

Submission  
No 220

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I work for the Department of Education. I have always been passionate about working in the public system as I believed that it didn't discriminate about who you are, your background and the system provided diverse opportunities to all students from all walks of life. Everyone had access to education, a fundamental human right. I completed my Bachelor of Education (Primary) in 2018 and received a Targeted Graduate position in the Department of Education. I was on a job share role and RFF in 2019 and taught through both lockdowns with Kindergarten (2020-2021) until I was forced to take leave due to the vaccination mandates of 2021. From my experience, there are no doubt many contributing factors to the teacher shortage but I observe two major contributing factors; 1) the vaccination mandates, 2) the beaurocracy embedded through the education system.

NESA also has a lot to answer for regarding the teacher shortages. Their changes to accreditation have left many retired aged teachers out of the casual workforce. The change in accreditation professional learning hours has made it unachievable and inaccessible to those who are near retirement. Many of this group of the workforce would have finished up at the end of 2020-2021 as the accreditation requirements changed. Therefore further leaving our casual pool smaller to choose from.

Prior to the vaccination mandates being introduced; throughout 2020, our school struggled to find casuals to cover for teachers on sick leave or attending professional learning. At the beginning of 2021, the casual pool to select employees within the school was very dry where many students were split across the stage or school. Not only were we unable to find casuals but we were also unable to obtain a consistent teacher for 5 days a week work for RFF.

During Term 2, 2021; a casual teacher was booked for our school 'just in case' as leaving planning for day to day casual booking was no longer an option with the amount of staff off due to sick leave or professional learning.

At the same school, at the beginning of 2022, they were still unable to find a consistent teacher to take RFF across the school and were struggling more to find casuals to take classes. Term 2 commenced and they started with a different staff member taking four of the five days of RFF and were relying upon a visiting teacher (casual teacher) to teach the fifth day IF they were successful in obtaining a casual teacher for that day. This was not the only disruption to consistency and stability to students. Due the number of staff who were off ill and the school was unable to obtain a casual teacher to cover their class, the librarian teacher was called to teach the class to help manage the supervision and lower the disruption to the class. This however meant that teacher missed out on their RFF. When teachers miss their RFF, it means they need to put more time in outside of the hours when the students are present in the school. When this occurs frequently, teachers become more tired, burnt out and furthermore; ill therefore in more need to take sick leave. Not only was the librarian teacher pulled off class but so was the Learning Support teacher who specialises in assisting students who need it most and after the last two disruptive years, this role has almost been diminished. Some teachers I have spoken with have discussed how this year has been more disruptive than the two lockdowns combined. One of my colleagues at another school has been offered 4 jobs in the last 2 months. Schools are desperate. They accepted work at the beginning of the year to job share on a class for two days a week. By Term 2, they were hired an extra day to be a 'permanent' casual teacher for the remainder of the year. Since their contract was extended at the beginning of Term 2, they have been offered an additional two days a week at the same school and have received 3 phone calls inquiring if they are available to take classes for the remainder of the year at three different schools.

Another staff member who has been in a relieving principal role throughout Semester 1 of 2022 has completed 2 'normal' weeks in this role. The other 18 weeks, they have been the 'casual' teacher at the school covering various lessons and classes as they were unable to obtain a casual for throughout that time period.

I spoke with another principal in June 2022 and they mentioned how schools are desperate for anyone. They aren't even looking at experience or the quality of the educator anymore. They just need someone to cover the classes. This is not a quality education and it is not good enough for our children.

