

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 5 July 2022

Partially
Confidential

I am a teacher in a secondary, years 7-10 school in Western Sydney with just over 4 years of active teaching experience. I have just managed to receive a permanent position a year ago through going to interview for my second school. When I saw the position advertised, I did not want to go for it as I liked my previous school and the staff there, however, I now see it was the best move for me as there were no guarantees of a permanent position under current department structures at my previous school due to favouritism of certain staff and the lack of positions available within the school. It is perceived that no casual staff want to come to schools in our area due to student behaviour and the lack of support provided to them. Why come and cope the abuse when they can get paid the same at another school? I believe there are 2 ends to the teaching scale - one side is behaviour management which we largely experience in Western Sydney schools, while the other side is academic pressure which is largely felt in higher SES areas. I will outline below my experiences within 2 different government schools and how I feel the system is failing to support and uphold teacher wellbeing.

Since leaving my first school (less than a 5 minute drive away from my current school) I have heard of 3 other teachers being GIVEN permanent positions without any need to interview. Their level of experience ranged from first year teacher to over 15 years of teaching experience. Sadly, I also witnessed one of my close colleagues, who had been a part of the school for over 15 years, not even receive an interview for the HT position which she applied for via advertisement. It felt like the very people who had helped her prepare her application didn't even have the decency to provide her the opportunity to go for the job. She was a hard working, loyal teacher who knew her students, how they learnt and most importantly, how to connect with them. She managed to get an interview for the relieving Head Teacher position at another school, where she has now been appointed permanent Head Teacher. Prior to myself leaving that school, I had also seen 4 head teachers, each with at least a minimum of 10 years teaching experience, leave at the same time due to collectively not feeling supported in their roles which included (in addition to their regular roles as faculty head teacher) whole school truancy follow up, setting up whole school reporting and whole school Literacy and Numeracy support. Each of those teachers felt unjustly targeted by students, to which they felt no lasting or genuine consequences were happening. I have also experienced this, which, in addition to seeing other teachers leave the school and witnessing the dual aspect of favoritism towards certain staff and limited things being done about severity of student behaviours (including persistent truancy, swearing at teachers and refusing to follow simple instructions in the classroom) was a driving factor behind me leaving the school. We had been experiencing the teacher shortage since I'd started, often having to merge classes with ratios that were beyond the department ratios of 1:30. This became more prevalent after having multiple staff leave, where we suddenly only had 7 spare periods of cover between the whole school staff. Within that school, I had students direct their language at me and other teachers, sometimes on a daily basis, without any consequence. I had a young girl call me a paedophile when I told their group of friends to stay back for detention for using their phones in class and not completing the work. They were made to write a letter of apology by the deputy, before again persisting with that language and abuse towards me in future lessons, requiring immediate support from the HT/Senior executives. I did not feel safe around that student and there were plenty of other volatile students made the place unsafe.

Since moving to my new school and returning from online learning, we have seen a rise in the number of issues created among students due to social media. We are seeing rising numbers of mental health struggles and volatile/unsafe behaviour. Some students are not able to concentrate, often choose to truant and disobey instructions. There are gang mentalities that form which lead to unsafe behaviours such as fights, property damage and language/abuse directed at staff and students. An example was the start of this year, we had a student bring a knife and went into lockdown in our second week. When I called and shared that info with another teacher up the

coast, they said they had already had that happen in the first week of returning. This is obviously an extreme behaviour/example, but the issue lies in the fact that these students often remain on school grounds and, at times, make the place unsafe for many students and at times, staff around them. Due to various factors including covid, we have had up to 20 staff out on some days. This has led to collapsing classes to ensure teacher availability, which also brings its challenges with larger class sizes and the extra management required. As a result of this, we spend most of our periods off chasing up student behaviours and often taking home or staying back late to complete our extra admin work (such as marking, planning lessons and content, wellbeing referrals and follow up, preparing external programs and extra curricula activities, professional learning and writing reports). We are struggling to get casual teachers as again, why would they want to get paid to be abused when they could go elsewhere? The workload is becoming increasingly unsustainable and the pressure is mounting on teachers statewide. This is the same for all department schools across the state.

I believe that 90% of the students are there to learn and make an effort in their learning, however when they see others getting away with the volatile behaviours they begin to also act up. There are even a small minority of students whose intention is to disrupt classroom learning, and they need an alternate education setting, however an ongoing narrative in our area is a limit on places at these educational facilities. I believe that recently suggested programs (a year of pre-kindergarten and teacher performance pay bonuses) are not fair or viable long term solutions as they do not account for issues such as those listed above that we experience in lower SES areas and the statewide teacher shortages we face. The salary cap of 3% does not reflect the recent rise in cost of living and this unattractive salary, in conjunction with the lack of support provided from department in dealing with increasingly volatile workplace settings does not incentivise or encourage teachers to enter or stick with the teaching profession. Another way of looking at it, there were over 200 students in my graduating class at university. Many of them, who have a lot to offer after 5 years of higher education, do not have a permanent position yet and many of them are considering leaving the teaching profession. Where are they now and why are the government not putting more in place - increased pay across the board, a more sustainable workload and increases in alternate education or workplace settings (e.g. TAFE) for the minority of students who don't want to learn - and make it their goal to disrupt the classroom?? I believe that the department need to look closer at these issues and re-evaluate the way they are implementing their catch phrase that every student is known, valued and cared for - while I also believe in this mantra, I don't believe that a mainstream setting is for everyone and that more can be done to recruit, value and retain teachers towards experiencing rich and full, long-term careers doing what they enjoy.