

Submission
No 222

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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The current staffing shortage is indeed a crisis, and is the result of at least a decade of complete neglect in ensuring that teaching (along with other public service jobs such as nursing) keep pace with private sector pay and conditions.

I began teaching in 2010. In that time, I have seen workloads and expectations upon teachers for work above and beyond the school hours increase significantly. The simple reality now is that graduates simply aren't choosing to become teachers because the pay and workloads do not compare favourably to other professions. I look at similarly educated peers who work in private sector jobs, are paid 20-50% more than I with similar length of experience in their fields. None of them are doing 2-3 hours of work after hours every/most nights. None of them are working 4, 5, 6 hours either or both weekend days. None of them have the emotional toll of dealing with the various stressors in public education, particularly those present in SW/W Sydney or Regional NSW. The "holidays" don't begin to make up for it - I'd be lucky to match the basic 4-weeks annual leave granted to all professions given the time I work in these "holidays". Most depressing of all in this is the steadfast refusal of our government to even acknowledge the issues present, let alone try to address them. All this talk of 'fast-tracked visas' or 'advertising blitzes', when the answer is simple - pay and workload must be commensurate with other professions to attract people to the profession.

The staffing crisis is present every day in my school. At best this year we have had 1-2 casuals available on any given day. This has nothing to do with Covid. In 2019, my HSIE faculty went an entire term unable to attract a full time temporary staff member to a classroom teaching role. This meant myself, as HT, and the rest of the faculty had to teach well above our award because there was simply no teachers available. Prior to Covid, we were still regularly covering senior classes that couldn't be covered by casuals.

But the crisis is not really about day-to-day casual cover. It is the inability to properly staff a school to enable quality teaching to take place. One of the key goals included in our Strategic Improvement Plan is increased and more formal and effective collaboration. How are we supposed to do this when staff are working above their award? One key activity in our SIP this year was to staff 6 year 7 classes instead of 5, to address the learning deficits and social-emotional challenges present in this cohort. This did not even last one term before we had to collapse that back down to 5 classes because we needed to free the teachers up to cover other classes. Another activity was staffing an extra period (from 7 to 8) for our senior classes, to build HSC specific skills to improve results. Again, this had to be reduced back down to 7 to free up another 36 periods to cover classes. A third activity was a fully staffed Study class for Year 12, to ensure effective and productive studying was taking place during study periods. This has now been abolished so that teacher can take the English classes of teacher who was appointed to a permanent role elsewhere. A teacher who had been at our school for 7 years, who we desperately would have liked to have made permanent, but were unable to. There were no other English teachers available anywhere so this Study teacher had to be moved to English.

Our PDHPE faculty was a staff member short for an entire term, on top of a Maths-trained teacher working in PDHPE full time. Despite advertisements everywhere, no PDHPE teacher could be found for the entire term.

We have had a HSIE (Business/Legal Studies) teacher go on Maternity Leave. We were lucky enough to get an experienced teacher request to transfer from Penrith HS for two terms; had this not happened, we had not other options at all. It also means Penrith HS lose a vastly experienced teacher, with minimal replacement options.

We had no EALD trained teacher, again despite advertising everywhere possible. Instead we have a first year Business Studies/Commerce trained teacher doing her best to fill in. This means some students who need the most help are getting her best efforts, but not the sufficient quality needed.

TAS is desperately understaffed. In a faculty of 8, there is are two English-trained teachers - one now teaching Year 11 Timber. The faculty is still 1 staff member short, with multiple panels and advertisements unable to find a single qualified teacher for the role.

I could go on. But its very simple. There clearly not enough teachers in the state. No amount of band-aid solutions, such as advertising blitzes or the odd overseas-trained teacher, are feasible long-term solutions. There is only one option - improve pay and reduce workloads.

Even more to the point. The Department has mandated a very targeted and administration-heavy School Improvement Plan, with mandated student achievement targets. I have a few questions for the Department in this regard:

- Given the collapsing of our Year 7 classes from 6 to 5: if there is no staffing crisis, why couldn't we find any staff to cover these positions? How are we supposed to progress towards our Year 7 and 9 NAPLAN targets when we can't staff classes?
- Question - how are we supposed to progress towards our HSC targets when we can't staff the very specific Activities outlined in our SIP, signed off by the Director?
- Our specialis teachers who have time allocated to support EAL/D students and those with identified learning support needs are needing to cover multiple classes on a daily basis. Why aren't the needs of these disadvantaged groups important enough for your government to address?
- What is the point in the SIP, with mandated targets, when there is no staff available to help us implement the activities necessary to meet these targets?

I repeat an earlier point - the saddest thing in all of this is the government's refusal to even acknowledge the scale of the issue. We know this is because they would then have to own actual solutions, instead of the fake ones we're seeing now. To the point where, in Senate Estimates, the Dept insists on saying, "Minimal supervision does not mean students miss out on learning". This is PRECISELY what it means!! The government needs to stop lying about this crisis, because kids are missing out on learning every day, and staff are leaving the profession due to the inability to do our jobs justice. The educaiton of kids in this state is going to get worse and worse until the government actually tries to solve the problem, instead of engaging in teacher and union bashing.