

2 December 2022

## **Response to the National Teacher Shortage Crisis**

The Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) National Council includes representatives from six States and two Territories, with two members representing each jurisdiction. This group represents a shared national commitment to both highlighting the importance of the primary years and to promote excellence in government primary education in Australia. Our advocacy is based on the vision of every child attending a school with healthy, high-performing leaders and quality staff, along with the knowledge that primary schools are where Australian children acquire the necessary foundational academic, social and emotional skills to lead fulfilled and enriched lives. Every AGPPA policy and response enables this noble intent so that all children can experience success, both at school and through later life. Primary schools are the foundation of Australian Education, with government primary schools being the engine room of this foundation in which over 70% of students attend. Government primary schools need a quality teacher in front of every class, every day, in every school.

AGPPA is the national professional association for public primary school principals in Australia. AGPPA represents over 7300 school leaders in 5300 public primary schools in every corner of every State and Territory. This body represents over 1.6 million students who attend government primary schools in Australia. AGPPA represents over half of all schools in Australia.

AGPPA's initiatives and actions are aimed at making Australia's education system one where we ensure we provide every Australian child with a life of choice, not a life determined by chance. This aim is perhaps best enunciated using the words of David Gonski, Chair of the Review of Funding for Schooling expert panel, who said:

*“Every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend.”*

### **Teaching in Primary Schools**

Primary school teaching is a highly specialised profession as teachers are required to have knowledge of all learning areas, whilst supporting the social and emotional development of each individual student. These are the critical formation years for students, and it is well documented the need for teachers of primary to have strong relationships with their students. The teacher shortage that has been evident in regional and remote areas for several years is now impacting upon every town and city in Australia. Government primary leaders are identifying that this shortage is having a profound effect on student's learning continuity, with some schools identifying that classes have had more than 20 different teachers in a four-week period. The importance of teachers in the learning process is well acknowledged as a critical driver of achieving academic and social outcomes. Despite this critical importance,

Professor Donna Cross from the University of Western Australia indicates that *'Teachers report the highest level of occupational stress in Australia, the United Kingdom and America'*, when compared to other occupations.

Key issues contributing to these concerns included:

- *excessive workload and working hours*
- *poor student behaviour including disengagement and classroom violence, challenging authority*
- *management of bullying and reactive management strategies*
- *aggression from students and parents*
- *classroom and school climate*

Wellbeing at the school level is also often affected by the propensity of governments and bureaucracies to impose additional responsibilities on schools without considering what should be removed to make space for the added expectations. This has added to teacher workload and has been exacerbated even further by an overcrowded primary curriculum.

## **Challenges**

AGPPA believes that the current challenges in staffing schools not only have consequences today but may have a compounding effect into the future. The issues identified below were evident prior to, and independent of, COVID-19, though the pandemic did exacerbate the problems.

Attracting and retaining high quality and highly skilled teachers to the profession would be supported by:

- Addressing pay and conditions as they are the only disincentives. Work that takes teachers away from teaching and learning, increased compliance training/administration takes time, energy, and enthusiasm out of teachers' ability to collaborate, plan and prepare quality and differentiated teaching and learning experiences for students.
- Increased regard for teachers: Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for teachers is a lost tradition.
- Addressing the increased demands on teachers, making it a less appealing profession for young people who know they can experience more favourable working conditions and gain higher salaries in other industries.
- Quality Initial Teacher Education pathways in universities which connect to primary schools early in the course and provide a pathway of employment for students in their final year of the course.
- Understanding that teacher shortage is a national issue, however, is not confined to Australia as international colleagues report similar issues. Labour shortages are also not confined to teaching, the difference is people can wait for a meal in a restaurant or to have their tax prepared, a class of 28 students cannot wait.
- The challenge is both attracting people into the profession and retaining them.

## **Short Term Strategies**

Ten years of inaction needs to be addressed with short-term strategies that have an immediate impact so that a reversal of the current issues occurs for the start of the 2023 school year.

