

High levels of responsibility and accountability not matched with support

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Schools have buckets of money instead of teachers to meet needs under the Local Schools, Local Decisions model, Federation Senior Vice President Amber Flohm told the work value inquiry on 26 October.

“There should be no flexible funding in English language proficiency; it should be delivered as permanent, qualified teachers,” Ms Flohm said, also outlining in her evidence the number of years of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) support students require to acquire English.

Qualified EAL/D teachers have specialist qualifications in second language acquisition and linguistics yet unqualified EAL/D teachers fill 40 per cent of the current EAL/D staffing entitlement, which rises to 47 per cent in regional and rural areas across the state.

This is due to “wilful neglect”, Ms Flohm said.

“In 2008 we had an over-supply of EAL/D-qualified teachers. There were 1369 EAL/D teachers awaiting appointment. Now we’re in the situation where there are not enough qualified EAL/D teachers,” she said.

“The Department of Education collects the data...they know exactly where those students are and where they are going to settle with their families and they have not put any measures in place to ensure that there are qualified [EAL/D] teachers in those schools.”

Teacher allocations are driven by student enrolments but it is not the case for EAL/D teachers. “We would never see such a circumstance with English teachers or the number of primary students for example; they would automatically be allocated additional, qualified teachers,” Ms Flohm said.

“In 2021 there are the funds for 407 [equivalent full-time] additional EAL/D teachers to be appointed, and the [system chooses] to give buckets of money to schools, when they don’t do that in maths or science or history. I’m not sure how you could describe it in any other way, except tantamount to institutional racism.”

Schools and classroom teachers are doing the best they can to address the growing numbers and complexity of the needs of their students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, having lost access to departmental supports since the introduction of Local Schools, Local Decisions policy, the inquiry panellists heard from Ms Flohm.

“The Department had 32 officers [based in schools in 2013] who supported multicultural education across the state. We now have none,” Ms Flohm said.



The inquiry also heard of matters of racism and social cohesion as Ms Flohm described to the panel how broader societal events would often play out in public school communities. “COVID is the latest example of what is occurring in our community and racism is replicated inside the school gates,” she said.

Panellist Dr Geoff Gallop questioned Ms Flohm on the capacity of the Department to meet legislative and other requirements, including the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, in relation to anti-racism education.

“I guess when you are constrained to one officer of the Department with such an enormous remit, that person ... can’t possibly deliver for schools as well.”

Ms Flohm referred to the Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000 and the failure of the government and Department of Education, as the public institution responsible, to make provision for CALD communities and current EAL/D student cohorts.

While classroom teachers are committed and dedicated, Ms Flohm said that without EAL/D qualifications and expertise it’s very difficult for them to address the complexity of students’ needs.

Central support by ESL/Multicultural consultants — who assisted schools to develop EAL/D programs, curriculum and resources, worked with teachers on professional development, assisted community engagement and embed anti-racism education in schools — is no longer provided.

Professional learning is not adequate. “It is often an email: read this policy, click on this and do the online professional learning. That is not the sort of professional development that works...What you are doing is unpicking the grammar and structures of language and comparing that to their current language, whether it’s an oral language or a written language; whether they acquire spoken English first before written English. There are a multitude of aspects of English as an additional language pedagogy, curriculum and programming; and they need support to do that,” Ms Flohm said.

Call for flexibility

“Part-time work should be a core right for all teachers,” Ms Flohm said. “I do note that the Department of Education brought in a policy [on flexibility] in October 2017...for the corporate section...to job share, to transition to retirement; none of which is available to school teachers.”

Ms Flohm outlined the dire situation faced by teachers wanting to work part-time. “What many of our female members find themselves having to do is go on leave without pay from their permanent position and work in precarious employment in a temporary position, so they have some flexibility around the number of days that they can work. That’s unacceptable, when they have permanent jobs.”

“There are no advertisements for women to job share,” she told the inquiry. “The number of part-time positions overall, in the Department, are declining, so it makes it very difficult for women to remain.”

In a profession that is dominated by women (over 75 per cent) and works to advance the outcomes of children and young people, Ms Flohm said it was “unacceptable that the Department of Education can’t facilitate the working of part time and job share”.

Women working part-time in a primary setting are often boxed into roles that are not on a class such as release from face-to-face or other support roles that have fractional allocations, Ms Flohm outlined.

“Often that has the result of deskilling those teachers long-term, because they’re not in with the K-6 classes developing the curriculum, programs and resources that they need to progress in their careers,” she reported.

View Ms Flohm’s testimony to the “Valuing the teaching profession — an independent inquiry” [here](#).