

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission into why there is a teacher shortage

Primary Education

The following issues have had a huge impact on teacher morale and workload therefore driving teachers from the profession

- **Teacher accountability and resultant workload.** The excessive amount of documentation required of teachers is taking away from quality classroom time. Quality teachers are far more interested in hands on dealing with situations in positive ways than documenting everything. But quality teachers are being driven away from schools because of the heavy documentation demands.
- **Curriculum expectations.** People educated in early childhood, or who have a speech and occupational therapy background, have a clear knowledge that expecting ALL students to 'learn their sounds' in preschool is an unrealistic expectation. This leads to students feeling they have failed at learning to read even prior to starting school which leads to disengagement and discipline issues. In the past, students spent considerable time in their first year of school consolidating pre reading and writing skills, which is developmentally appropriate. Now students are being bombarded with reading and writing expectations that are not developmentally appropriate as soon as they enter school, at a time when they should be learning to cooperate with other students and be learning that school is a non-pressured, enjoyable environment where students enjoy learning not only scholastically based information but social skills that lead to them being capable learners throughout their schooling experience. There appears to be a direct correlation between the removal of these pre reading and writing expectations and the decline in general literacy and discipline. With these expectations, teachers are left feeling demoralised and like they are failing the students and thus leave the system.
- **Discipline issues.** Many teachers are being confronted with a plethora of discipline issues from students who have impulse control issues such as the many students on the Autism spectrum who are now integrated into the school setting, to students who have been exposed to trauma in their homelives. These students are extremely demanding and the lack of aid support in many classrooms to cater for their complex needs, results in disruption to the learning of all students. It is not enough to state that students must be educated at a given age. Children must be screened PRIOR to school entry at an early age, I suggest 3 years, to ensure that they are physically and emotionally progressing. If students do not have these abilities, they must be given speech, social skills training and physical therapies by highly trained specialists and not forced to enter the school environment without these skills. Children must be given these social, emotional, physical and listening and speaking skills to enable them to adapt to the school environment and not enter that environment until they have the skills to do so. While there are some excellent early intervention programs, once a student is 6 they are taken from these programs where they receive more intensive input and thrown into a learning environment with 19 other students. This is a recipe for failure and places unrealistic expectations on teachers. As part of this, families who are struggling, must be given greater support. Students who enter school tired because there is a lack of routine in the home, are not able to learn effectively as they are falling asleep in class. More family support prior to reaching school age is imperative. Early intervention prior to school, will result in problems being resolved before they escalate making the teachers more able to cope with their student needs and increasing the retention rate of teachers.
- **Social expectations.** Gone are the days of parental accountability. If a child fails to engage in the school environment, then immediately the teacher is held accountable. Of course, all teachers need to be dedicated and professional and some do not have adequate education themselves to ensure all students are exposed to a positive learning environment, but parents too must also be held accountable. Family support for

struggling families is essential. If this was to be supplied then less teachers would be attacked verbally and sometime sadly, physically, by parents.

- **Teacher training.** Teacher training has become increasingly theoretical. This theory would be more suitable if it was specific to reading and mathematics. University tutors should be demonstrating precisely how to
 - Every primary school teacher should be exposed to supervising a small group for reading and mathematics every week for the **first year** of their training as well as assisting with supporting a special needs student. This would initially be implementing the program designed by the supervising teacher but lead to them writing the program for those groups of students. This gradual initiation into the classroom would result in the student teachers having a more realistic expectation of what lay ahead and arm them with many necessary skills. This should then be increased to half a day of classroom visits every week for the remainder of their training plus practicums and the internship.
 - A literacy and numeracy competency test must be given PRIOR to students being accepted to university. This is presently given further into training so people are accumulating university debt then being told they will never be teachers.
- **Creative Arts Emphasis:** The link between music and listening skills, and music and mathematics, is a well- established one. Many students blossom when exposed to the joys of music, art, dance, and drama, all of which promote collaborative learning, working as a team, problem solving and promote skills that reduce stress and arm students with lifelong tools necessary for positive mental health. Sadly, in the push for academic excellence these tools which assist with these skills have been pushed aside and given less focus. This has contributed once again to less creative expression and therefore problems with focus and discipline. A creative classroom creates an atmosphere of joy for learning and help equip students with group participation skills, trusting in their creative abilities and self- discipline which in turn makes the teacher's lives far more pleasant.
- **Emphasis on social issues best taught at home.** Rather than specifically exposing young children to gender issues, racism, sexism etc, to be age appropriate and ensure that all areas are embraced, we should simply be teaching all students to treat everyone with respect and dignity. We do not need to be cramming the curriculum with labels for this and that as this is time consuming and often builds unnecessary barriers between families and school. Rather if every student is encouraged to treat all people with respect and dignity, regardless, then all people are covered, and all situations are covered. Parents can then address specific circumstances as they arise for their child. This would free up more time in the classroom and detract from an overcrowded curriculum, thus minimising stress on teachers and encouraging a higher retention rate.
- **Stage- based progress.** When stages were initially introduced into the education system the purpose was that a student did not progress to the next stage until they had mastered the previous stage. This was logical and a positive initiative. Now teachers are being asked to 'expose students to the staged learning appropriate to their age.' This results in a student who has not grasped basic concepts being placed in a situation where they are 'exposed' to concepts that require higher order thinking e.g. students who cannot yet decode words but who are older, are being asked to analyse the author intent or other more sophisticated skills. Learning needs to be more systematic and steps clearly achieved before progressing to the next stage. This results on students being more confident and competent and improves classroom behaviour.
- **Removal of non- specific terminology.** The relationship between home and school is crucial as education is a collaborative partnership between both, and yet the feedback from such tests as NAPLAN is ridiculously vague and generalised. I have always found that if I can show a parent the exact example that the child is struggling with, then they