AGPPA Short-Term strategies are as follows:

- Utilising the 100 000 registered teachers around the country who are not working in schools and reduce the barriers for them to return to teaching.
- Engage the estimated 100 000 - 150 000 trained but unregistered teachers and create easily accessible pathways into teaching.
- Pay teacher registration fees of these trained teachers.
- Retain current teaching staff through reduced workload, increased remuneration and improved working conditions including more flexible work options.
- Look for more part time options.
- Look at the structure of the school day – can we do this differently?
- A different model for primary schools? More specialist teaching options and less generalist teachers – this would suit part time teachers.
- Pay 4<sup>th</sup> year teaching students to work in a school whilst studying – in school training.
- Explore opportunities for 3<sup>rd</sup> Year teaching students to work part time as teacher assistants – or give them credits for their work in a school.
- Provide housing and other benefits (relocation) for hard to staff areas.
- Expand international recruitment for experienced teachers.
- Explore incentives for childcare.
- Explore pathways for part-time teaching and resource leaders appropriately for the increased line management.

## **Medium-Term Strategies**

While long term strategies are desperately required to ensure the current situation never occurs again, it's critical that medium-term strategies are adopted that start to redress the current issues in the next 12 -18 months.

AGPPA Medium-Term strategies are as follows:

- Using the architecture/frameworks that we have (Australian Curriculum, AITSL, National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Be You) and advocating for their adjustment to reflect contemporary schooling contexts and continuing to challenge the measures that are used to indicate our success. How is the here and now reflected in these documents? We need standards and outcomes that matter to reflect the human nature of the work.
- Taking out competition between schools... focus on responding and improvement.
- Use existing research to investigate ways in which to increase the number of Aboriginal students taking up teaching degrees.

- Have a representative of AGPPA at every point of this conversation.
- Authentically reduce workload issues for teachers and give them the support (resources through funding, capability development).
- Scholarships for ITE, bonded for 2-3 years.
- Adapt university courses in teaching to align with school terms (eg start in February, end in November /December).
- Federal Government explores opportunities to pay for 4<sup>th</sup> year students to work in schools whilst training.
- Reduce the need for additional work that may not be required, e.g., having a documented plan for every child in Government care.
- Fund schools to be able to provide genuine TOIL for the out-of-hours commitments.

### **Strategic Long-Term Solutions**

- Creative ITE solutions including expanding current initiatives: final year employment in schools | SLSO roles in schools | explicit coaching and mentoring support in schools | partnerships with schools.
- Recruit teachers for Local Area Relief Schemes to create accessibility to high quality casual staff.
- Create Instructional Leadership positions in primary schools that allow for mentoring and coaching; planning personalised teaching and learning and resources; curriculum development; interagency support for students and to complete compliance roles and training.
- Continue to work in partnership with AGPPA to co-design and plan for contemporary strategies to attract and retain high quality teachers and leaders. Immediate, short-term, and long-term strategies need to be in place.
- HECS fees for ITE courses at universities need to be minimised and increased university scholarships offered.
- Administrative support for teachers, leaders, and mentoring and coaching, for early career teachers.
- Significant investment in rural and remote incentives must be enhanced: ensuring teacher housing and workforce planning provisions are offered for the teacher/leader/Principals' partner/spouse/children so the attraction becomes a retained position and contributor to the community.
- Create a nationally consistent accreditation agreement to facilitate mobility of staff seamlessly.
- There is also a significant workload in administering the acquisition of casual teachers, constant changes to duty and learning program timetables to accommodate the daily variations in routine. The communication of these changes to all stakeholders is also problematic and significantly increases the workload for principals, teachers, and administrative staff.
- Provide additional school development days, so that many operational matters can be addressed during school hours, rather than out of hours
- Ensure there is sufficient support for staff in managing complex students with imputed disability, such as anxiety, ADHD, dyslexia etc.

