Review into public education finds regional schools lack support



A review into public education headed by Dr Carmen Lawrence has found the teaching profession is at breaking point, with regional teachers and school leaders not getting the support they need.

Commissioned by the State School Teachers' Union of WA, the review took more than 12 months, received over 100 submissions from both individuals and peak bodies, held community forums in 11 regional towns and conducted two statewide online sessions.

The review made 46 recommendations, including that a joint steering committee should be immediately established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations, with a focus on the most urgent changes.

The report found that teachers were navigating increasingly complex classroom environments, trying to cater for an increasing number of children with special needs and behavioural problems, which left less time for the core job of teaching.

The review stated the centralisation of services had not met the needs of schools for administrative and educational support.

It found the Independent Schools model had particularly disadvantaged regional and remote schools, which were unable to compete with metropolitan schools for experienced staff.

It also found that frequent teacher and school leader movements between schools increased staff workload and disrupted student learning, particularly in rural, remote and disadvantaged schools.

Dr Lawrence said while the review panel was interested in receiving a wide range of views, it especially valued the perspectives of those at the coalface – teachers and school leaders.

"We were very concerned to hear that many teachers, particularly in disadvantaged schools, are paying a high personal price for staying in the profession," she said.

"However, we were impressed by the dedication teachers and school leaders showed toward their students and their deep

concern about the detrimental effects of some recent education policies.

“Those we spoke to had given careful thought to how schooling could be improved for both them and their students.

“Many pointed to the need for a significant increase in public school funding, together with a better distribution of those funds to help teachers narrow the achievement gaps created by socio-economic disadvantage and disability.”

Chaired by Dr Lawrence, the review panel included Dr Scott Fitzgerald, Colin Pettit, Pam Pollard and Dr Robyn White.

SSTUWA president Matt Jarman thanked the panel for the report and called for immediate action to start implementing some of the recommendations.

“The report has highlighted what our members have been telling us - teachers are facing increased workloads and stress due to the demands of managing student behaviour and other neurodivergence, with these issues often more keenly felt in the regions where there is less support for both students and staff,” he said.

“To ensure that all children can get the individual attention they need to thrive, we need a carefully considered and fully funded plan to tackle the significant issues in WA schools, that ensures we have both the teachers and the classrooms we need to make positive changes.

“With many families working longer hours to make ends meet due to the cost-of-living crisis, it has never been more important for them to be able to rely on their kids getting a quality education through the public system.

“Our union is committed to working with the government and the Department of Education to fix the public education system in this state.”

The report was officially handed over to Education Minister Tony Buti at an event at the Perth Convention Centre on 6 November 2023.

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