

Submission  
No 239

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## **Inquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW**

### **Individual Submission –**

#### **Background**

There have been teacher shortages in secondary government schools in western Sydney since the 1980s and there have been attempts at multiple policies to address these shortages. Many policies were never going to be successful because of underlying structures dating back to the 1950s, outdated formulas for secondary entitlements and more recent cost saving formulas that have increased uncertainty and moved permanent positions to temporary status.

I have taught in western Sydney for over 40 years and have been a principal of a large, complex high school for 25 years. I have read evidence – the situation we are in today is the result of poor planning and decisions made years ago. What happens from here will depend on the government and systems working more with schools. It is time governments and systems held themselves accountable for impact as well as inputs.

In this submission I wish to address 5 key areas of concern:

1. Funding
2. Formulas
3. HECs and universities
4. Teacher identity and perception
5. Western Sydney – poverty and aggregated disadvantage

#### **1. Funding**

1.1 There was a moment when the NSW government signed off on the “Gonski 1.0” reforms where large high schools in the area where I work planned for significant additional funding going directly into schools. The opportunity to employ more specialist staff, support the complex needs of students, give teachers more time to plan universal, targeted and intensive programs and provide more focused resources, including technology (an area in which students do not have equivalent skills to those from more affluent homes) and give executive staff more time to support large and diverse teams of teachers, many of them beginning teachers.

1.2 Needs based funding did not happen. Instead, secondary schools received the bulk of their funding for enrolment and an “equity component” based on annual funding cycles. This is still the case with all funding being “operational and annual”. In addition, unspent funds must be returned at the end of the year (under carry forward policies) so the capacity to provide longer term employment is compromised. In fact, the Department of Education will only allow annual contracts for temporary staff (funded by the equity funding) and has significant restrictions on part-time temporary employment (a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 12 months).

##### **1.3 I would like to see:**

1.3.1 Funding to schools on a 3-year rolling cycle that gives greater continuity and “equity funded staff” included in entitlement staffing. This would immediately increase executive support positions and create positions for temporary and casual staff to be appointed permanently. This could have been done had “Gonski” funding been received, instead of equity funding being used to cut permanent staffing.

1.3.2 Redistribution to increase entitlement funding and the capacity to appoint temporary staff to “ACIP positions” – above centrally permanent positions with DoE and deployed to a school for 3 years. This would enable schools to employ against long term leave and maternity leave positions and, at the end of the 3 years, the teacher would still be permanent with job security.

#### **2. Formulas**

2.1 The “formulas” used to staff secondary schools are complex, arcane and increasingly unfair. After 25 years as a secondary principal subject to multiple award agreements, I have observed that the concept of “parity” (usually between primary schools and secondary schools) has resulted in little or no improvement for secondary teacher and school working conditions at the same time as compliance requirements for secondary settings have continued to increase. This is not the place to enter into all the minutiae of staffing formulas and restrictions but it is worth noting that the executive teacher (HT) allowances in secondary schools have been the same since 1954 – 68 years ago and that the rule of appointing Head Teachers based on 1:6.1 permanent teachers, excludes all temporary and equity staff. The current settings are simply not good enough for the needs and demands of secondary students and their schools especially in areas of aggregated disadvantage.

### **2.2 I would like to see:**

2.2.1 An immediate review of the K-12 and “parity” principles and an immediate commitment to redesigning the staffing formulas for secondary settings so they become “fit for purpose”.

2.2.2 A government that has learned the lessons of COVID in relation to what and how senior students (students in Years 10-12) learn best in a high technology, high knowledge community and how senior school staffing can better address their needs, including the high intensity staff work needed in transition from school.

### **3. HECs and universities**

3.1 As the major employer in NSW, what has the government done to ensure that universities in NSW offer teacher education courses in areas of need? As an experienced principal, my observations are that there has been a tendency to undervalue the teaching degrees of our universities at the same time as the teachers appointed to our schools, especially the majority who have Masters degrees are much better prepared for teaching than before. I would also note that the decision by the previous federal government to make very large increases in HECs for degrees in the humanities (that include teaching, psychology and secondary teaching subjects English, History and special education) has and will have a lasting negative impact on university participation and graduation. It is past time for our state to view ITE (in schools) as an investment, not a cost.

### **3.2 I would like to see:**

3.2.1 LANTTTE as an entry requirement for all teaching degrees not an exit/employment requirement.

3.2.2 HECs reviewed for all secondary teaching subjects – going back to the previous model which is still in place in South Australia which was exempted from the changes.

3.2.3 Subsidised or fully funded HECs for teacher graduates who commence work in schools once their course work is completed.

3.2.4 Ensuring funding does not go to “fads” and that teaching degrees are supported by universities and employers – through legislation if necessary.

