Minister’s speech to June State Council Conference

Western Teacher volume 54.5 August 2025



This is a transcript of a speech delivered by Education Minister Sabine Winton to the SSTUWA June State Council Conference on 13 June 2025. Please note that the delivered remarks on the day may slightly alter from this text.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you to the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) for the opportunity to speak today. As a former classroom teacher, and a member of this union for 36 years, it truly is an honour.

Today I’m also representing the Premier of Western Australia, Roger Cook, who I know is a big advocate for public education.

Before I start, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

Can I also acknowledge:

- Australian Education Union Federal President Correna Haythorpe.
- SSTUWA president Matt Jarman.
- WA Director General of Education, Jay Peckitt; and
- Every single teacher, school leader and SSTUWA representative here today – you are the reason our children achieve incredible things every day. Sincerely, thank you for the work you do.

As you may know, long before I was elected to parliament in 2017, I began my career as a teacher in regional WA.

I graduated from Murdoch University with a primary teaching degree and packed my bags to head to the Goldfields for my first posting at Norseman District High School.

My next schools were even further afield - Fitzroy Crossing District High School and Cocos Islands District High School.

Those years at the start of my career were a period of great professional and personal growth for me. I have always wanted to be a teacher and I look back on those years fondly. It set me up for 27 wonderful years as a classroom teacher, in our public school system.

Teaching has provided me with invaluable life lessons and I'd like to share some that I still draw on in my role as Minister for Education today:

1. The relationships you build are critical to your success.
2. Education is an equaliser – the things we do to inspire kids from all walks of life are incredibly important.
3. You should always ask questions - and never be afraid to; and,
4. Everyone needs a champion.

I feel that final point is particularly pertinent, at a time when teachers and school leaders are facing significant challenges in our schools.

Teachers need champions too and this is the focus of what I want to speak about today.

Supporting teachers, and reducing their workloads, is the key priority for me. The importance of making my first speech as Education Minister to [the] SSTUWA State Council Conference today is not lost on me.

Neither is the significance of taking on the role of Education Minister, with decades of valuable classroom teaching experience behind me.

I also feel the weight of the expectation and responsibility that comes with that – and that keeps me up at night.

What I will commit to you today is that, as Minister:

- I will apply a filter to every initiative, asking how it will make tangible differences to teachers in the classroom.
- I will use my influence to foster respect for teachers and school leaders – inside and beyond the school gate; and
- I will be a common-sense minister.

It's important to me that I continue to be a Minister who isn't afraid to do what needs to be done and change course when something goes too far.

You may remember a kerfuffle about bikes earlier this year. My first act as Minister was to un-ban bikes from schools. Can you believe it? I'm no cyclist, but I think we can all agree that one needed to be wheeled back.

Now that I've got that off my chest, I want to talk to you about something that is close to my heart.

The Cook Labor Government knows WA's teaching workforce is our most valuable asset for providing the next generation with a quality education.

As a government, we have a critical role in making sure we have the right supports in place for teachers – so they can focus their energy and effort on what they do best … teaching!

The recent Enterprise Bargaining Agreement made with the State School Teachers' Union of WA and Principals' Federation of WA (PFWA) introduced a range of new initiatives to improve conditions for our teaching workforce.

A major one of those initiatives is the Workload Intensification Taskforce. The Taskforce brings together representatives from the SSTUWA, PFWA and Department of Education to progress initiatives to address workload pressures for teachers. It will report directly to me on actions to support teachers and school leaders with managing their workloads.

Today, I'm excited to announce important changes that I have made that will elevate the Taskforce and its work.

As part of the reset, I have appointed Emeritus Professor Colleen Hayward AM to take on the role of Independent Chair of the Taskforce, effective immediately.

Many of you will be familiar with Colleen and her work. She brings a wealth of experience to this role. She has a strong background in education, including as a teacher and policy maker. You may or may not be aware that she was also an

SSTUWA official.

She has an incredible record of bringing parties together to get things done. I worked with her on the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce. She did a fantastic job. Colleen will chair the first meeting of the renewed Taskforce when it meets next week.

I know she shares my view that quality student learning is directly linked to quality teaching. We agree that this is why we must focus on attracting great teachers to WA schools and that it's just as important we support those teachers to retain them as well.

I look forward to working closely with Colleen and the Taskforce membership to deliver better outcomes and supports for teachers and school leaders across WA.

More broadly, the Department of Education and SSTUWA continue to work in partnership to tackle the challenges affecting SSTUWA members.

You would be aware that the new General Agreement was registered in November [2024].

That agreement includes salary increases of 12 per cent over three years, which I'm proud to say makes WA teachers among the best paid in the country.

This is combined with a range of new measures to address workload pressures and support teachers in the classroom.

One of the initiatives I'd like to highlight today is the expansion of Complex Behaviour Coordinatorsin our public schools.

This work acknowledges the increasing number of students with complex needs, who are requiring more support to ensure they can succeed at school.

Last year, the Department launched a trial of 16 complex behaviour support coordinators, who worked directly with schools to identify students' needs and match them with effective interventions.

As part of the new expansion, 192 schools were invited in recent weeks to participate. Work will begin soon to embed the 64 Complex Behaviour Coordinators, who will promote positive student behaviour and engagement in learning.

