

**SUBMISSION**



## **Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales**



☎ 1300 772 679

✉ [psa@psa.asn.au](mailto:psa@psa.asn.au)

🌐 [www.psa.asn.au](http://www.psa.asn.au)

📺 @psansw

☎ (02) 9262 1623

✉ [cpsu.nsw@psa.asn.au](mailto:cpsu.nsw@psa.asn.au)

🌐 [www.cpsunsw.org.au](http://www.cpsunsw.org.au)

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Authorised by Stewart Little, General Secretary, Public Service Association of NSW and  
Community and Public Sector Union (SPSF Group) NSW Branch, 160 Clarence Street, Sydney NSW 2000

## **Submission to the Legislative Council**

### **Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales.**

The Public Service Association of New South Wales is the primary union with coverage of over 21000 administrative and support staff in NSW Public Schools, as well as numerous other non-teaching staff roles. Our members work in NSW state government schools, in roles directly working with and supporting students such as School Learning Support Officers working with children with disability and behaviours requiring support, School Learning Support Officers Preschool, Aboriginal Education Officers and Community Liaison Officers, Student Support Officers (Youth/Wellbeing Workers) and School Psychologists. They also work in administrative roles ranging from Administrative Managers, Business Managers and Administrative Officers in the school office as well as the library and food and science laboratories. We also cover outdoor staff called General Assistants and Farm Assistants and a range of specialist roles under the umbrella term of administrative paraprofessionals. The Public Service Association of New South Wales is a state-registered employee organisation. For the purposes of this submission, the PSA will be referred to as 'the Association'.

We welcome the opportunity to submit on the issue of teacher shortages in NSW. However, for the Association, the wider issue of student wellbeing – of which teacher shortages is a subset – is of paramount importance. The work activities undertaken by our members are integral to the ongoing wellbeing of students in the NSW school system. Teachers are unable to perform at the top of their game without the support of a raft of other professionals, the bulk of whom constitute our membership. Hence, the long-term wellbeing of all pupils in NSW schools is being challenged by the ongoing teacher and support staff shortage. In presenting our case, we draw upon data from a number of sources including a survey of our members, as well as peer reviewed evidence from the academic literature.

#### **Background.**

The role of school support staff is critical in progressing the wellbeing of all students as education has moved towards an inclusive model – something codified in the UNESCO (1994) Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs (c.f. Chambers, 2015). Indeed, this growing role of non-teaching support staff in schools is further recognised in Chambers observation:

“UNESCO (2005) subsequently produced a document that provided support for the principles of inclusion which was titled Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All and broadened the inclusive education movement to encompass all students not just those with a disability. These guidelines (UNESCO, 2005, pp. 1516) described four main elements of inclusion: (a) that inclusion is a process; (b) that inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers; (c) the presence, participation and achievement of all students is important; and (d) access should be given to those who are highly marginalised or excluded for any reason. The United Nations (2006) also released the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in which Article 24 specifies the right of all people with disabilities to an inclusive education.” (2015, p.6)

We would argue further, that in terms of the School Learning Support Officers et al, the typology developed by Kerry (2005) is pertinent, with a gradual evolution of the role from ‘dogsbody’ towards ‘behaviour manager/curriculum supporter’ – with our members providing an increasingly important role in creating, enhancing and maintaining student wellbeing in all New South Wales schools.

A Typology of Teaching Assistant Roles (Kerry, 2005).

Role	Description
Dogsbody	Menial tasks and little respect from managers
Teacher’s personal assistant	Deals with routine classroom paperwork and runs errands
Factotum	Versatile role dealing with paperwork and individual instruction
Carer/mentor	Concerned with physical or psychological welfare
Behaviour manager	Responsible for behavioural support for an individual or group
Curriculum supporter	Prepare and revise curriculum materials and plan aspects of curriculum

Source: Kerry, T. (2005). Towards a typology for conceptualising the roles of teaching assistants. *Educational Review*, 57, 3, 373-384.

This point was further reinforced by the Navarro in an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Education Working Paper a decade later which noted that effective use of school support staff can reduce the workload of teachers, arguing that:

“As part of school staff, learning support staff can have an important role in improving teaching effectiveness by supporting teachers and providing children with additional support.” (2015, p.5)

Hence, our member’s role has changed from simply being ‘an extra pair of hands’ to being integral members of a professional team focussed on the educational wellbeing of all students.

