

Submission
No 227

INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Context: I am a secondary school principal working in rural NSW, and president of the Western Secondary Principals' Council. The observations and experiences I share below relate specifically to my school but I am aware through my colleague principals that they are not isolated issues.

The human resources process:

Staffing notifications are assigned to a specific officer within HR. If that staffing officer takes leave, the request remains unattended on that HR officer's desk unless a specific request is made that it be actioned. Timely replacement of teaching staff is, as a result, less than satisfactory.

A position can be flagged with HR as being vacant from a specific date in the future related to the separation of a current teacher from the teaching service. Unless followed up with regular phone calls, the vacancy seldom becomes the subject of HR action until the date it takes effect. This can lead to vacated positions remaining as such for a period of six to ten weeks, more if no suitable candidates can be found.

The 'on-boarding' process for new teaching recruits is glacially slow. At my school and on two occasions in recent years, the drawn-out process of employing new teachers has led directly to quality teaching staff working casually in the state system being poached by a Catholic system not impacted by similar constraints.

Regarding the supply casual teachers, one of the less well-thought consequences of minimum hours of professional learning to maintain accreditation to teach has been the exclusion of very experienced former teachers from casual employment. In many cases, extraordinarily competent, retired teachers with between 35 and 40 years successful classroom experience cannot be employed because their accreditation has lapsed; accreditation based on the yearly completion of mandatory professional learning that in many cases is little more than a test of common sense.

Competing departmental priorities also impact the supply of casual teaching staff. The Intensive Learning Support Plan (ILSP) created a very real impost on casual teaching staff availability, making it all but unworkable as those same casuals are needed to cover short and long term leave. Equally, Department of Education initiatives that come with "paid relief" when there is no relief to pay, impact casual supply. If a branch within the Department decides that an initiative needs to be rolled out in schools, that branch of the Department should be prepared to supply the bodies required, not the cash. The Rural Access Guarantee, a worthwhile project, was one such example in 2022 that demanded the part release of a teacher from teaching duties from a pool of teachers already diminished.

Incentives for going west:

Housing availability and affordability. In Mudgee, and especially since the pandemic, rental costs have soared. This, coupled with the tourism-inspired movement to B&Bs, has set the scene for the perfect storm of unaffordability and unavailability. The short-sightedness inherent in this is that Mudgee once had Teacher Housing residences. They have all been sold. I had a teacher accept a position at the beginning of 2021, only to call back within 24 hours to decline the position as it was cheaper for him to stay in Hunters Hill.

Relocation expenses for first appointments. These could be tied to a minimum period of commitment to the position (e.g., 3 years). On several occasions, potential recruits have subsequently declined appointment because of accommodation and removalist costs, the most

recent being an English teacher - the only one who responded to the job on offer - in the week beginning 04/07/2022.

Incentives for a preparedness to move west of the Great Dividing Range needs a huge rethink. There are no universities in Mudgee. Most graduates come from the coast. The incentives for agreeing to teach in Mudgee are the same as for someone taking a position at North Sydney Girls, James Ruse, Wollongong High School of the Performing Arts, or Merewether High School. The scope of incentives should be on a scale; I recognise that Mudgee and Walgett should not be the same. The current regime is inadequate for ensuring all rural schools are effectively staffed.

Other issues impacting teacher supply:

The elephant in the room; uncompetitive salaries.

Compliance training that has little to do with educational delivery.

The proliferation of complaints, especially vexatious and those addressed to the school via Registered Ministerial Letters (RMLs) and their effect on staff morale. A burgeoning issue over the past few years.

Infrastructure issues, especially those related to timely maintenance and repair of buildings and other facilities by the asset owner rather than at school expense.

Minimal supervision and collapsed classes made necessary by the teacher shortage. At Mudgee High in 2021, there were 640 classes reduced to minimal supervision and a further 271 merged. To 1 June 2022, there were 1637 minimal supervision classes and 293 merged classes. At 31/07/2022, there are 4.6 teaching positions unfilled at the school. Additional face-to-face teaching has made a lot of this possible – but relies on teachers being prepared to work outside the award. The potential for burnout should not be underestimated. It is an unsustainable model of delivery.

The virtual absence of a school counselling service. Mudgee High has an entitlement of 1.0 counsellor – a 10 days per school fortnight appointment – but only has a counsellor two days each week (0.4 of the allocation). The impact is that many teachers find themselves being thrust into the role of accidental counsellors.

Teaching staff working outside their areas-of-expertise simply to keep the school operational.

The proposed implementation of a new behaviour strategy – the Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools package – which, when first released, did not have at its heart the fundamental imperative that teachers have a right to teach and students have a right to learn. The effective management of challenging behaviours that test this imperative is critical to both attracting and then keeping those who would be teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the issues touched on above.