INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission to NSW Legislative Assemby

Enquiry into Teacher Shortages in NSW.

Neil Middleton – Head Teacher Creative and Performing Arts,

My name is Neil Middleton. I am Head Teacher of Creative and Performing Arts at   , a well run NSW Department of Education school with dedicated and hard-working Principal, Senior Executive, Head Teachers, Teachers and Support Staff. I have been teaching for over 30 years in the following schools;

Engadine High School – teacher

                 - teacher

East Hills Boys High School - teacher

St Johns Park High School - teacher

St Aloysiuis College, Milsons Point - teacher

Kirrawee High School – teacher

The Arts Unit, Lewisham (DET) – program officer

Strathfield Girls High School – head teacher

                – head teacher

In my years of experience teaching and now supervising a large faculty of practical subjects, I feel the following things take myself and my staff away from the real business of teaching, and I would like to recommend the following staffing and provisions for teachers be put in place to facilitate teachers to teach and thus, enhance the learning outcomes for our students.

1. **STUDENT NUMBERS IN PRACTICAL SUBJECTS**

When I entered the profession as a Visual Arts teacher in 1990, all practical subjects Visual Arts (Visual Arts, Photography, Visual Design, Ceramics), TAS (Woodwork, Metalwork, Design and Technology) and TAFT (Textiles and Food Technology) had strictly capped student numbers in classes.

(a) Years 7 & 8 were all capped at 22
Years 9 – 12 electives were all capped at 24

(b)   opened in 1988 and was designed to accommodate these numbers. My Visual Arts classrooms comfortably (and somewhat snuggly) hold six tables (two desks put together) around which four students sit and safely work.

(c) At some point in the early 2000's, several practical subjects, including Visual Arts, were lifted to 30 students. I now have to fit 30 students into a room designed for 24. We have desks against walls, 6 students squeezed in around desks designed to handle 4, and during practical lessons we move 8 students outside to work.

(d) The quality of the work students produce, and their learning experiences, are affected as they can no longer work on large pieces and the materials and equipment such as easels, carving tools, stencil knives, hand tools, cameras have to be shared to the point where some of our more dynamic and engaging programs are no longer viable. Supervising 30 students with stencil knives, lino carving tools, wire cutters, hand drills, heat guns, chisels and hammers is also very unsafe.

Recommendation - 1

> **Restore class sizes across _all practical subjects_ back to the previous caps;**
>
> **Yrs 7 & 8………………22 students**
>
> **Yrs 9 – 12………………24 students**

2. NON-TEACHING SUPPORT IN PRACTICAL SUBJECT AREAS / FACULTIES

(a) In my role as Head Teacher Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) at   , I supervise and oversee the following;

- Supervise seven teaching staff across two staff rooms at opposite ends of the school
- Work across two staff rooms situated at opposite ends of the school – Staffroom 1: Visual Arts, Photography, Visual Design, Ceramics – Staffroom 2: Dance, Music Drama
- Student discipline, incidents and welfare across the above learning program areas
- Monitor the ongoing programming, assessment, reporting and compliance for Visual Arts, Photography, Visual Design, Dance, Drama, Music
- Monitor and ensure compliance, programming, assessment and reporting for five HSC subjects – Visual Arts, Music 1, Music 2, Dance, Drama
- Manage all budgets, purchasing, stocktake, maintenance of instruments and equipment across 8 practical teaching spaces and 4 store rooms
- Ensure the whole school initiatives set by the school executive are implemented and embedded by the CAPA faculty
- Oversee the running of all extra-curricular programs in Dance (4 ensembles), Music (2 Bands, 2 Ensembles), Performance Evenings (3 per year)
- Coordinate a whole school Musical Production every two years

(b) To support the above programs / areas, I also organise, monitor, maintain, fix and repair and am accountable for the following physical assets, spaces and resources;

- **Eight classrooms / practical teaching spaces**;
    - o 3 stocked and equipped Visual Arts rooms
    - o 2 specialist Music rooms (sound gear, 40 instruments)
    - o 1 specialist / equipped photography darkroom (*see next point below*)
    - o 1 specialist Drama room (lighting and sound gear)
    - o 1 specialist Dance room (dance matts, mirrors, change room, sound equipment)