3.2.5 Paid internships as part of the final year of a Masters degree with the teacher appointed to the school in which they will initially teach. Additional scholarships should be given to teachers appointed to “hard to staff schools”.

- 3.2.6 All NSW Universities required to offer secondary teaching degrees including in wider areas of need beyond Mathematics and Science. There are currently shortages in Engineering, Food Technology, PDHPE, English and HSIE.

#### **4. Teacher Identity and Perception**

4.1 The following statements reflect over 40 years of observations, experiences, and research.

- 4.1.1 The majority of teachers in government schools are women. Most have at least one degree, often at post graduate level and they undertake considerable research to prepare lessons, design and mark assessment tasks and design universal, targeted and intensive programs. They are often parents, community volunteers and many also have responsibility for older parents and extended family. I have observed how much they sacrifice for their students and, despite this they are often treated “like children” (as principal Briony Scott has said) by decision makers, media and even parents. This is not good enough.
- 4.1.2 Teacher registration (NESA) identifies teachers who have completed their initial registration as “proficient” (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers). The OECD and others have identified teaching as one of the leading professions with higher order skills including “adaptability, flexibility, responsiveness and higher order communication”. As an expert I observe the day to day work of teachers and note that the majority of teachers with 4-5 years experiences are actually demonstrating their professional work at APST Highly Accomplished. Unlike other professions, it is very difficult for most teachers to be recognised for the quality of their work due to cumbersome professional practices and an over concentration on “compliance courses”. Other countries and leaders respect and value Australian teachers. Evidence suggests we do not do that.
- 4.1.3 It is NOT teacher (person) quality is it teaching (practices) quality. Just as it is nursing, medical, sporting, political practice. NSW moved to focus on practice in the previous decade and is now back to focusing on the person. The return to “the person” approach has enabled. It has enabled attacks. It has enabled constant negative media (and sometimes political criticism). It has silenced the voice of many women in the profession. It has done enormous damage.
- 4.1.4 Teachers, executive staff and principals are paid for 7 hours per day. The community, decision makers and teachers know they work much longer hours than that, often on site for parent conferences, school-community events, concerts, excursions – all unpaid goodwill. Many teachers (and principals) would be very happy with their current salaries if they could work fewer hours but in recent years more and more and more “top down” compliance, new (and not always good) policy and demands that schools support everyone else with more and more limited resources has resulted in a culture that now looks like a “burn out” culture. The expectation of “business as usual” while schools are still struggling with COVID repercussions creates the impression of governments and employers who are disconnected from schools.

#### **4.2 I would like to see:**

- 4.2.1 Respect for the profession and, in particular, acknowledgment of the women who educate for the future at all levels of government and from DoE.
- 4.2.2 Teachers being willing to “talk up” the profession to students because it is a great profession to join – students can see each day how “tough it is”.

- 4.2.3 The government listen to the expertise and concerns of principals when new policy is being designed (not when it is announced). This was a strength of previous governments and DoE leaders.
- 4.2.4 A policy in education (as is done with police) that will not allow individual schools and teachers to be attacked publicly and protects them from risk of threats and abuse in the workplace.
- 4.2.5 Recognition that the focus should be on “teaching” not “teachers”
- 4.2.6 A revision of what can be done in paid hours and how to “compensate” (in time or money) for unpaid hours. After all, HSC markers are paid for marking outside hours.
- 4.2.7 Much, much, much smarter policy.
- 4.2.8 Removal of “beta software” and the workload that comes from a “software driven” culture.
- 4.2.9 Respect for the APST and smarter ways to use them to accredit the professional work teachers do each day.

## **5. Western Sydney**

- 5.1 Not all school-communities are the same. Since COVID, inequality has increased and the number of government secondary schools with aggregated levels of poverty and social disadvantage has increased. These schools were often seen as “hard to staff” and now many have more than 3 vacancies which are being “covered” by colleagues or minimal supervision. This is having a severe impact on attendance, learning continuity and the delivery of equity programs. All schools and sectors will lobby for their schools to be staffed first and there will be a significant challenge for government in determining priorities. Having been a teacher in the 1970s and 1980s when it was not unusual to have up to 10 classes on minimal supervision all day, watching videos or doing nothing, we cannot return to this as a long term solution for our regional and outer suburban comprehensive secondary schools.
- 5.2 There are many young people in Years 11 and 12 in western Sydney schools who would like to teach, and many will never do so because their families are debt averse, they will have an enormous HECs debt, they will never be able to afford to live in western Sydney if they teach and they can earn much more from a vocational or other degree pathway.
- 5.3 I would like to see a genuine western Sydney strategy to staff our schools and fund government secondary schools to the point (100% SRS) where the student experience of schooling encourages local students to be teachers and remain in the western Sydney community.