The increasing importance of support on the classroom is recognised by Blatchford et al (2009) in their observation that ‘increased individualisation of attention and overall teaching, easier classroom control, and that pupils showed more engagement and a more active role in interaction with adults’ (p. 661). This point is further reinforced by Navarro’s OECD Education Working Paper:

“Support staff are no longer undertaking only routine and administrative tasks that enable teachers to focus on their teaching tasks but have a multifaceted role that engages them in instructional activities and allows them to support all the students they interact with, even if their role is to work with mainly one child. Moreover, they support children’s inclusion and act as a link and mediator between different stakeholders.” (2015, p.6)

Whilst the Evidence for Learning Report ‘Maximising the impact of classroom support staff’ more recently noted:

“Where improvements are observed (in student achievement), classroom support staff are working well alongside teachers in providing excellent supplementary learning support.” (2020, p.6)

### **Terms of Reference.**

Having outlined the growing importance of school support staff in ensuring and enhancing student wellbeing, we will address specific points in the Terms of Reference:

**(a) current teacher shortages in NSW schools,**

**(b) future teacher supply and demand,**

**Given the way in which (a) and (b) are intrinsically connected, we have addressed both points jointly.**

There has been a historic, systemic failure to address the issue about the recruitment and retention of teachers – examined by Norris (2021). These generic issues extend further to include school support staff within the NSW school system. There are several reasons for the retention issues:

There has been a significant increase in the administrative workload of teachers – removing them from their chosen vocation of teaching. This is a direct consequence of the under provision of in class assistance from support staff and of the additional administrative burdens as a consequence of ‘Local Schools, Local Decisions’. Given the pivotal role of support staff in providing mentoring support for all students, this has significant implications for student wellbeing going forwards. Our members commonly provide assistance/support with preparation of materials that can be done by administrative staff, such as photocopying, as well as providing some support for learning outcomes within the context of the School Learning Support Officers Statement of Duties.

Schools cannot run effectively without enough permanent, trained administrative staff and, while administrative staff may not be able to take on the work of teachers, our members are integral in supporting the executive teaching staff in the running of the school e.g. provision of resources, supporting the wellbeing of students, managing frontline communications and liaising with internal and external stakeholders.

The issues around teacher retention – and indeed wider support staff retention with the NSW school system raises worrying questions about the system’s ability to retain institutional/corporate knowledge. This has implications for the long-term effective performance of the school system which can only have negative impact upon the wellbeing of students.

In early 2022 the Association conducted an extensive Workload Survey of its members in schools. The results highlighted the following as causes of both physical and psychological harm amongst our members leading to increased staff turnover:

- Stress/burnout
- Violence/aggression
- Workload
- Covid

These results largely echo the finding of the Gallop Report (2021) into the demand for teachers – and reflect an increasingly stressful school environment which functions because of the professionalism and goodwill of all staff, but which does not bode well for either future staffing or the ongoing wellbeing of students.

We acknowledge recent initiatives to allow School Learning Support Officers to retrain as teachers as one step to increase the number of teachers in NSW. Often the School Learning Support Officers are mature females in long term, insecure employment. Providing a framework for them to retrain and progress towards registered teacher status not only benefits the school system and students, but it allows School Learning Support Officers to fulfil their potential and move away from what is often, precarious employment.

Over and above this, the costs involved in recruiting staff - both in terms of financial and service delivery – are well recognised. The ultimate impact of these costs is felt by students receiving a less than desirable education. Progressing the careers of those already within the NSW school system adds value to the student experience too.

### **(c) out-of-area teaching, merged classes and minimal supervision in NSW schools,**

Staff shortages have led increasingly to our members – particularly School Learning Support Officers - being employed out-of-area. Such activities, along with merged classes as a result of teacher shortages and minimal supervision of our members, again as a result of increasing teacher shortages, raises issues of grave concern. Teacher shortages and class mergers often lead to School Learning Support Officers being in vulnerable situations with high needs pupils and little or no supervision or support for themselves.

It is not uncommon for School Learning Support Officers to be required to support students on a one-to-one basis, often requiring physical contact. To the casual observer such interactions can seem inappropriate. However, such interactions may be part of the Student Support Plan – something unknown to the casual observer. We are aware of such interactions being misinterpreted and the ensuing investigation being immensely stressful to our member concerned and the pupil they support too. In a similar sense, staff

shortages have resulted in our members use of the Management of Actual or Potential Aggression training being questioned on the grounds of child protection.