Another positive outcome from the recent EBA negotiations is a new commitment to Small Group Tuition.

This initiative will be rolled out in 350 schools to help improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students who need extra support.

It is also designed to have a positive impact on teacher workloads by reducing the need for teachers to spend significant time developing interventions for students with additional literacy and/or numeracy support needs.

The Small Group Tuition teachers will plan and deliver evidence-based interventions. They will also implement processes to monitor student progress and report on students' progress and achievement to their classroom teachers and parents.

In raising the Small Group Tuition initiative, I want to acknowledge the SSTUWA's*Facing the Facts* report, which continues to contribute to discussions about how we can better support teachers and school students in WA.

I look forward to continuing to work with Matt and his team to progress our shared priorities and implement opportunities identified by the review, such as:

- Ensuring WA public schools are funded to 100 per cent of the School Resourcing Standard.
- Working to reduce educational disadvantage.
- Assessing all policy changes for possible impacts on staff workload before implementing them; and
- Reducing administrative burden for teachers, so they have more time to focus on core teaching.

Since becoming Education Minister in March, teacher attraction and retention has never been far from my thinking.

Amid national workforce challenges, WA has been fortunate in that we have continued to attract and retain high-quality teachers for our schools. But there is more work to do.

While attracting teachers is important, it's also critical that we support our existing workforce to stay on in public school classrooms.

This is particularly true of staff in our regional, remote and hard-to-staff schools.

I look forward to working with the Taskforce, unions, universities and other stakeholders to make sure we aren't losing quality teachers from the profession.

It's impossible to talk about retaining teachers in our schools without also acknowledging that violence is an issue in our society.

Everyone has the right to feel safe at work. First and foremost, teachers need to be safe – and schools need to be safe places for their staff and students.

Violence must never be tolerated. This is reflected in our Government's long-standing commitment to ensuring there are consequences for violence.

Principals have our full backing to take strong action to address violence. The safety of teachers and school staff is a high priority for me and I'm keen to look at what more we can do to ensure all teachers, school leaders and staff have a safe working environment.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognise the changing environment that schools are operating in.

They seem to be constantly under attack, particularly on social media, often with no meaningful way of defending themselves.

As a system, we need to look at how else we can support principals and schools to deal with the barrage of complaints and destructive criticism coming their way.

I also want to acknowledge the complexity of what teachers are dealing with in the classroom in 2025 and the value of providing clear guidance to help them navigate conversations about tough issues of the day.

Teachers play an important role in helping students understand the world. We need to support them to do that.

While there are plenty of challenges in modern education, we are fortunate to be in this field at a historic moment in time.

Our landmark $1.6 billion Better and Fairer Schools Agreement with the recently re-elected Albanese Labor Government will mean every public school in WA is set to receive what is considered "full funding" under the School Resourcing Standard.

This is an enormous deal. It has been achieved through no small amount of advocacy – I would like to acknowledge the role of education unions in this hard-fought victory.

And this package would not have been possible without State and Federal Labor Governments at the table.

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement speaks to the power of what can be achieved by governments that value public education – good Labor governments – working together to support schools and better outcomes for our students.

I look forward to progressing the roll out of this funding as soon as possible in partnership with Federal Education Minister Jason Clare and new Early Childhood Education Minister Jess Walsh.

We are also focused on delivering the significant package of commitments the Cook Government took to the March election, including:

- New and improved quality infrastructure for WA public schools.
- Modern, effective air-conditioning for more classrooms.
- Additional cost-of-living support to help families get the things their kids need for school.
- Expansion of the School Breakfast Program; and
- Beginning to implement free full-time kindy.

As part of the upcoming State Budget, we are putting $28.9 million into a free full-time kindy trial. This will be a continuation of the current play-based model of delivery.

The funding is for minor infrastructure, measures to grow the early childhood workforce and development of additional curriculum resources.

We will also develop a WA Play Strategy, recognising the importance of the role of play in a child's development. The Government's creation of the State's very first Office of Early Childhood speaks to just how important this work is.

Before I wrap up, I want to once more acknowledge the challenges many teachers are facing at the moment.

I know from my discussions with people like all of you - that we need to improve communication and connection between the Department and schools.

This is also something that is validated by the findings of the Agency Capability review – which I am committed to implementing.

I’m also well aware that additional workload pressures are distracting from the work you went into this profession to do.

As Education Minister, I have my work cut out for me. That said, I come into this role with a cup-half-full mindset.

There is a lot of incredible work happening in our schools. Many of you are involved in that work every day and I’m keen to promote the profession of teaching as a positive thing.

While we can acknowledge the workforce pressures, we can also celebrate the brilliant teaching happening in our schools. I believe we must do both.

I was lucky to visit Fitzroy Crossing recently and return to my old school. I was reminded of the impact and difference that a good teacher can make in a community like Fitzroy Crossing – it cannot be overstated.

We need quality teachers and educators in the system, who show up every day in our schools to ensure students have opportunities to grow and thrive.

You, as teachers, play a vital role in shaping the minds of the next generation.

I look forward to working with the SSTUWA to promote the interests of public schools in Western Australia and, importantly, to support our teachers and school staff to succeed. Thanks again to the SSTUWA for inviting me to speak today.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every educator in the room. Your continued commitment to public education and young Western Australians is deeply appreciated.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026