- **Photography Darkroom** – situated across the other side of the school away from both staffrooms.
    - o 11 enlargers
    - o 9 vintage analogue film SLR cameras (all different brands) + variety of lenses – these cameras can't be purchased new and require constant maintenance and care
    - o 20 digital SLR cameras
    - o chemicals, dryers, safe lights
    - o bulk load film facilities
      *NOTE: this teaching space consists of two connected rooms – **3 X 4 metres and 2 X 3 metres** – 11 enlargers, 9 cameras.*
      *Based on DET policy and standards for practical subjects, we are forced to take **30 students** each year and teach in this small space – under a set of stairs on the opposite side of the school from our Visual Arts rooms. Photography is a popular subject with students – the school does not have the funds to move the darkroom closer to the Art rooms, or upgrade and improve it to handle 30 students.*

      Why do we persevere and run Photography? – students were disengaged and disruptive in Photography classes two years ago when we ran only digital. When I asked the class "What was the problem?", they replied "We chose Photography and we haven't touched film, cameras or been in the darkroom". Since returning to darkroom Photography, the subject has grown in popularity and student engagement in the classroom has improved significantly.

- **Ceramics workshop area – 13 wheels, 2 kilns** (1 currently under repair) – clay storage, glaze and oxides storage – firing of all student work

- **Four Storerooms for practical subjects**
    - **Visual Arts / Photography**
    - **Music - 40 instruments, 10 amplifiers – re-string guitars, grease/oil valves, repair corks, drums**
    - **Band – 30 band instruments and charts – grease/oil valves, repair corks, replace reeds, drums**
    - **Drama – props and costumes, portable lighting system, 2 x P.A.'s / sound gear**

- **Shipping container** – portable staging /exhibition panels

- **Printmaking room** – 2 x heavy etching presses, acids, inks, rollers, screen printing equipment

- **Digital studio**
    - 2 X portable studio tungsten lighting / flash units
    - 4 Apple Mac computers
    - 1 carbon printer
    - 1 stencil cutter
    - 1 large format, 12 colour, A1, Roll Feed, Canon Inkjet printer
    - Fine art papers / rolls for large format printer

- **All sound and lighting gear in the School Hall**
    - 20 microphones
    - 100 + cables
    - Projection system
    - P.A. System – in need of constant maintenance - needing replacement
    - 36 channel sound desk – in need of replacement
    - 40 stage lights on ceiling bars: currently outdated and unserviceable due to age – **does not meet current OH&S requirements, thus we can't maintain / change lights**
    - Digital lighting desk – now outdated but matches the outdated lighting – needing replacement
    - All software updates, maintenance, organisation, fault identification and repairs for above equipment – under current staffing with no ancillary support we don't have time to do this

        NOTE: our school has a community reputation for achieving high results in Creative and Performing Arts and maintain excellence in this area.
        The school does not have the funding to complete a much-needed overhaul of all the sound and lighting in the school hall. We use this for performance nights, community events, regular showcases and School Production – because of OH&S issues we are in danger of not being able to put on our regular School Musical Production and Performances8m97

As Head Teacher I spend a lot of my time (2-3 days per week) managing the organisation, maintenance, repair, cleaning, storage and stock-take of all these assets. I spend hours on the road delivering and picking up repaired instruments, photography and sound equipment.

Music teachers and I constantly re-string guitars, violins, cellos, basses, fix keyboards, re-tune and clean expensive percussion instruments, oil-grease-replace reeds, re-cork and clean expensive brass and wind instruments.

Visual Arts teachers and I spend all our spare time doing the following;
- **Purchasing, ordering, organising and monitoring consumable artmaking materials**
- **preparing wet and dry artmaking materials and equipment for classes**
- **cleaning, organising and arranging storage areas,**

- packing, firing and unpacking ceramic kilns – firing student's work
- re-cycling clay and glazes
- mixing fresh photography chemicals
- dispose of solvents and chemicals
- monitor and update stock-take of chemicals
- monitor and store expensive light sensitive film and paper
- maintain and repair cameras / enlargers.

These are not teaching tasks. They are specialist maintenance tasks (currently not being done) requiring a non-teaching technical assistant to the faculty. These equipment assets, specialist spaces and consumable materials are expensive to purchase, require lots of ordering, cleaning, organising as well as constant, on-going maintenance.

We throw out clay and glazes because we don't have time to recycle them. We write-off equipment and musical instruments because we don't have time to seek out and organise repairs, or even do basic instrument maintenance. I see TAS teachers cleaning, organising and preparing materials and spaces, sharpening class sets of planes and chisels.

