

Submission  
No 216

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 30 July 2022

---

Partially  
Confidential

To Whom it May Concern,

Please accept this letter as a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the ever worsening teacher shortage in NSW.

We are two teachers at a public primary school on Sydney's Northern Beaches. Our school has around 650 students and 30-40 teaching staff. Our students are of mixed backgrounds, mostly from middle class families.

We both have extensive teaching experience and consider ourselves professional individuals with extremely high expectations of the contribution we make to our school community and our profession. We strive to engage and encourage all our students, differentiate our lessons, ensure the wellbeing of our students and remain up to date with all professional development to ensure we can maintain our accreditation.

We have witnessed first hand the landscape of our profession change over time which has ultimately led to the teacher drought that Australia now faces-a very different story to that portrayed by our media.

Over the years, we have continued to pivot with the ever increasing demands of our day-to-day roles as educators, the changes to our curriculum and the increasing list of administration responsibilities added to our roles. The real disconnect is that schools are operating under a business model in which students and parents are seen as customers and teachers are treated as expendable workers, expected to function as told. What we need is to be seen and valued as highly qualified, autonomous professionals with the complex role of shaping teaching and learning in a way that meets the needs of all young learners. Unfortunately, the current state of our education system does not support this, nor attract the individuals needed to make real change in our industry.

At the commencement of 2022, our school had trouble filling all vacant positions. These were full time positions at a school that, not even 5 years ago, would have had more than 75 applications for advertised positions.

Currently, it is proving almost impossible to book casuals in the event that we need to take leave. With COVID still rampant, we, at the coalface of this epidemic in young children, find ourselves in the position where we have to split classes on an almost daily basis. At the beginning of the year, we were asked to assign our students to a 'friendship class', where they have a regular classroom to join if their teacher is away. The consequences of this are of course that:

1. Class sizes then increase across the school, with at least 4 or 5 more students in each class. Some days this number is even higher because several teachers are away. This impacts the learning offered to all students in the classroom and places additional pressure on the classroom teacher to manage and cater for the needs of the students within the room. As we

know, no two students are the same and some require more support and differentiation than can be offered in this context. Most of the time we do not even have enough chairs and tables to seat these students.

2. The students whose teacher is away will be given 'busy work' and are expected to work independently, revising concepts previously taught. This means that those students miss out on a full day of learning. This may not sound like much, but with an already extremely overcrowded curriculum, this quickly leads to syllabus outcomes not being covered well enough or not at all.

The ongoing COVID epidemic is by no means finished. As difficult as nurses, doctors and police (as well as a host of other industries) had it during lockdown, we also went out of our way to accommodate our students' needs and were asked to provide online learning with next to no preparation time and no end date in sight. We ensured that every student had access to educational activities in line with the curriculum, we supported our families, we learnt new technologies on the go and we embraced the challenges that were upon us each day. We were then told that we had to 'return to normal' and adopt a hybrid system to ensure that students could return safely to face-to-face learning. At this time there was a mix of opinions of teachers within the community. Some parents had nothing but praise and admiration for us, some parents were ready to point blame for the already emerging gaps in their child's learning.

The slogan 'Return to normal' at the beginning of 2022 has proven near impossible. The idea that 'business' would be back to normal was an outrageous oversight of our system and frankly highlights the disconnect between the people on the ground (teachers) and the people making decisions. We started the year with our students having already missed 2 years of consistent teaching and learning in schools and despite the intention to work on those gaps, the focus is ever changing, flickering from pointless deliverable tasks to professional learning that does not address the priorities of our students. We are only now seeing the impact that home learning has had on our students and the vital socialisation opportunities they have missed as part of their natural development. These consequences seem minor but again add to the complex nature of our roles, yet nothing has been done to support teachers with this task. We need a complete overhaul of the responsibilities of teachers. We need more office staff to reduce the administrative tasks that teachers are currently required to perform and we need more funding to create a rigorous curriculum that supports the complex needs of our students and highlights the exceptional ability of our teachers.

In our opinion, the teacher shortage is caused by but not limited to a variety of factors, such as:

- Older teachers are retiring and less school-leavers are choosing to study an education degree at university.
- The ongoing pay dispute between the Federation and the NSW Government, and their unwillingness to allow our salary to at least increase in line with inflation, means fewer students enrolling in a teaching degree. It has also meant that those teachers who have an alternative, have decided to leave. I know that we are both actively thinking of alternatives.

- The day-to-day demands on teachers has increased at an alarming rate over the past several years. Some of these demands are departmental requirements (NCCD, accreditation, PDPs, ILPs, etc), increased social and developmental issues in our students, increased admin responsibilities, increased class sizes and an insufficient amount of release time to be able to collaborate and plan quality teaching and learning experiences for our students.

In our opinion, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Ultimately the broader issue is that teachers are under-resourced, undervalued and underpaid. Our role as educators requires more than just the skills to plan a quality lesson and to implement it in a classroom. It's more than proving the growth of the students in our class. It's a multi-faceted role where we often find ourselves in the position of teacher, parent, counsellor, mediator and arbitrator. The list of roles we fulfill is endless and humanly not possible to execute in a 40 hour working week. Therefore, anyone who enters the profession is quick to learn that the workload stretches way beyond the hours of a regular school day and often compromises the time and energy left for a healthy work life balance. Who would want to work under conditions like this and still only be paid for 40 hours?

We sincerely hope that this inquiry will lead to some real change in teachers' working conditions, thus enticing more teachers to enter or return to the profession. If not, we know that the situation will only get worse. This would not only be tragic for those excellent teachers forced to leave a profession they used to love, but even more so for our students. Education is a universal human right. It is the responsibility of a government to ensure their system is the very best it can be. We implore you to look for real solutions to the ongoing teacher crisis.

Kind regards,

(Names withheld).