

School staffing neglect reaches crisis point



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Recent media coverage has reported major teacher shortages across the state. 1250 permanent positions remain unfilled on the eve of the new school year. This is on top of any unfilled temporary and casual teacher vacancies. While alarming, it is hardly surprising.

This is a major policy failure on the part of the NSW government and its Education Department.

Schools across every setting (primary, secondary, central and special schools) across the state are affected.

However, the depth of teacher shortages is acutely impacting rural, remote and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

The staffing of all public schools **is** the responsibility of the NSW government through the Department of Education.

It has been nearly 20 years since the Department conducted comprehensive workforce analysis and planning necessary to deal with issues of supply and demand to ensure adequate numbers of teachers.

Further, increasingly over the past 15 years the NSW government and Department have walked away from this responsibility.

The Department's staffing unit has been decimated. This has resulted in principals being denied the support they need placing more of the pressure on their role and ultimately shifting responsibility and blame for the staffing of schools on to them. This is simply devolution and the consequences of the Department's discredited Local Schools, Local Decisions policy.

In February 2020, Minister for Education, Sarah Mitchell, said:

"I recognise there are issues with teacher shortages across the state. It's pronounced in regional and regional areas, but I hear it from teachers based in the city as well. I am proactively considering ways in which we can better incentivise teachers to take up positions in rural and regional areas. It is an ongoing challenge. I do think money is part of it. But it's not the only part."

This is correct.

Apart from the teaching service being overworked, underpaid and undervalued, the deliberate move by the Department to weaken and undermine the statewide transfer system has seriously affected many hard to



staff schools, especially in rural and remote communities.

The NSW public school system once had a reliable and effective statewide transfer system that ensured suitably qualified teachers, executive staff and principals were permanently allocated to all schools including hard to staff and favourable areas.

In return, it gave confidence to members of the teaching service that should they decide to uproot and move to harder to staff areas of the state, they had a likely chance to transfer back home after a minimum period of service.

This system intentionally and unashamedly favoured harder to staff schools while rewarding those teachers, executive staff and principals for their public service.

With student enrolments forecast to grow by 20 per cent over the next 15 years and 25 per cent over the next 20 years, the looming teacher shortage crisis is set to worsen should the government fail to put in place a comprehensive suite of policy options to attract and retain teachers.

In February 2020 Federation commissioned the *Valuing the teaching profession — [An independent inquiry](#)*. Led by former Western Australian Premier, Dr Geoff Gallop, the Inquiry panel was charged with the responsibility to investigate the changed nature and value of teachers' and principals' work.

Further the panel was asked to consider:

(a) how best to support teachers and principals in New South Wales public schools, including through investment in the education workforce and capital infrastructure; and

(b) how to best improve the status of the teaching profession, including, but not limited to matters going to remuneration.

The evidence presented to the Inquiry throughout 2020 was compelling.

It is no longer a question of whether the teaching service needs more time and support to perform the task expected of it, it does.

It is no longer a question of whether the teaching profession — the salary of which has declined by 10 - 15 per cent against historical relatives when compared to other like professions — deserves a competitive professional salary necessary to attract and retain teachers particularly in a time of a massive enrolment boom, it does.

Federation awaits the findings and recommendations from the independent Inquiry scheduled to be handed down on 20 February.

These findings and recommendations will inform our policy objectives to improve the salary and conditions of teachers throughout 2021 and beyond.

The membership is to ready itself for an unprecedented campaign.