The feedback we have from our members is that the situations/scenarios outlined above are predominantly from metro areas and tend to be exacerbated in rural areas where recruitment of school support staff is more difficult. Indeed, in a survey of our members in schools state-wide, less than 3% felt that their school could easily recruit casual staff to fill vacancies.

**(d) the NSW Teacher Supply Strategy,**

We noted above our support for programmes which enable School Learning Support Officers, and other classifications where there is interest, to retrain in order to obtain registered teacher status. This would to a certain extent help to alleviate the situation described by Morrison et al (2022) whereby student teachers are utilised to fill classroom teaching vacancies rather than registered, qualified teachers.

**(g) impacts related to COVID-19, including the impact of government responses such as remote teaching and safety restrictions,**

The actions of school support staff were exemplary during the pandemic and went well above and beyond what was required in their Statements of Duty. We are aware, for example, of School Learning Support Officers reading and recording stories which were then uploaded. This allowed their students to be read to remotely by someone whose voice with which they were familiar.

In a similar sense, School Administrative Officers undertook activities outside of the Statement of Duties in the preparation of homework kits for distribution to students. In addition, School Administrative Officers undertook much of the additional administrative burden to collect and collate statistics around Covid-19 positive test results and close contacts before the Department had systems and procedures in place. These activities still continue for School Administrative Officers, with School Administrative Managers collecting and providing daily data on student and staff attendance.

Our members again went above and beyond their Statement of Duties to deliver Rapid Antigen Test kits to students' to ensure the wellbeing of pupils. Indeed, with Rapid Antigen Test kits, school support staff were requested to return to school earlier to package and distribute to staff and students prior to our commencement to of new school year

In the Workload Survey conducted by the Association in 2022, overall, over 80% (Q6) of our members experienced an increase in their workload during the pandemic. On average, our members worked 13 hours per week (Q8) in excess of their contracted employment, with almost 50% working during holiday periods (Q13). For over 50% (Q14), this was uncompensated work activity, with less than 14% feeling comfortable claiming for this additional work (Q11). This trend of excessive unpaid work replicates the findings of the Gallop Report (2021) on teaching staff.

**(k) the administrative burden for principals associated with recruiting for and appointing roles,**

**(l) the impact of central appointments prioritisation for teaching and principal roles,**

**Given the way in which (k) and (l) are intrinsically connected, we have addressed both points jointly.**

The period since the 'Local schools, local decisions' reforms in 2011 has seen the decentralisation of the management of schools. This saw the role of school principal morph into that of a general manager with the associated functions rather than being the school's head teacher. The most obvious way in which this can be seen is in the hiring and firing role the school principal has been required to fulfil.

This shift towards deprofessionalising the principal/head teacher role epitomises the move towards 'New Public Management' (Hood, 1991) or 'managerialism' (Pollitt, 1993). The cumulative impact of these reforms has led to the gradual erosion of student and staff wellbeing in our schools, with a focus on the bottom line as opposed to education. Here it is worthy of note that the Gallop Report (2021) was unequivocal in concluding that 'Local Schools, Local Decisions' and its successor policy 'School Success Model' were unfit for purpose.

The devolution of recruitment from the Department centrally to individual schools has led to an added administrative burden on school support staff which has cascaded down from the school principal onto the Associations members. This has essentially been the result of the 'Local School, Local Decisions' not being fully funded – resulting in our members being burdened with extra activities which sit outside their Statement of Duties. Given the precarious nature the temporary nature of many School Learning Support Officers and School Administrative Officers, they often feel compelled to undertake these additional burdens. A move towards permanency (see (p) below) would remove this compulsive element of the roles. When taken in the context of (m) too, the move towards the use of above base funding impacts on the stability of school staffing, with the resultant positive effect upon student wellbeing.

A move to recreate centralised school recruitment capability would aid the ability of all members of school staff in delivering maximum student wellbeing by freeing them of unnecessary administrative burdens. It would also serve the wider school population by creating a centralised expert resource which would end the duplication of provision which currently exists. The Gallup Report (2021) argued too that support services should be centralised.

