

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

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Partially
Confidential

The Unmentionable Reason Why Too Many Teachers Leave Teaching.

How embarrassing for the NSW Dept of Ed to have to admit some of the worst bullies in schools are employees in executive positions.

There was real trauma in the way my career ended and the manner in which it was allowed to occur. What happened to me, and will affect me for the rest of my life, has unfortunately happened to too many other great teachers I know personally and others whose bullying abuse stories I know of via the Australian Teachers Support Group which I cofounded in Jan 2017.

The experiences of targeted teachers vary considerably but have certain features in common including but not limited to the following:

1. The teacher when initially targeted is shocked but tries to remain positive that it won't continue.
2. When it does continue there is confusion and distress as to how to handle the abuse. Schools don't have HR departments to take issues to.
3. Eventually the targeted teacher has a serious possibly life changing decision to make, flee or stay and try and navigate the situation.
4. Abused teachers face the dilemma of who to complain to because the principal is the person I the chain of command who should be notified but that obviously can't happen if he/she is the offender.
5. If teachers finally make a complaint NSW Dept officers are meant to investigate. This is often a cursory attempt and very often witnesses for the target aren't even interviewed. It seems the abusers are protected by the lack of follow up and are able to continue with apparent impunity. Those in positions of power are in the best position to abuse that power and bully abuse.
6. Teachers who do make a complaint often find that the bullying abuse escalates as a result. Pay back is a common consequence for trying to seek justice.

I will relate:

1. A story of a young teacher member who sought my support. She had studied to become a Maths teacher and excelled at Uni. As a Targeted Graduate she was appointed to a high school in a permanent role. Within a few months of her being there her head of department stated targeting her. No matter what she did and how hard she tried her performance wasn't good enough. She was placed on a Teacher Improvement Program and before her first year was over the HOD failed her. She was escorted off the school premises without the opportunity to collect her belongings nor say goodbye to her students. She naturally worried all through the Summer vacation and in Term I of the following year was instructed to sit in a Dept of Ed district office and await a decision re her career. One very sad aspect of this particular teacher's abuse journey is that every day she left her home pretending to be going to school so her parents wouldn't worry. Each day there was no work to do, just sit, wait and no doubt stress. The EPAC investigator was expecting a baby so a decision was made in a more timely fashion than usual before the Easter break. (Some unfortunate teachers are left in limbo for two or three terms) Her position was terminated. She was given permission to teach on a casual basis. Her scholarship would have to be repaid also. Despite the appalling treatment inflicted on her she persisted. The sad thing is that when she was offered a position at a Catholic School she felt guilty for letting down the public system. * I'm not sure if teachers are treated any better since EPAC being disbanded and PES being set up.
2. A story about the school up the road from the one where I was bully abused. There were at least 16 staff members who identified as being bullied by the female principal and her executive mob. Complaints were made to district office by several staff members. An investigation of sorts was made but none of the witnesses for the abused staff were interviewed. That is a common denominator in many complainant's stories. The most important and concerning fact about this particular situation is that 4 teachers became very ill, considered self harm and were hospitalised. One of those teachers told me she lost two years of her life while she was so unwell and feels she'll never again be the vibrant creative teacher she was before the abuse. She has since found a

supportive school to rebuild her confidence and health. Surely an exodus of teachers from the one school is an indicator of a dire problem but it seems not. Targeted teachers quit, retired earlier than planned, exchanged to another school only to have to return a year later or stayed and suffered the health consequences.

My story. It's very challenging to write this account of just some aspects of the complicated thing that is my bullying abuse story. It is triggering to do so but, knowing this issue so urgently needs to be addressed to save others from enduring their own abuse journey I'll give it a go.

I was a teacher dedicated to public education and my students for over 30 years. I always looked at going to work for another system as defecting. My long career ended abruptly on Aug 10, 2014, the day I received a copy of the bully abuser principal's report on my conduct and performance. I picked up a package from the post office, a little excited, wondering what it might be. What that package contained was devastating when I read it. It was a document sent by a woman from the Dept of Education's Work, Health and Safety department who was in charge of my case. Without any prior warning from her, I received a copy of the report on my Conduct and Performance, that consisted of fallacious accusations and blatant lies written by the serial bully abuser principal. I later asked the WH&S officer how she thought it was OK to send such a document to me without warning. Her reply was that the principal had assured her he had discussed all matters with me. He had in fact discussed NONE. That WH&S officer trusted the principal's word over mine and got to sign off on the end of my career; medical retirement. What led to the principal writing this damning report? It was retribution after I made a formal complaint re bullying abuse and harassment.

