

Bush issues left out back

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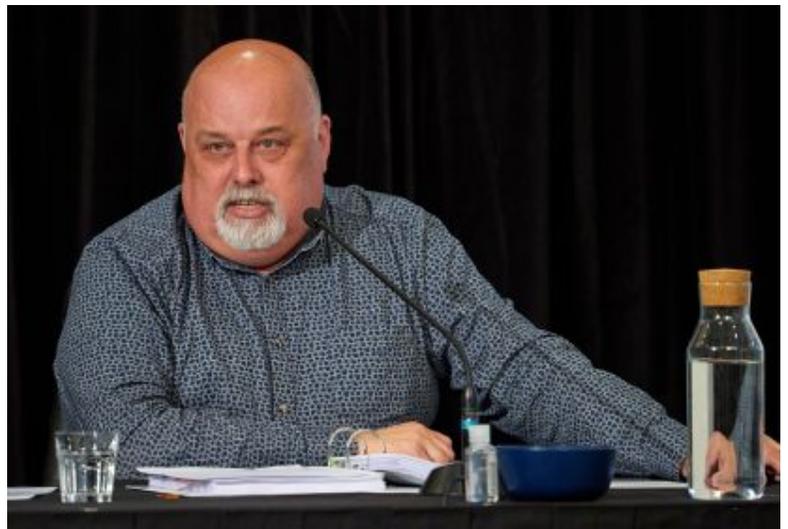
Teaching in rural and remote NSW comes with its specific challenges and issues, as related by teachers from regional schools who gave evidence to the Gallop inquiry on 10 November. However, many of the issues cross over their city counterparts' concerns when it comes to key issues of support and workload.

Here's what your colleagues had to say in evidence to the inquiry in the final week of public hearings.

Parents see the value

The inquiry panel asked how the two crises that hit Batemans Bay – the bushfires and pandemic – had affected the view of teachers and the role they play in the community?

"Our community has been given some insight. Some parents and students needed additional support, and it created a stronger bond with the school because they now understand, and they've seen firsthand, how hard we work to support their students ... and around equity, providing the support for their learning online.



"That additional connection we've had with the community over this time has upped their view of teachers and the school. I think we stand pretty well in our community."
Gavin Street, classroom teacher

Workload and wellbeing

"The pressure [to meet targets] increases their [teachers'] cognitive load, it takes their focus and their time away from planning lessons for the students in the classroom because they're now thinking I've got a target to achieve, 'What's my role in that?, How am I going to move these students and achieve this target?'.

"For some teachers that induces headaches, nausea. Teachers that were once passionate about teaching, doing it for the love of their students and wanting that authentic growth naturally, these teachers are now feeling unwell because of this added pressure. That, of course, is impacting on the learning of students because the students are not receiving the extra time of that lesson preparation because their teacher's head is in, 'Gosh, I've got to meet this target'."
Bronwyn Lochrin, assistant principal

Staffing

"Time is the big issue for teachers and I do have to say that some of the areas we are struggling with. The Department has said OK here is some money for extra teachers [but] we can't get them. The Gonski funding has been great, there's some outstanding positions we've filled in the school and some programs, our Pacific

Island liaison officer is an example of that. But in terms of teaching positions, I can access training for the staff, the Department's said we can get you this program, it's five days training course, which is great but I don't have teachers to replace them. That's the million-dollar question how we get all this together, the time, the resources and the staffing.

Richard Wiseman, deputy principal

Show me the casuals

"One of the most time-consuming roles we have is staffing, especially at a location like Griffith. We haven't filled our staffing allocation for this year, we're still about six or seven [teachers] short, at the same time we're planning to fill the staff for next year. So the role of deputy and principal is to spend an enormous amount of time running panels trying to source staff, instead of doing those educational leadership duties which are its prime focus. Casuals are next to impossible and that has been the case for some years at our site. Now we're seeing ... temporary and permanent positions being harder and harder [to fill]."
Richard Wiseman, deputy principal

Accreditation

"Through my involvement with Federation I've been to lots of conferences, where they very carefully explain[ed] the accreditation process and made it sound not that scary.

"I 100 per cent believe in the process, I think it's fantastic to have that, they're recognising teachers as professionals and needing to address these standards ... in your work. I was incredibly lucky ... when it came time for me to submit my accreditation, we had a newly transferred assistant principal, who had been through the process with many, many other beginning teachers at her previous school. I've heard of other teachers ... becoming overwhelmed and allowing it to be all-consuming."
Margaret Gordon, classroom teacher

"The head teacher is now responsible for monitoring all of the aspects of the accreditation and writing the report. While the report comes out under the name of the principal, I doubt whether there is a principal in NSW who actually writes the accreditation reports. That's increased the workload for the head teacher substantially in terms of the monitoring of the individual staff member and is in contrast to what used to happen. There are certainly some advantages to the formalization of that process but it has increased the workload of the head teacher substantially."
Rob Bartulovich, head teacher

More programs, more policies - less learning

"I think there is a distinct disconnect between the policy makers who are making these [policy and program] decisions and the teachers on the ground in the micro world of the classroom. There needs to be more collaboration and discussion between the policy makers and teachers on the ground as to what works best in the classroom for the students.

"Teachers want to learn, they embrace these new programs ... they want to move their students, they want to see that growth. Because teachers are all about the students but when the new programs are introduced unfortunately the next thing on their mind is, 'When am I going to have time to learn this properly so I can get that growth?'"
Bronwyn Lochrin, assistant principal

More work, same pay

"While we have had an exponential increase in the types of things we're required to do, the allowances a head teacher is given have not changed since the 1960s. I think, in many ways, head teachers have become meat in the sandwich in high schools. We're expected to go through a process of responsibility for a really large number of areas that have not decreased, they have actually increased.

"There seems to be less of an emphasis on teaching and learning and more of an emphasis on the administrative side of being a head teacher. We also have our own classes that we need to prepare for. We are in an era where the head teacher's role is no longer just part of the school day, it's become a 24/7 role."
Rob Bartulovich, head teacher

"Sometimes I think, as an assistant principal, I have enough administrative tasks that could put me in an office every day of every week. We certainly do not receive the time to do our administrative tasks."
Bronwyn Lochrin, assistant principal, Sutton Public School

Data collection

"I think teachers embrace data collection and analysis if they can see there is a real purpose and that this data collection will inform their teaching to produce the best outcome for students. If they see that the data is meaningful, is relevant and purposeful, and they have the time to obtain and analyse it, then they value it."
Bronwyn Lochrin, assistant principal

Technology

"We always make the assumption that everyone has access to the internet at home. They don't. The old dial-up is still used by some, and NBN is a mystery magical thing that sits in somebody else's yard. Also it's a financial burden for some families and they don't have that type of access. The other assumption we make is that everybody below the age of 15 is going to be a technological expert. This not true. They might be great with their mobile phones but when it actually comes to accessing word processing, research or using your computer in a meaningful way they don't get that."
Rob Bartulovich, head teacher

The mental health crisis

"The time spent dealing with students with a whole range of issues, whether it be anxiety and other mental health issues, dominates our day. I quite often think what is causing these concerns, is it that access to technology? I really don't know. But that's another thing in my role where a lot of the issues revolve around the use of social media and issues at home which add just another new dimension to your role at school, what you do."
Richard Wiseman, deputy principal