

## Real-life stories help understanding

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“My largest kindy class was 34 and largest year 1 class was 36,” recalls Wheeler Heights Public School Fed Rep Trish McCombie. “It was in the early part of my career and it was challenging.”

After the Vinson Report’s recommendations for smaller class sizes, intense lobbying by Federation members and the union’s Public Alliance partners in the lead-up to the 2003 state election, the Carr Labor government announced all kindergarten classes need not exceed 20 by 2005 and by 2007 class sizes would average 22 in year 1 and 24 in year 2.

“When the change came through, it meant I was able to spend more time with children who needed additional help and because of that we had greater learning gains,” Trish, now Manly-Warringah Teachers Association President, said. “I was also able to work more carefully on their emotional and psychological needs. Going from 34 to 20 was a significant improvement to the way I could do my job.”

“I can see the value in the current campaign to inform politicians and parents about the findings and recommendations of the Gallop Inquiry, because without understanding the problem people won’t agree,” she said.



“We can help them understand by injecting real-life stories.”

Recalling her first meeting with an MP in the naughties, Trish said: “The thing that struck me most was his indifference to the plight of students.

“I thought, we have to hold politicians’ feet to the fire and give them the stories about individual kids.

“Parliamentary aides, Treasury, think tanks and reports will give them numbers; we can give them faces, stories and families.”

Having delivered a series of presentations to her school’s P&C on Federation issues over the years, Trish said parents are very interested in how teaching and learning conditions affect their child.

“Recounting personal stories can also be a powerful tool at these meetings, to help parents and carers understand the problems,” she said.

“It’s important to have a good relationship with your school’s P&C. The information you share with the P&C disseminates to parents at Saturday sport and parents in the playground.”

Trish plans to engage the school’s P&C on the findings and recommendations of the Gallop Inquiry this term.