In both my previous and current schools, it has been suggested we should "apply for a grant". Applying for grants takes up hours of teacher's time, can often be unsuccessful (thus a fruitless exercise), and takes teachers away from their core task – teaching.

The current situation for practical subjects and provision of non-teaching, technical support:

SUBJECT AREA	SUBJECTS TAUGHT	HSC ??	Full-time tech. assistant
VISUAL ARTS	Visual Arts, Photography, Visual Design, Ceramics	YES	NO
MUSIC	Music 1, Music 2 – Bands, Ensembles, Performances	YES	NO
TAS	Woodwork, Metalwork, Design and Technology, Automotive, Electronics, Software Design, Engineering	YES	NO
TAFT	Textiles, Food Technology, Hospitality, CAFS	YES	YES
SCIENCE	Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology	YES	YES
AGRICULTURE	Agricultural Studies	YES	YES

Recommendation - 2

1. Provide additional full-time, non-teaching, technical support staff to every practical subject area (not just Science, Agriculture and TAFT) - Visual Arts, Music / Performing Arts, TAS
2. Upgrade / renovate / re-organise facilities and teaching spaces so they are not a constant struggle to work in.
3. Upgrade Halls and Performing Arts spaces, sound and lighting equipment in schools to meet OH&S requirements and enable schools with strong Arts programs to continue their good work
4. Replace long-term demountable classrooms with permanent buildings.
5. Relocate faculties to single areas in the school - I currently supervise two staffrooms on opposite sides of the school, as does our TAS / TAFT Head Teacher. This makes no sense, wastes time and limits faculty cohesion, teamwork and collaboration.

3. TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHERS

I observe many teachers still providing their own technology to enable them to do their job at school. I don't know of any other profession or industry where staff working for a large organisation (government or private), are expected to provide their own laptop for work purposes. Personally funded devices are not covered for damage or replacement by the Department.

Teachers don't earn high salaries. To personally finance the $2300 + cost (salary sacrifice or otherwise) for a laptop to enable them to do their job is unreasonable and I will not do it. My current school does issue laptops to most teachers, but they are of a basic standard and low processing power.

Staff from Head Office at Parramatta are all issued with Windows Surface Pro i7 laptops with detachable keyboards and stylus as standard issue. Why are support staff who aren't teaching issued with more powerful and capable laptops than frontline teaching staff?

I teach and demonstrate the use of Adobe Creative Cloud (Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere Pro) to my classes on a daily basis. I am asked to constantly shoot, edit and publish video for school promotion and evidence gathering. We create screen recording tutorials and multi-media presentations for eLearning on a daily basis. We are expected and indeed required to keep student work samples for NESA compliance and the DET's External Validation process. More and more teachers are expected to use, integrate and teach technology at a high level, yet we are issued with basic laptop devices, or worse, asked to provide our own.

Recommendation - 3

> **Issue all teaching staff across all DET schools with a standard high end laptop device with the following standards and features;**
>
> - **13 inch touchscreen**
> - **Stylus**
> - **Detachable keyboard to enable quick and portable tablet conversion (for playground and excursions)**
> - **Tablet conversion functionality**
> - **High processing power – i7 for all multi-media subject areas (possible i5 will be adequate for other subject areas**
> - **Mapped to school network drives**
>
> **Windows Surface Pro 13" i7 with detachable keyboard and stylus pen – this is standard issue for non-teaching consultant staff at Head Office, yet not for frontline teachers in the classroom.**

4. DATA ANALYSES - EXTERNAL VALIDATION / SCHOOL EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK / EVIDENCE GATHERING – COMPLIANCE

(a) **Data Analyses –** the private / independent school system employ non-teaching staff and specialists to build their student data sets from SCOUT and other sources. These specialists also create reports on trends, student ability and performance for each teacher and their individual class groups.

Currently in the public system, I can't access any data on my individual class groups. I can only access the whole year group and school. If I want more useful, focused information on the current literacy capability of students in one of my individual classes, I have to create my own by searching for individual students from a large spreadsheet of hundreds of students and a variety of different data types, most of which I don't understand or know how to properly operate. I don't have the time to filter through all this information and data and build my own data sets. I just need to be able to quickly see trends, abilities and on-going improvement or areas of student need for each of my class group cohorts.

(b) External Validation / School Excellence Framework / Evidence Gathering

Preparing for this process is laborious, time-consuming and takes teachers away from their core business of teaching and school executive away from more important and vital tasks. It is "busy work" for teachers and school executive and is a drag on public schools. Teachers should not have to produce pieces of creative writing telling the story of what they have done over the past three years – particularly 27 pieces of triangulated evidence that comply to three vague headings.

