

## Action on shortages back campaign

September 21, 2021

Teachers have shown solidarity with the More Than Thanks campaign by taking stop-work action since its launch last Thursday.

Federation members at seven schools in the Coffs Coast region – Mullaway Public School, Ulmarra PS, Coffs Harbour PS, Coffs Harbour Senior College, Coffs Harbour Learning Centre, Hastings Secondary College Westport Campus and Bellingen Public School – brought the total number of actions over staffing shortages across the state to 80 this year.

Deputy President Henry Rajendra applauded members for making a stand in the campaign to secure the changes to workload and salaries that will improve conditions and make the profession more attractive.

Of the shortages, he said: “This is what you get when governments don’t take workforce planning seriously and impose wage caps and unsustainable workloads on teachers.



“We have been waiting 10 years for a 10-year plan from this State Government about how they will fix the shortages and recruit the additional teachers we need.

“We can’t wait any longer. The Gallop Report gives us a roadmap for change and we need to follow it.”

Mr Rajendra said NSW is at the start of a boom in enrolments that will require up to 25 per cent more teachers in the next 10 years alone.

“The vast majority of that growth will be in Sydney area so it is going to be even harder to get teachers to head to the country,” he said. “Not just rural schools, not just large schools but schools in all parts of the state where members have said enough is enough.”

Members at Coffs Harbour Learning Centre, an SSP, cited the lack of casuals, as well as only having access to a qualified school counsellor for less than one day a week despite the high-needs students they teach, as motivation for the walkout.

The meeting resolution from Mullaway Public School stated the worsening teacher shortage plaguing schools across the state is increasingly affecting areas once considered preferable and not “hard to staff”.

“For example, at Mullaway Public School there has been consecutive days of lessons that have not been covered due to an inability to find an appropriately qualified teacher,” their resolution said.

Members at the school also revealed the lack of casuals meant its teacher-librarian and COVID intensive

learning support program (ILSP) teacher had to cover classes, which led to the closure of the library “consecutive times” this year and students learning further disrupted by a lack of ILSP provision.

At Bellingen Public School more than 40 days of lessons have not been covered due to an inability to find a qualified teacher.

“We have to split classes at least once a week, resulting in class ratios being exceeded,” its resolution said. “This impacts both the students being split, and those in the classes students are being split to.”

This year alone at Hastings Secondary College Westport Campus, 269 lessons have not been covered due to an inability to find a qualified teacher.

“In some subject areas, students have been placed under minimal supervision as a matter of routine,” its members said. “Staff have taken upon themselves to cover these lessons, at a detriment to their own students and their own wellbeing.”

At Coffs Harbour Public School, whole school arrangements have been reorganised on numerous occasions due to an inability to find qualified teachers.

“Teachers have been forced to miss or have professional learning rescheduled, which in turn is disruptive to the learning of the students,” members stated. “Specialist programs have been collapsed and specialist staff used to cover classes of teachers on leave, ie EAL/D staff and ILSP staff have been redirected to cover classes without teachers.”

Shortages at Ulmarra Public School meant cancelling professional development for teachers, classes combined to accommodate staff leave and intervention programs have been interrupted to cover leave.

Getting into the campaign spirit at Coffs Harbour Senior College, the message from Fed Rep Ross Burton and Women’s Contact Louise Cleary – drawing on their decades of experience as workplace activists – was, “the only way we can get #MoreThanThanks is to fight”.