

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 6 July 2022

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Partially  
Confidential

Wednesday, 6 July 2022

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into the Teacher Shortage

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to this parliamentary inquiry to address the reasons for the teacher shortage from my own personal perspective. I write as a teacher from Arthur Phillip High School, NSW's first vertical high school.

I write in exasperation that even after all the protests, submissions and discussions, there are still no concrete moves towards reducing the amount of face to face teaching time, reducing the amount of administrative work we have to do, increasing teachers' salaries and wages beyond the 3% which is not even on par with the rate of inflation. Not even a proper research study done for the #MoreThanThanks campaign was enough to even get a look-in by the current Government.

The teacher shortage to which this parliamentary inquiry refers was brought home to me late last year, in Term 4. This was when all the students and teachers were tired from a very difficult year of learning from both at home and at school with the sceptre of COVID-19 over all of us. Having to pivot yet again in 2021 and having just gone through this in 2020, especially for our Year 11 and 12 students, was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back. So that in Term 4, 2021, when we had quite a number of teachers off who were very unwell, I had on three occasions 100+ Year 11 and 12 students up on a mezzanine study period supervised by myself only. There were students there whose entire timetables for the day consisted of them being under this minimal supervision model because there were simply not enough relief teachers and not enough teachers in general. The worst time was towards the middle of Term 4, 2021, when I had 160+ students in Year 11 and 12 under minimal supervision, again up on that mezzanine floor. I was so worried that I told any executive staff members, including two deputy principals, about the situation. As we were so short-staffed, only minimal assistance in terms of the amount of students being supervised by me and check-ins by the caring executive staff members could be offered.

Earlier this year in Term 1, 2022, this situation got so bad that Year 11 and 12 students started not seeing the reason for going to school at all if all they were going to be doing is left with minimal supervision and not taught. The students openly said this to any teacher or deputy that would listen. I know that my school was not the only one suffering from this predicament at all. There were, are and probably won't be for the near future, enough relief teachers and/or teachers in general to cover and properly supervise and teach Year 11 and 12. This is not at all the fault of the executive staff members or the staff members that organise relief teachers. This is not the fault of the principal or deputy principals. We have followed all the advice, procedures and protocols as set out to us by NSW Department of Education Head Office, which is around the corner from us.

We are hamstrung by a system, policies, procedures and politicians refusing to deal with the root causes of this: unsustainable workload and uncompetitive salaries. Explain to me why someone with a Bachelor of Science in Computing Science – like I have – would go into a job that maxes out at effectively \$110K take home, where you work a crippling 60 hours per week on average, and do everything but your core business, would do my job as a teacher. All because the Government wants you to take care of data collection for system targets on literacy and numeracy growth instead of actually teaching the students. This data collection turns students into numbers and teachers into grade factories rather than engaging the whole student. There have been decades of research which clearly states that engaging students and building relationships with them are the keys to getting the most successful, effective and well-behaved students.

Speaking of data collection for system targets, have any of you heard of something called SPaRO or School Planning and Reporting Online? Here's an example of it below:



Figure 1: Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) Cycle screen on SPaRO

The screenshot shows the 'Plan Setup 2021-2025' interface. The header includes the NSW logo and 'SPaRO School Planning & Reporting Online'. A notice at the top states: 'ATTENTION: Content on this page is included in your 2021 Annual Report. No edits should be made before the annual report is published. Please contact sparo@det.nsw.edu.au or 02 7814 3853 for assistance.' Below this, a paragraph explains that strategic direction titles and purpose statements entered will be reflected throughout the SIP. A link to 'Visit School Excellence - Strategic directions, School Excellence - Strategic planning for unique school contexts and School Excellence - Purpose statements for further information' is provided. The main content area is divided into three columns for 'Strategic Direction 1', 'Strategic Direction 2', and 'Strategic Direction 3'. Each column has a 'Change colour' button, a 'Title' field, and a 'Purpose' field. The first column is pre-filled with 'Student growth and attainment' for the title and 'Best Classroom Practice' for the purpose. The other two columns are empty. A 'Preview report' button is located in the bottom right corner.