The report was full of 20+ false accusations for example,

1. That I wandered aimlessly around the school as a form of classroom management. I had 3 or 4 classes a day and was always walking them to various parts of the school to run my programs. This accusation was devastating because it was so untrue.
2. I was accused of teaching art instead of Science yet the abuser had seen me doing a science experiment in the playground and had commented about it to me. These things were so far from the truth I couldn't believe what I was reading. I had also taken a work sample from a science experiment lesson I was thrilled with to show him. One unit I did with Year 1 classes was a design and make activity. He may have considered it was art but it was science! An AP wrote a statement for me that said as much.

I rang one of the Assistant Principals, (my support person during the time that led to this report being written) because I was absolutely devastated after reading the report and seeing the extent the abuser principal would go to retaliate after I made an official complaint about his bullying abuse. I let the AP know I was no longer safe at the school I'd taught at since 1987 and would not be returning. Later she told me she was very concerned that I may self harm. True to my word I never returned except to sneak back to try to collect my teaching resources and belongings.

So I had to desert my 13 primary classes without the opportunity to say goodbye. I'd been trying to make it to the end of the year for the kids sake. Twenty eight years at the school, with a great reputation and teaching record, popular with parents, students and teachers until I was effectively disappeared. I had to write to the abuser principal 12 months after I'd left and request he told the school community I no longer worked at the school. He lied and said he wasn't aware of my work status when it was he who had orchestrated the chain of events that eventually led to my career termination/medical retirement.

So what lead up to this appalling end to my career?

When the serial bully abuser principal arrived at my school in 2010 I foolishly confided in him that I worked three days a week and was on antidepressant medication as a way to maintain my mental health. He later used this information against me.

In March 2011, I made an official complaint (with a support person present) about the senior admin manager's (SAM) harassment and controlling behaviour towards me. She had been doing so for several years but it had worsened under his leadership.

At that meeting after outlining my complaints the abuser drew a number line on the whiteboard and rated my complaints 3 out of 10. He minimised my what was affecting me daily. He failed to follow Departmental procedure by following up on my complaints. Nothing was ever said or done about my complaint.

The abuser, who'd earned the nickname The Cleaner prior to arriving at my school found a bully ally in the SAM thereafter.

Some examples of the harassment and unsupportive behaviour:

Example 1.

I had come in on a Thursday (I only worked Mon to Wed) to hang some wonderful art displays. Two parents were in the office area to enrol their child. The father was watching as I hung the work while his wife completed the forms. I commented, Lovely art isn't it? The father replied yes it is. He kept watching me while he waited so later I asked what class his child was going into? He answered me, "Year 5." I said she'll enjoy being at That short conversation led to me being reported to the Deputy Principal and reprimanded for interrupting the enrolment process. I came in on the Friday and was bailed up in the office by the DP who informed me of the complaint. I couldn't believe it. I was doing PR for the school as far as I was concerned. I cried with disbelief. I asked the front of office Secretary asking her if she'd made a complaint about me? She answered, "No why would she?" The SAM had been listening and not even involved in the enrolment and was the person who made the malicious complaint.

Example 2.

I put in a request for 60 A2 sheets of art paper for 2 of my 13 classes. That had never been a problem before. This time the SAM had the DP tell me that I couldn't have the paper because it was too expensive. I checked the cost of a ream (500 sheets) of A2. It was \$7.95. I went to the DP with that figure and later that day received the 60 sheets.

These are just two examples of many. Over time this nastiness would wear anybody down.

In a major incident on Dec 19, 2012, the second last day of the school year the SAM interfered with what I needed to do. When I told her calmly to stop interfering she raced off to tell the abuser. He came back very angry and screamed at me. I later tried to speak about what happened but the abuser said he was too busy. Thus I was left distraught for the Summer holidays. I sought Employee counselling in January fearful for my wellbeing and future. I returned to work and was expected to get on with my job. The abuser waited until March to call a meeting to discuss what had happened 10 weeks prior. That meeting, also attended by the same support person as previously, ended up being a discussion of my future or not at the school. He denied what happened on the penultimate school day of 2012. The minutes of that meeting prepared by the Deputy Principal were very inaccurate, omitted crucial statements I'd made and misquoted me. I wrote out my own meeting minutes and had the AP sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting. She actually said I hope I don't get into trouble for doing this. She was also being targeted by the abuser principal and feared repercussions for supporting me.

How do I know the principal was a serial bully abuser?

When trying to set up a support group for teachers experiencing bullying abuse I was introduced to She was bully abused by the same principal as I was, only 10 years prior. The ideal target for a bully boss; a single mature women with no husband to defend her. She unfortunately had been hospitalised due to his abuse and was still very unwell the day I met her. She told me her story. We were amazed and saddened at how similarly and unjust our experiences had been. He had developed his bully modis operandi over a period of time.

One of the most regrettable things about my abuse situation is that if the NSW Dept of Ed had dealt with the serial bully abuser after Maggie made an an official complaint about him followed by receiving a compensation payout I may have been spared the psychological, emotional, social and financial ramifications I live with to this day.

Teacher from Jan 1979 - 10 Aug 2014.