The hidden reality of staff shortages



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I want to thank all our members who responded to our start of term survey on teacher shortages.

We had nearly 400 responses, which given the incredible workload members are facing was most welcome.

I think it is important to note that it gives a margin of error of around five per cent, so the findings of what might seem a small percentage gives a pretty accurate representation of the real situation in schools.

It has become the department's mantra in replying to concerns about teaching numbers by stating there will be a teacher in front of every class.

This is a clever tactic because it does not say how qualified that teacher is or how many classes were collapsed or oversized.

That means our respondents told us over 90 per cent of classes had a teacher. At the same time nearly 10 per cent advised us that classes had to be merged to get to that figure.

Nearly a third of classes did not fit within the class size guidelines. Class sizes in WA are already much larger than other states.

One in five of the teaching staff on 2 February were not fully qualified. A small percentage had no teacher qualifications at all.

Over a third of respondents said their school would not be fully staffed in 2026.

Many shared the impact this will have, which ranges from no Duties other Than Teaching (DOTT) time for staff (which breaches the General Agreement) principals stepping in to teach, classes being merged and a huge impact on specialist classes.

One member said: "Our school is bursting at the seams with nearly 1,000 students. All staff are on a full load, and most classes have 32 students in them, including the [Year] 2/3 foundation classes, Years 7-10, which are not only low literacy, but behavioural classes as well. Some staff are already at breaking point, and I have one staff member in my department already leaving at the end of Semester 1, and possibly another. We are overwhelmed at the moment, and as I said, feeling stressed already."

Another commented: "If we were 'fully staffed', we would not have started the year with multiple classes that are over the numbers stated in the Class Sizes Table GA23 Clause 12.2. This was planned since the end of 2025. Students face having less teacher attention, and less room to move and do hands-on activities due to extra furniture in the room for higher student numbers."

Other impacts were described:

- "We have no relief staff - so when a staff member is out, we will often have collapsed classes. We also lose our EA time regularly."
- "We have already had numerous class changes within our department, including things like three-way swaps and deleting classes to merge with others because we cannot staff them."
- "Bigger class sizes, more challenging and violent behaviour for teachers to manage without help, collapsed specialist subjects, upset families."
- "Merged and loss of specialist classes due to sickness and lack of relief. We will also have teachers leave during the year due to unreported stress leave. It is too hard to go through official stress leave channels, so they often just take sick leave."
- "While 'fully staffed', relief staff is impossible to get. Relief is secured then they cancel at 8am for a 'better' option. We also have a number of staff taking LSL (long service leave) this year. This will cause a lack of staff and specialist/support programs to collapse."
- "We won't be staffed for relief coverage. We will need to merge classes, lose specialist and teacher DOTT. Deputies will cover classes."

Misleading claims about staffing levels are not just hurting teachers and driving more and more out of the profession. They are having a direct effect on education outcomes and behaviours.

We need real solutions, not clever evasion of reality.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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