better understand the issue and generalisations can be made from there. Many parents have expressed over the years that they have no idea what the NAPLAN results were actually saying, and it is laborious for teachers to go through these results with parents when in fact if they received the marked test which showed the specific mistake, they would be able to see for themselves what kinds of mistakes were made. Given the cost of all this testing we should at least make it more useful rather than giving parents another reason to criticise teachers as 'using language that is beyond their understanding,' thereby weakening the supportive bond between home and school. The delay in receiving the results too, makes it outdated information and parents approach teachers stating how their child can do these things. One would hope a quality teacher would have assessed the need and addressed it given the timeframe of the results. Outdated information is detrimental to the trust between teacher and parents opening opportunities for unnecessary professional criticism.

Secondary School

- **Reintroduction of the School Certificate and Lowering of Leaving Age.** Raising the age of leaving school to 17 has crowded year 11 and 12 classrooms with students who do not want to be there. This leads to increased discipline problems and detracts from the ability to teach the more academically inclined students as time is taken from the classes learning time spent disciplining disengaged students. Of course, these discipline issues lead to teachers leaving the workforce. Joining the workforce or attending TAFE, at age 16 for students who are less academically inclined, leads to a plethora of financial and social advantages and because we now offer alternate pathways to universities could see a more mature and work savvy group of potential future university students should they opt for that educational choice later in life when they are more mature. Attending TAFE in a specific interest area is far preferable, than the more limited subject areas that can be offered at schools, which are understaffed and lack industry trained teachers. TAFE is a far better option for so many students. When the School Certificate was practiced it was an indicator for students of how they might realistically perform in the HSC and an opportunity to think about trades or TAFE based courses that would be more appealing to the less academic students.

All Levels of Education

- **Suspension, At Home vs In School.** At home suspension of students leads to poor home/school relationships, many students being exposed to inadequate supervision during that suspension and a poorer attitude towards school by many students once they return. In school suspension achieves the same cooling off period and removes the immediate danger to other students but needs to be adequately supervised by appropriately trained staff. Every group of schools needs a well supervised suspension area where students are not only encouraged to do schoolwork so they do not fall behind, but are taught how to better cope in classroom situations e.g. students while suspended should be exposed to yoga techniques and strategies that address anger management by a properly qualified professional. The suspension centre should be teaching collaborative techniques and giving students the opportunities to address the issues that lead to their suspension. If teachers had this tool to refer students through to, they would feel more empowered in their discipline and have students returning to their classroom after suspension, equipped with more positive strategies thus encouraging more teachers to stay in the profession. However, another important aspect of the in-school suspension **MUST** be home support. Open communication is vital to establish what has caused the issue with the student.
- **Teacher Supervision.** Prior to a university student being sent on a placement, better screening of the supervising teacher should take place. Some university placements are

inappropriate, and the teachers are not of a high quality to be the best role model for those students. We want our future teachers being taught by the best. To encourage this, part of the quality teacher process should be that teachers supervise other teachers and university students. Some university students have had inappropriate placements which have left them feeling disheartened and unsupported. Once teachers are in the workforce then they must have quality mentoring and support. In the past the education system had consultants in each subject area. I found these people to be of great value in advising and demonstrating a plethora of skills. When they were removed from the system a most valuable resource that supported teachers and executive, was removed from the system. This led to but another supportive level being taken away from teachers so more teachers left the system.

- **Promotion Process.** Once again, the baby has been thrown out with the bath water. While the 'List system' had many faults, it did in fact put teachers who wished to be a supervisory role through a process which ensured their eligibility, rather than simply how well they wrote a CV and performed in an interview. A combination of both these systems would be of benefit in ensuring that executive are appropriate school leaders and have the necessary skills to adequately supervise and support their staff. It is ludicrous that a person who has taught for less than 3 years, should ever be considered for a promotions position. In the old system people had to have 5 years teaching experience prior to applying for promotion and this was a good rule of thumb guideline. If, our schools were staffed with excellent executive who were well aware of teachers who were struggling and had the skills to adequately support them, then we would not be losing so many young teachers.