Class sizes reduction too vital to ignore



Class sizes in Western Australian public schools are among some of the highest in the country.

What bigger classes mean for students is that they get less individual attention, which can significantly affect their learning.

What it means for teachers is a higher workload, less time for teaching and a considerable impact on their ability to safely manage their classrooms.

These factors are pushing people out of the teaching profession in droves. It's led to a teacher shortage the government is struggling to address.

The Facing the Facts report led by Dr Carmen Lawrence found that maximum class sizes are higher in WA than in other states, and had not changed in 40 years, despite the increasing complexity of student needs.

We know that there are more than 10,000 teachers who are currently registered to teach in WA, but aren't. We need to be asking what we can do to get those people, many of them very experienced, highly capable teachers, back into our public education system.

While the workload concessions and increase in pay recently secured in EBA negotiations will help attract and retain teachers, the State School Teachers' Union of WA believes the next step is to develop a long-term plan to reduce class sizes in this state.

That's why we've launched a new campaign, Target 27, which calls for a reduction in the maximum class size for Years 4-10, from 32 to 27.

An analysis of research by the Facing the Facts report authors concluded that "smaller class sizes result in better educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged groups".

For a start, fewer students would mean more individual, one-on-one attention for students and the ability to provide targeted feedback to each child. Teachers would get to know their students better, understand how they learn, what motivates them

and how to support them to reach their full potential.

The reduction in teacher workload as a result of less marking and fewer administrative tasks would allow teachers to focus on actual teaching, increasing the quality of teaching and allowing more time for taking questions and interacting with students.

Fewer students would improve teachers' ability to manage their classrooms, particularly in classes with students who have complex needs and behaviours which affect classroom dynamics. There would be more opportunities for teachers to be able to differentiate their instruction.

All of these things would lead to happier, safer classrooms, better educational outcomes for students, and less burnout and more job satisfaction for teachers.

And that satisfaction would lead to more teachers staying in their jobs, more registered teachers agreeing to return to classrooms and more graduates seeing teaching as a viable career. Smaller class sizes are part of the solution to teacher shortages.

Not every class is overcrowded. This is about addressing the ones that are – which we estimate to be about a fifth of all classes, with the issue being especially relevant in regional, rural and poorer metropolitan suburbs.

In a wealthy state like Western Australia, this is something we cannot afford to ignore.



By Matt Jarman
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