My colleagues in the private and independent systems do not have to go through this process – they spend their time programming for student learning, preparing engaging and meaningful lessons, building relationships with students, assessing and marking, reporting on student progress and achievement to parents and students.

(c) Compliance

Currently, there is no standard platform across DET schools being used for programming, assessment and reporting, eLearning. Most schools use a mixture of Sentral, EdVal, Google Classroom and Google Drive.

Private and Independent schools, NESA and DET Curriculum Directorates / Head Office are using CANVAS for all their eLearning needs. It is a much more efficient and dynamic platform, but most DET Public Schools can't afford to purchase it. Another example of frontline schools "making do" with freeware platforms such as Google Classroom and Google Drive to try and facilitate student learning and improve outcomes, while DET Head Office, NESA and Independent Schools have the best.

Recommendation - 4

1. **Employ staff in each school to conduct real and meaningful data collection, analyses and build data sets for classroom teachers tailored to their individual classes and guide / advise teachers on how to analyse and use this data to identify areas for improvement and meet the learning needs of students**
2. **Terminate the School Excellence Framework and External Validation process and cycle. Stop asking teachers to do "busy work" gathering evidence to justify their work. This is sending schools backwards and is highly resented by teachers. It is affecting moral.**
3. **Provide a standard platform for eLearning, programming and assessment such as CANVAS that schools can tailor and modify to their needs. Google Classroom and Moodle are free, but they have limited functionality.**

5. Teacher Salaries and Pay

I leave my school on average at around 5:00-5:30pm most days. I take work home and complete it over the weekend, on weeknights and during school holidays. Staff at my school run holiday lessons for all our HSC courses and students. We run extra-curricular programs before and after school, and run performance showcases and attend regional performances at night time several times each term. We teach in basic facilities and crowded classrooms with no air-conditioning and poor heating. We provide some or all of our own tech. devices and equipment. We manage and maintain a lot of expensive assets, equipment, materials and resources. We manage difficult students and varying levels of student behaviour. We manage students with different and complex learning needs, often with very limited or no learning support in the classroom. We have very little time throughout the day to eat lunch, visit the bathroom or make a phone call.

When I compare my pay to my friends working in other sectors with similar qualifications and levels of responsibility, both they and I agree teachers are under-paid.

It is no surprise there is a teacher shortage. It is vital that we improve both the pay, and working conditions for teachers if we are to retain the experienced and dedicated teachers we already have in the system as well as attract quality people into the profession.

I am currently actively looking and applying for jobs in the independent private school sector as well as career options outside of teaching.

Recommendation - 5

> **Raise salaries for Teachers, Head Teachers, Senior Executives and Principals significantly. Do not base it on "performance". There is no "perfect way" a teacher's professional performance can be properly measure for the purpose of determining performance-based pay.**
>
> **How would you account for teachers with lower academic ability classes, or teachers in lower socio-economic schools.**
>
> **How can you measure and compare the dedicated Maths teacher who works long hours to quietly and effectively improve their student's learning outcomes in a difficult to teach subject, with the equally dedicated Music teacher who spends long hours conducting before and after school ensembles and extra-curricular programs. Both are dedicated, both work to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Both build meaningful relationships with their students and equally facilitate quality learning experiences.**

CONLCUSION

I have outlined above my thoughts, observations and experiences of some of the main issues that affect teacher workloads and staff moral in public schools. Hopefully I have offered some meaningful and oractical solutions to help improve the situation.

Teachers, Executives and Principals in NSW Public Schools work very hard and provide the best they can for their students. Families, in my opinion get very good value for very little financial outlay. If every school attending family were asked to pay $1000 fee per student per year to their public school, this would cost them $23 per school week over 42 weeks. That's just a bit more than a McDonalds meal. Make it tax deductable or salary packaged. A school with 1000 students would have an extra annual income of $1000000 per year to spend on providing for and improving student learning.

Whilst my colleagues in the Independent Private school sector (in which I have also worked and am looking to return) have their own sets of challenges, they are provided with the extra non-teaching support staff, facilities and equipment to enable them to fulfill their primary role - program, teach, assess and report. They are paid better, treated professionally, and they work in a much calmer, settled, less frenzied and more supported environment. This why I chose to send my own children to a local independent school and not the local public school.