

'Too much to ask': Department's support shortcomings highlighted to inquiry

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It's impossible to be an expert in a diverse range of learning needs, so we need someone who can guide and advise us, to help us understand, high school teacher Eli Pietens told the Gallop inquiry on 28 October.

"We are an amazing profession but to do that on our own is just too much to ask."

English head teacher Jowen Hillyer said beginning teachers need to have a reduced load and they need to have a mentor who has time built into their timetable so they actually have time to talk through the accreditation process. "To observe a class takes many hours out of your preparation time. You often have to ask a friend to take your class while you do that for somebody else. There is really not enough time in that accreditation process to sit back, to reflect, to discuss and then make plans moving forward. It is entirely before school, after school or lunchtimes."

The inquiry panellists were given a window into documentation and compliance by Ms Hillyer, who outlined the work and time required to differentiate the curriculum to cater for the learning needs of students.



Intensification of workload and the increasing complexity of responsibilities were also raised by other witnesses.

When the government upped the school leaving age to 17 the needs of those students who typically may have left earlier had to be accommodated, said careers adviser Belinda Standage.

In the past Ms Standage would organise an information night and provide a handbook but parents wanted information on demand as well. "To be on top of that I provide a lot more information via our emailing system, newsletters, Facebook page and Instagram, before parents could even ask the question... I'm trying to be ahead of the game and pre-empt what they're going to ask because the questions and demands for my time ... had increased so much that I couldn't keep up."

To stay on top of her responsibilities Ms Standage undertakes a lot of work before school, after school and on the weekends. "The amount of paperwork and reporting that we do is above and beyond."

School counsellor Danielle Kempton also spends a lot of time doing administration work out of school hours.

She said she deals with more complex mental health issues than in the past and triages students while they wait to see outside agencies. In her area, kids are waiting two months for an initial appointment with a

psychologist.

The inquiry heard from Mr Pietens that rarely is extra time allocated to give teachers and executive members release from face-to-face teaching to develop, implement, monitor and review personalised learning plans required for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The time needed to maintain accreditation was also discussed.

“I don’t mind the fact that I have to keep improving in my profession,” Mr Pietens said. “In fact, one of the reasons I became a teacher was because I thought I wanted a profession where I would never stop learning.”

“For me, the key thing is, having teachers who love teaching,” Mr Pietens said. “You can only love teaching if you’ve got the time to pursue it.”