While the Department has recognised that workload is an issue for teachers, measures to improve the situation have to date been laughable and have had no discernible impact on teachers' workloads. It must also be acknowledged that some significant administrative loads are created by NESA or at the individual school level. In the case of NESA, compliance activities have increased substantially and require many hours to be spent scanning and recording work samples and other evidence of the teaching and learning cycle, inspired by the fear of an audit. At the school level, pressures on principals to demonstrate school progress to Directors and through School Improvement Plans results in inefficient or unnecessary measures driven towards providing data rather than genuinely improving outcomes. Many, especially newer, principals are caught in the trap of trying to tick every box, resulting in unnecessary additional strain on their staff.

Another issue is the added stress placed on temporary teachers. As a temporary teacher in the primary school setting, my wife is forced to take on excessive numbers of additional responsibilities in order to remain competitive for the expression of interest process the following year or for the next permanent vacancy. Aside from the stress caused by balancing multiple extra-curricular responsibilities, this negatively affects teacher cooperation and morale by pitting teachers against one another and encouraging self-interest over the needs of the school. In this context it should also be noted that the so-called 'merit selection' process is grossly misleading, as the reality is that most teacher appointments reflect other factors, most commonly the experience of a temporary teacher in the school advertising the position.

The overall situation has become so bad that many of my colleagues have considered a change in profession or indicated that they would not choose teaching if they had their time again. Some have increased their use of sick leave, either for mental health reasons stemming from burnout or just to catch up on work that they can't get done in the school day. Others have switched to part-time, plan early retirement or actively seek other career options. Just last week an experienced teacher commented to me that she would no longer recommend teaching to her students on account of the unmanageable demands of the profession. This is indeed a sad day for teaching.

I note the terms of reference also include specific Covid-related measures, and there is no doubt that these have contributed further to the challenges faced by schools and teachers. This is especially true for schools and regions where casual staff cannot be found to cover classes. However, the problems I have outlined here extend far beyond Covid times and have been steadily growing for years. For many Covid has been a breaking point, but the issues extend much further.

In terms of a strategy to improve the situation, workload is unquestionably the first thing to be addressed. Either the workload of teachers needs to be drastically reduced (in the order of many hours per week) or release time increased by a similar magnitude. Adequate pay is an important incentive and has fallen below what is appropriate for the complexity and importance of a teacher's role, but increases in pay must be matched by changes to demands on teachers as well. If the combination of workload and pay are not addressed, there is increasingly little incentive to enter the profession. Our students see what it means to be a teacher today, and they don't want what they see.

Finally, a personal note. Today is Sunday, the second day of the winter school holidays. Today I spent a large chunk of my day doing background readings for Year 11 history topics, completing a mandatory training course, providing feedback on student work and planning my week ahead. I know that I need to plan my teaching units for the upcoming term over the next two weeks, because during the term I simply don't have the time to sit down and develop a cohesive and meaningful learning sequence, especially in the little windows of time available in the school day or evening. If I don't do it in my holidays, the lessons will be rubbish. Assessment tasks need to be written now, so that I can then sit down and mark more than 180 assessment tasks across this term alone, each requiring detailed feedback against marking criteria, no doubt all done of an evening or on weekends. And you know what? I'm tired. I'm sick, from something picked up at school. I'm in desperate need of a break. As I sit down and write the list of all the things I need to complete these holidays, I'm already exhausted just looking at it. But I don't have a choice. It has to be done if I'm to survive the term. As I sit here writing, my wife is completing a mandatory online training course with graphic images of first aid injuries – so much for a relaxing Sunday evening. Tomorrow we'll both be back in front of screens trying to get ahead before the mayhem begins again for Term 3. But more and more this is our lot in life. Something has got to give, and I hope it's not us.