**(m) support for principals to effectively staff schools above base allocation,**

Whilst the Association in principle supports above base allocations – we do however have some concerns about how this might be utilised. Such allocations tend to be focussed on increasing the numbers of teaching staff, with increases in support staffing numbers ignored. This has the knock-on effect of creating extra workload and therefore pressure on our members who have already being burdened with additional tasks. In addition, many principals elect to employ additional executive staff to support them in their role. Each new

deputy principal or assistant principal requires additional administrative support, something which is not factored into workload calculations.

As we outline in (p) below – we strongly encourage the use by school principals of above base allocation funding to facilitate the shift of school support staff from insecure temporary positions to permanency. This would serve to provide stability for the schools, the support staff concerned, but also pupils who are reliant of support staff - especially School Learning Support Officers - to ensure they gain the most from their time in school.

**(p) the impact of casualisation, temporary contracts and job insecurity,**

The impact of insecure work is now widely recognised. Casualisation and job insecurity do little to address the issue of school support staff or teacher shortages. The multiple negative aspects of casual and temporary forms of employment are chronicled by amongst others: Gallop (2021); the McKell Institute (2022) and Stewart, Stanford and Hardy (2022).

A disproportionate number of those employed on a casual, temporary basis are female. Those employed in a casual/temporary basis have a very uncertain future. They cannot plan ahead because of the indeterminate nature of their employment. Hence, things we tend to accept as being 'normal' – such as the ability to obtain a mortgage and build a life within a stable community - are beyond the means of many within the schools' workforce. The Department of Education's own statistics show that of the 21,388 employees in schools covered by the SASS award, 53% are either on short- or long-term temporary contracts. For school psychologists, there are 39% of staff working in insecure employment, whilst over 14% of Student Support Officers (youth outreach workers) finds themselves in a similar position. This is neither positive for employees, schools nor the students.

We would urge that those employed in insecure employment are moved into a permanent basis – especially those 9,965 covered by the SASS Act and Crown Employees (School Administrative and Support Staff) Award 2019 who are classed as Long-Term Temporary. This can only add to the stability of all concerned, with immediate beneficial impact on student wellbeing.

Another concern we have is that whilst we have many members who are employed on a short term or long-term temporary basis, there is a tendency for senior employees in schools to enjoy permanency – with all the associated benefits this brings. Job insecurity and the associated issues are seemingly something which are concentrated in the most junior of school employees – both teaching and school support staff. In the overall interest of student wellbeing, temporary staff offers little in terms of long-term stability and continuity. This is an issue where a key factor of wellbeing and student success is the ability for School Learning Support Officers to build and maintain trusting relationships with students, they deal with over the longer term. Also, little to no incentive is provided for these people to further their careers in education, many leaving the sector for stable employment – again undermining the ideal of student wellbeing.

## **Conclusion.**

There is a staffing crisis within the NSW school system. Whilst this Inquiry is focussed on the high-profile issue of teacher shortage, we would argue that the staffing issues are system wide - extending to all levels of staff involved in the education of our children. As such, this includes support staff both in schools and in centrally provided functions. Without these support functions being sufficiently staffed, it becomes difficult for teachers to perform at the top of their game without the correct level of classroom and backroom support. Further, the Association is concerned that far too many of those involved in supporting teachers are employed on temporary, short-term contracts offering insecure work and uncertain futures, both for employees, schools and students. For the benefit of all involved in the NSW school's system: teachers, other employees, parents and not least students – having a stable workforce in secure employment in our schools should be a policy goal we strive for.

## **Recommendations.**

- That the essential role of support staff in schools in facilitating student wellbeing be recognised.
- Steps are taken to redress the issues impacting on turnover which were identified by both the Gallup Report (2021) and the Associations Workload Survey, namely:
  - Stress/burnout
  - Violence/aggression
  - Workload
  - Covid.
- Action taken to end out of area teaching and the need to merge classes which often leave support staff with minimal supervision.
- An enhanced package which facilitates the process whereby School Learning Support Officers can gain registered teacher status.
- Recognition and remuneration of the extent to which school support staff undertake additional activities above and beyond their Statement of Duties to ensure student wellbeing is developed and advanced.
- The reintroduction of centralised school support services which are not related to the core educational role of schools.
- School principals to be encouraged to use above base funding to move staff engaged in temporary insecure employment onto permanent contracts.

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