Put children first and properly resource education in the regions



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OPINION
STATE SCHOOL TEACHERS' UNION OF WA

As students, teachers, school leaders and other staff head back to regional and remote schools across the State, there are several issues which will follow them into the new school year.

Attracting experienced staff to schools in rural and remote areas has been an ongoing challenge for many years.

Because of geographic, job quality or perceived disadvantages, regional and remote schools are not considered by many education staff when thinking about applying for jobs.

Ahead of the March State election, the State School Teachers Union of WA is calling on all major political parties to put our children first and commit to properly resourcing public education, particularly in regional and remote areas.

There are several barriers to employment the union has identified in rural WA, and we are asking the politicians to commit to addressing them.

One of the major impediments to attracting experienced teachers to regional schools is the very limited staff transfer system.

The current system offers little incentive or reward for regional school placement and makes movement back to metropolitan schools challenging.

Greater flexibility in the system to guarantee a pathway of return from regional to metropolitan schools would go a long way to encouraging more principals and teachers to apply for regional positions.

The union also believes there needs to be a focus on providing appropriate, affordable, clean and regularly maintained accommodation in regional and remote communities for teachers and school leaders.

Government Regional officer housing standards have declined significantly during the past decade.

Housing and rent assistance, particularly in regional locations in the Pilbara and Kimberley, does not adequately cover rental and living costs.

The sale of the GROH portfolio and its assets, as flagged in the 2015 State Budget, has and will continue to further limit affordable housing options.

If GROH is privatised, the service will be forced to cut costs in order to ensure a profit, which will further reduce standards.

The union is calling for the sale of GROH to be abandoned.

We are also seeking a review of the current policy by which rents are set, particularly in relation to the calculation of rents being based on Perth median rental prices, age of the house, quality of the house and its distance from a major centre.

We are asking for a continuation of the freeze of the 2017 GROH increases for teachers and school leaders, and a commitment that there be no further increases for the next State Government.

In addition, there needs to be an increase in spending on GROH maintenance to ensure accommodation in regional and remote areas is up to scratch.

Another issue highlighted by principals and teachers is the support in the regions.

The reduction in regional staffing has had a significant impact on the level of support available in regional schools, including counselling support, professional development, help for struggling students, academic and mental health and operations management.

It is recognised that for rural the current model is not suit

Source: Byrne, Pat. 3 February 2021. "Put children first and properly reso

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Pat Byrne
Published in the *Kalgoorlie Miner*

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The reduction in regional office staffing has had a significant impact on the level of support available for regional schools, including curriculum support, professional development, help for struggling students (both in academic and mental health areas) and operations management.

It is recognised that for rural areas the current model is not suited because of geographic challenges.

In particular, union members have reported a lack of relief teacher availability in regional schools.

The union believes district office level support should be reinstated, and funded mentor positions for new teachers should be introduced.

The relief teacher flying squad should be expanded to ensure access to relief teachers when they are needed.

Every child in this State, irrespective of where they live, should have access to high-quality public education.

Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers in the regions is central to this.

The union has sent a list of these considerations, as well as others, to the major political parties in the lead-up to the election on March 13.

For the sake of all rural and remote public school students, they need to listen.

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