Figure 2: Strategic Directions as a part of the SIP. Note that the first one is given to us already and the other two have to be approved further up in the NSW Department of Education hierarchy. This becomes important to note later on.

Figure 3: What has to be completed for every single program under each Strategic Direction. Note that each of the boxes on average needs 500 - 1000 words for the amount of detail to be considered complete.

Note that all of these examples require data to be collected. This usually means a Google Form, or the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey, or report and grade data, or transcripts of interviews and spreadsheets with exact costings and figures down to the last cent. These forms of data collection, analysis and aggregation take time away from the classroom. And this is just at the executive level. For each of these initiatives, a teacher has to create the resources and materials, base the justification for the existence of these initiatives on data, and then evaluate how it all went, again based on data. This is what the NSW Department of Education refers to as data-driven pedagogy. However, what this all conveniently forgets is that someone has to complete the Google Forms, the TTFMs, mark and assess for the report and grade data, create the spreadsheets of costs and figures down to the last cent, write the submissions for each program under each Strategic Direction and then somehow manage to teach their children. That 'someone' is always the teacher. And this is just one example of data entry and administrative work that overburdens the teaching staff and thus drives people away from the profession and makes it less attractive.

When you start considering the compliance documentation required for:

- Special Education Needs (SEN) students
- English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students
- PLAN2
- Adherence to national Literacy and Numeracy Progressions
- The legal situations of the students including custodial arrangements, refugee status etc
- The linguistic/cultural/familial situations of the students etc

a bigger picture of over-burden and over-reliance on documentation equating to compliance – and thus educational success – starts to form. Oh and one more thing I forgot: the principal has to co-ordinate all this, along with actually trying to build relationships with staff, students and schools i.e. their core business. No-one in education signed up for this much documentation, this much reporting, this much data collection and analysis away from the classroom.

Often when a societal ill is mentioned or raised, the first question that gets asked is what the schools are going to do about it. A big part of this issue with workloads is that we are being expected to fix everything as socio-economic janitors with zero recognition of how harsh our workloads are in terms of salaries and wages, as well as release from face to face teaching time. We aren't given any sort of recognition in terms of how we as a profession are talked about in the media, or even in some sectors of Government. Nor are we given any sort of specialist training to deal with all of these issues, so the training we do have on tackling these huge issues (e.g. domestic violence, consent, social media, bullying, mental health and well-being etc) is taken out of our own time and often with our own money. We teachers do amazing work but the system around us is completely broken because the Government will not spend any more money into actually making it better. Especially not without 'productivity increases' i.e. making teachers do more for effectively less money.

None of that matters to those to whom it should matter. We have in Sarah Mitchell an MP and Education Minister whose disdain for the profession is so well-known that we can almost predict word for word how she's going to either denigrate our teachers further or blithely ignore us and 'thank us' right at the end of any speech or policy announcement, as if we're a footnote in her hierarchy of important people. We have a Premier who refuses to sit down with the teaching profession and increase the 3% public sector wage ceiling. There is a reason why the nurses are upset, the public sector union is upset, the teachers are upset, the transport workers are upset – I could go on. In light of this, it is this disdain for teachers that have driven so many away from the profession and will continue to do so.

The potential for us to have a world-class education system is there, both public and private. The potential for our students to have the best opportunities in life, along with highest levels of literacy and numeracy and thus preparedness for the workforce and life in general, is there. The potential for trust to be rebuilt between the community and the education sector is there. There is a lot of good will for us out in the community and even amongst ourselves. This being said, we cannot run an education system on goodwill and fumes alone. We need real increases in our wages, in our working conditions, in release time from face to face teaching. We need decreases in administrative work (e.g. SPaRO) so that we can continue to do our best for our students, get the brightest and strongest teachers available, and so that we can be the best education system in the world that looks after its teachers and its students. Because if being the world's best education system isn't a target our government is striving for, then I don't know what other targets actually matter.

Yours sincerely,