When the return to schools occurred in October 2021, my principal let me work onsite through the October period as I had obtained a medical exemption and it was thought that I would be continuing work once that got officially approved by the Department of Education. Why the Department of Education should ever have had the power to approve medical documents baffles me but none the less, we were waiting approval. As there was no one else to cover my class through October 2021, I worked three weeks prior to be having my medical exemption denied by Sonic Health Plus and the Department of Education. I am not sure what those difference of three weeks were before I received letter that I was non-compliant and not permitted on school grounds and if I were to step on school grounds, police would be called. When I was forced to take leave in November 2021, there was only one CV that was submitted through class cover looking for work. This member of staff was hired immediately without being interviewed. They had no experience in a Primary school setting and were placed onto my Kindergarten class having just walked out of university studies. This is concerning as we had just come out of lockdown. Our students needed us most and due to the teacher shortage, the school was essentially left with no option but to hire this person in place of me. Schools are desperate they aren't even concerned about who is in front of the children so long as there is someone in front of the children.

Throughout the last 10 months, my principal has asked me to relinquish my position or quit or queried about why I hadn't been fired yet so they would be able to fill my permanent position with another member of staff. Since the mandates have been lifted in the last month, I have had discussions with the principal and they have stated they don't have room for me to return eventhough I have a substantive position and there are 5 temporary contracted staff members within the school. This has contradicted his comments made throughout the last three months. For the first week or two in my return, I will be floating around the school where needed and will be the school 'casual' teacher because they are unable to get casuals into the school most days.

The treatment through harassment, coercion, bullying and the threats that have been made to staff who have remained unvaccinated against Covid-19 during this time whether we were medically exempt or not has been atrocious. While I am returning, there are many people who will never return to the education system. They do not want to participate in a culture where it is deemed acceptable to bully, threat and harass based on a medical decision. We have lost a lot of experienced, quality and passionate educators in this time period and in a time when our children of this nation need it most. The vaccination mandates of 2021 have been one of the most damaging situations to our society and culture. Everyone has a right to work in a safe work environment and the beaurocrats running the Department of Education have filtered down their toxicity to the individual schools and the management within. Many are unwilling to return to such a toxic workplace and after the trauma I have been through, I certainly empathise with this stance.

The beurocracy of the education system is another factor driving people away. The statistics of teachers who leave within the first five years is horrendous. I have seen it first hand why staff leave. The paperwork and lack of support from leadership are the biggest drivers. In my experience, it is never the children who are the issue. I have worked closely with seven early career teachers in my three years of teaching and only one of those seven remain in the profession (not including myself who was forced to take a break). The job is not 'just' a job. It takes support. Just as we nurture our students, our teachers need nurturing. The beurocracy filtering into schools is taking time away from executive staff members to put into their staff (and students). If our staff are unable to feel regulated in themselves, supported and confident (at a base line), how on earth do we expect our students to feel regulated, supported and confident? Wellbeing is perceived as a tick a box situation and it isn't working and staff are leaving. Now, this is not in every school but it is a culture I find in many schools. In recent months, many experienced teachers of 20 years plus have all said; "Staff morale has never been this low". During my forced leave, a staff member at my school contacted me to ask for assistance. They were an early career teacher to the profession and the school and were not getting the support they needed to work the simple things like learning how to use the online platforms because everyone was 'too busy'. They have since left the school and have decided to be a casual over having a temporary contract.

Changing the curriculum does need to occur. I understand that however, the addition of all the political agendas and moreso the script-like, prescribed learning the Department of Education are providing is breaking down the teacher autonomy. Yes, teachers need support and maybe these resources can be used as such, as time savers. But, where does that leave our students? We should be planning our learning based on what our students need, not what the Department of Education feels they need. Many teachers leave because they just want to work with the students and instead they find themselves ticking boxes to satisfy the requirements of the government rather than the development of the individual child.

With many of our practising students entering the profession early due to the teacher shortage, how can we guarantee that throwing them in the deep end is actually going to do our profession justice in the long term? We will burn out this batch of graduates before they see out their five years. Plunged into the post-pandemic education system gripling with maintaining staff. If we don't retain early career teachers, they won't flourish into the leaders we need to carry education for the future. Principals are leaving due to retirement and it is very challenging finding people to fill their shoes. No one wants the role of a principal at present because those working inside the system know the beurocracy you face once you truly step out of the classroom. We all know the magic of education occurs in these classrooms, not in the offices of corporate.