Desperate measures not the answer to teacher shortages

The state government's desperate plans to fix the state's teacher shortage will not address the underlying issues in the public education system, according to the SSTUWA.

The union said the government's plan to send under qualified teachers into short- staffed schools (announced late last year) was a short-sighted move which had the potential to cause more harm than good.

SSTUWA President Matt Jarman said the union had been warning the government for years about the looming teacher shortage, but its concerns were ignored.

"Now we're in a desperate situation where the government is offering random cash payments to teachers instead of taking a strategic approach

to address the issues that led to the shortage in the first place," he said.

"If the government was genuine about fixing the public education system, it would do something to address the workload issues teachers are facing which have forced many of them to leave.

"More also needs to be done to address violence and other abuse in schools which has made teaching a very difficult job.

"The government also needs to increase salaries across the board to retain current staff and make teaching a more attractive career option for those going into university."

Mr Jarman said a number of other factors had also contributed to the teacher shortage, including the failure to provide the minimum funding
for schools recommended by the Gonski report, constant changes to curriculum and testing regimes and false expectations created by the Independent Public School (IPS) model.

The union said rural and regional public education had been undermined during the implementation of the IPS model, and cash payments to lure teachers to the regions would not work in the long term.

"We need full and properly considered consultation about public education in WA with those who understand the system best – teachers,"

Mr Jarman said.

Through an unprecedented level-up clause, the SSTUWA not only secured initial salary rises for members but ensured any subsequent changes of state government wages policy negotiated with other public service unions flowed onto our members (and other unions benefited too).

In addition, a series of important gains around core issues were secured. Once the new process gets underway, I urge you to play your part in helping us formulate our negotiating position.

Our Public Sector Alliance proved crucial in shifting the government on wages policy and we will be seeking a continuation of that cooperation.

During the next few months the new joint funding agreement between federal and state governments will be thrashed out. This is an absolute priority for the SSTUWA.

At the census date of 5 August 2022 there were a total of 476,110 students being taught in WA schools.

Of those 316,834 – 66.6 per cent – were being educated in public schools.

How can it be then that public schools get less than the minimum funding level set by Gonski while private schools get more than 100 per cent of their entitlements?

The system is broken and needs fixing.

This is a situation that flies in the face of Labor's supposed commitment to public education. It is essential to work towards WA getting the 105 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard that the Gonski review set as a minimum.

Without full and proper minimum funding levels being met, WA will not be giving its children the best possible education opportunities.

Straightforward funding commitments, without accounting tricks, are what is required.

Jane Caro tackles some of the myths around education funding from page 15 of this issue. I urge you to read the article and share it with everyone you know – educators, parents and your local MPs!

Contributing to the SSTUWA's efforts on both GA negotiations and funding discussions will be the Lawrence review into public education.

We need to ensure that public education is at the forefront of community and political discussions in Western Australia. The Lawrence review will assist in that process, presenting the problems in a clear manner and offering practical solutions.

I urge all of our members to make their own submissions, focusing on real problems and real solutions.

It is time to listen to teachers about how to improve educational outcomes, not impose think-tank solutions based on ideology or profit seeking.

The recent rash of quick fixes for the teacher shortage shows how important consultation is to deliver workable long-term solutions. (For more see the story on previous page.)

We have a challenging year ahead, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

Don't stand on the sidelines, be part of the solution. If you are already a member, join in.

If you are not a member, join up and then join in.

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