

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

6th July 2022

Inquiry Into Teacher Shortages in New South Wales

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to share my experiences and views in reference to the Teacher Shortage in New South Wales.

My name is _____ and I was a 20 year+ classroom teacher and more recently an Assistant Principal in the New South Wales Public Education System. I worked at _____ in Sydney's north-west for the last 16 years, building my leadership capacity and achieving growth in career progression.

Over the last couple of years, we (educators) have faced enormous challenges in delivering quality teaching. We have also needed to adapt to changes in the operational logistics of day to day life in schools. It is important to remember that for much of 2020, New South Wales school teachers were at the forefront of the pandemic - unvaccinated and expected, to be pillars of strength for their school communities.

In 2021, educators were again asked to deliver online learning and interactive lessons over platforms such as Zoom. As an Assistant Principal, supervising and supporting staff held its own challenges, as did the added expectation of completing tasks as part of the school executive.

It was with this in mind that I made the decision to take some time away and not immediately return to my workplace when schools would return to operation. In consultation with the school Principal, it was agreed that a period of long service leave would be taken so that I could reflect and refresh after 20 years of service. It was agreed that my leave would commence on the 18th of October 2021 and run through to the 8th of April 2022. This would still allow me to have a long service leave balance of 33 days, in addition to the 183 sick days that I also had in the system.

Despite preparing to take long service leave, I attempted to engage with the directions handed down by my employer on the 6th and 13th of October 2021, requesting details of vaccination status be entered into the VACS attest application. Through email I raised concerns about my privacy and the consequences for staff who did not follow the direction and whether the direction itself was lawful. I sought risk assessments from my Principal on the 18th of October and the 24th of October 2021 (during my leave), showing goodwill towards Departmental requests and seeking knowledge to help make an informed decision while on long service leave. It was during this time that the Secretary of the Department of Education, Mrs Georgina Harrison signed (and backdated) a determination in relation to the Teaching Service Act making a condition of employment for staff to provide either vaccination evidence or a medical contraindication certificate. This was received on the 27th of October 2021, during my period of leave.

In the meantime I attempted to engage with the COVID Taskforce and received an email on the 25th of October 2021, with the following correspondence: "Immediately prior to returning from leave, I would encourage you to log into VACS and attest your vaccination status and then, when appropriate, show your Principal your vaccination certificate so that your status can be confirmed." As a result, this was the information I based my

decision from and believed that when my period of leave would end, I would engage with my employer's requests.

It was during this period of time that the NSW Department of Education hired investigators to look into cases. For an unbeknown reason to me or purpose, my case was identified and investigated. This all took place while I was on long service leave. I expressed the following in an email to the investigator assigned to my case: "I feel harassed, disappointed, agitated and this is causing severe anxiety and stress while on leave." On the 17th of November 2021, the investigator leading my case, proceeded to serve me with allegations of misconduct (although incorrectly addressing my name in the email).

On the 8th of December 2021, I was charged with three allegations of misconduct and these were sustained in an email received from Mr Daryl Currie Executive Director of PES. These allegations amounted to misconduct for:

1. Failing to comply with directions to enter my vaccination status into the VACS system by the 8th of November 2021
2. Failing to show my Principal a copy of my vaccination evidence by the 8th of November 2021
3. Failing to meet the conditions of my employment by 18th of October 2021

The result was an immediate dismissal from the Department of Education. Despite making a written appeal and requesting another two risk assessments, my submission was seemingly ignored and dismissal was made official on the 10th of January 2022.

It is important to acknowledge that throughout this process, I did make valid and reasonable attempts to engage with my employer and that I was on a period of approved long service leave. I was humiliated, rejected and ignored, as were the 20+ years work that I completed working in public education. Despite appeals around my professionalism and dedication to my workplace, it would seem that everything I have worked for in my career became non-existent or largely thought of as an issue that was hoped will simply go away. Communication with former colleagues had almost been non-existent and it is only the support of teachers who experienced something similar that has given me hope of returning to the profession I hold dear.

Valid points that I wish to make the committee aware of highlight the Department of Education's mismanagement and lack of professionalism in following their own guidelines:

NSW Department of Education COVID guidelines:

8.4 Staff who are currently on a period of leave that spans 8 November 2021 are required to prioritise getting vaccinated as soon as possible. Staff in this circumstance will need to ensure they meet the requirement to be fully vaccinated or, if medically exempt, obtain a medical contraindication certificate from a medical practitioner before returning to their school site after leave.

Further, the Department of Education Chief People Officer, Yvette Cachia had also stated, as recorded in Hansard on the 2nd March 2022 (Portfolio Committee No.3 Education page 71): "Chair, no industrial relations rules have been breached. For anybody who is on leave, if they are noncompliant with the public health order, that investigation is on hold."

As a result, the lack of respect towards my position and the fact I was on leave, yet discriminated against is further proof that individuals within the Department of Education were given unlimited power in making decisions and were largely unaccountable for their actions. To put it simply, I should not have been dismissed while on long service leave.

In finishing, I wish to emphasise the impact this decision has had on my health. Financial implications aside, this has caused and continues to impact on my mental health and wellbeing. It has truly ruined the strong association I shared with public education and through the charge of misconduct, it has placed enormous guilt on my conscious, all for simply wanting to make an informed decision for my body and health. The assumptions and inferences made by hired investigators, guided by individuals within PES have cost the public education system a loyal and experienced educator, as well as someone who cared for students and educators alike.

I express my sincere appreciation to the Committee and thank them for taking the time to read my submission, acknowledge my experiences and seek an understanding as to the reason for teacher shortages in NSW. I hope in time, a just and reasonable resolution is found to allow unvaccinated teachers to return to the profession they love and to repair the damage and hurt caused.

With respect and appreciation,