Proper action needed to fix education

As the latest generation of Western Australian children start their education journey it is time to stop talking and start acting to address the problems facing public education.

The announcement of a new funding agreement bringing $1.6 billion into WA public schools is a good start but there is more to do.

Consider these words: “Our analysis indicates that the problem goes to the more fundamental question of whether the job of teaching as currently performed and organised is doable and sustainable.”

Is that a question posed by a union? No. It comes from the Department of Education’s own review *Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools*.

The department’s own report confirmed pretty much every finding of *Facing the Facts* – a review commissioned by the SSTUWA and conducted under Dr Carmen Lawrence.

That is really concerning because Facing the Facts said: “The profession is at breaking point and requires immediate steps to improve education delivery and morale.”

The SSTUWA was not surprised as 86 per cent of members who responded to the union’s 2023 State of our Schools survey said they had considered quitting the profession in the past four years. Thousands have done exactly that – left the sector either entirely or partially.

They have resigned, retired early or dramatically reduced their hours because they simply cannot cope any longer – they feel underfunded, overworked and they are over it. In many cases they have been replaced by teachers who have not even finished their degrees. The shortages are so desperate people who are not fully qualified are being drafted in so the department can claim a teacher is in front of every classroom.

Like other public sector workers, they were targeted under Mark McGowan to help fix the state’s budget. They were given $1,000 a year salary rises for four years while inflation was raging far ahead of that. It took coordinated action by an alliance of public sector unions to give that salary cap the boot, but in the meantime teachers in WA have gone from the best paid in Australia to well down the national table.

This is not just an issue for educators. 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.

Teachers are facing increased demands from student behaviour, higher class sizes and the increased use of Individual Learning Plans for children with complex needs.
To ensure that all children can get the individual attention they need to thrive, we need a carefully considered and fully funded plan to reduce class sizes in WA schools, that ensures we have both the teachers and the classrooms we need to achieve this.

This would include a plan to reduce maximum class sizes across the public system, with additional reductions in individual class sizes, based on the number of children in each class requiring an Individual Learning Plan.

Yes, that will require more teachers at a time when we are already facing shortages.

The alternative though is far worse; a continued drain from the profession.
We need urgent action to stop the exodus, start attracting experienced teachers back and then future-proof the profession.

The SSTUWA is calling on the WA government to invest some of its record surplus into teachers and public education.

As well as addressing class sizes, we need better salaries, more respect for the profession, and a clear strategy to address red tape, so that all children can get a quality education and the WA economy has the skills it needs for the future.

The SSTUWA has made it clear our preference is to work cooperatively with the government to fix public education.

What we need now is action.



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