

Medowie members take action over Government neglect

March 29, 2021

NSW Teachers Federation members at Medowie Public School walked off the job today after voting for industrial action over the Berejiklian Government's neglect of staffing issues, particularly school counselling roles.

Members at the school in Port Stephens voted for industrial action stating they were "deeply concerned with the failure of the NSW Government to staff the NSW public school system adequately", and it "must provide additional school counsellors urgently".

"Dual-qualified school counsellors do an incredible job, but they are toiling under unsustainable and impossible workloads," the members' motion said.

"Schools do not have anywhere near the amount of school counsellor entitlement to meet the ever-increasing and complex needs of the school community."

Over the past month, Federation members in schools from Walgett to Albury and Darlington Point to Port Macquarie have resorted to industrial action citing drastic staffing issues through continued teacher shortages and reduced incentives to staff regional schools.

The issue of school counsellors – considered by Federation to be a priority after the bushfires and particularly heightened through the COVID crisis – has escalated into 2021 as staffing shortages have been exposed across the state.

Research by Federation late last year showed 98 per cent of teachers and 99 per cent of principals say the number of students with mental health issues has increased in the past three years.

The Medowie members also noted that the Vinson Report, conducted in 2002, recommended a ratio of no more than one school counsellor for every 500 students.

"Students are being denied the appropriate level of assistance required, due to a lack of workforce planning and incentives to attract and retain dual-qualified school counsellors," their motion said.

"Put simply, public education students are being denied the mental health care and support they need because of Government neglect. This cannot be accepted."

Members at Medowie Public School also called on the NSW Government to implement the recommendations of the Gallop Inquiry, which advised school counsellor numbers increase to the ratio of 1:500 by 2023.

