



Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession

Submission



About Queensland Independent Schools

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with about 122,000 students enrolled in 207 independent schools across Queensland in 2018. These schools educate approximately 15 percent of the state’s total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

The strength of Queensland’s independent schooling sector lies in the rich mix of education choices and opportunities local schools provide families. Independent schools are as diverse as the students and parents who make up their close-knit communities. Of Queensland’s 207 independent schools: 183 educate children with disability; 109 cater for students for whom English is a second language or dialect; 184 enrol Indigenous students; 72 offer international education programs; 33 provide boarding services; and 17 cater specifically for students who have disengaged from mainstream education.

Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and well-being of students.

Over the past 10 years enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by 21 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child’s schooling.

Summary

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) supports the inquiry into the status of the teaching profession and commends the focus on looking at ways to overcome current constraints to deliver the best school education model for Australia. The constraints that have been listed as priorities are; inflexible curriculum delivery; periodic reporting and assessment practices; a lack of evidenced-based research; an absence of readily-available class room applications; time pressures for teachers and principals; and a lack of support for school principals to develop professional autonomy.

In considering these constrains under the headings of the terms of reference for this inquiry other factors might also be included including; the particular needs of remote and regional schools, the specialised needs for teachers in special assistance schools, teacher and school leader wellbeing, and raising the public perception of the teaching profession.

Terms of reference

Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

In a previous inquiry, 'A Class Act; Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998), concerns about the problems associated with the status of the teaching profession was noted:

'This is a clear indication of the need for teachers and others, especially governments, to publicise more effectively the excellent work taking place in our schools. Teaching needs to be accepted as a profession. The Committee is persuaded, on the basis of the evidence it received during its Inquiry, that teaching deserves the description of profession and acknowledges that it does not yet enjoy the status it deserves.' (pg 39)

As a focus of the current enquiry is looking to increase the attractiveness of the profession of teaching it will be necessary to ensure that this need is addressed. Studies into the teacher shortages have identified solutions such as raising the status of teaching, offering real career prospects, and giving teachers responsibility as professionals and leaders of reform (Andreas, S., 2011). Reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have found that people who have close contact with schools – such as parents who assist in classrooms, or employers who have students in workplace learning programs – often have much more positive attitudes towards teachers than people with little direct contact. This suggests that building stronger links between the schools and the community can help to enhance the status of teaching (Andreas, S., 2011).

The attractiveness and working conditions for teachers can be enhanced by exploring opportunities for:

- teachers to become innovators and researchers in education, not just deliverers of the curriculum
- parents and communities to be collaborative partners in schools
- the work of the impact of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers to be explored more fully in order to provide clear and fulfilling career and leadership pathways.

Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

The provision of appropriate support platforms will go a long way to resolving many of the focusses of the terms of reference of this inquiry. However, thought must be given to the particular needs of special assistance, alternative education and rural and regional schools. Staffing in these areas has been traditionally problematic. Studies have revealed that almost half (47.8%) of Australian lower secondary teachers work in schools whose principal reported that quality instruction is hindered by a shortage of qualified and/or well performing teachers. A shortage of teachers with competencies in teaching students with special needs was also commonly reported in Australia (37.4%), as was a shortage of vocational teachers (27.6%) and a shortage of support personnel (28.2%) (Freeman, C., O'Malley, K. and Eveleigh, F 2014). Increasing human resources will not be an easy outcome to achieve given that, particularly in contextually specific circumstances, these schools already find it

difficult to staff adequately for the needs for their students. In addressing this need, therefore, it is more complex than simply making funding available for extra staffing. Thought must be given as to how suitably qualified and experienced staff can be encouraged and supported to work in these areas. Some of the major issues highlighted in the rural education literature include: difficulties in attracting and retaining experienced teachers, feelings of isolation experienced by many teachers, particularly those new to the profession, lack of professional development opportunities for teachers within a reasonable geographical distance from the schools, and lack of adequate preservice preparation of teachers in dealing with scenarios likely to be experienced in rural schools. In the last few years, filling teaching positions in some discipline areas has become problematic, due to a national shortage of teachers. For example, Skilbeck and Connell (2003) revealed that 67% of schools across Australia had experienced difficulty in finding suitably qualified mathematics teachers. While this is an issue in metropolitan areas it has reached a critical point for rural areas with a growing proportion of schools unable to fill positions with suitably qualified staff. The result is that in some states and territories, students are being taught by teachers who do not have the deep subject knowledge or the teaching experience to maximise students' learning outcomes in specific discipline areas. Recent evidence from international and national tests indicates that inequities in student achievement do exist in different geographical locations in Australia in the areas of mathematics and science. (Pegg, J. and Panizzon, D. 2007)

Similarly, the provision of IT resourcing would also be welcome, however there are also complexities associated with this. Many regional and remote schools do not have access to the infrastructure or connectivity in order to reliably make use of even the most basic technology for communication. Initiative such as the Sky Muster (ABC News, 2018) to resolve issues such as unreliable and slow internet access have gone some way to resolve these issues and ISQ would welcome the investigation of such innovations with the aim of making reliable vital connectivity available to all schools, irrespective of location.

Identifying ways in which the burden of out-of-hours, at-home work can be reduced.

On average, Australian teachers report working for a total of 42.7 hours per week. This places Australia seventh internationally with respect to the length of a teacher's working week after Japan, Alberta, Singapore, England, Malaysia and Portugal (Freeman, C., O'Malley, K. and Eveleigh, F 2014). Studies have shown that teachers spend higher amounts of time on work-related activities outside of formal work hours, and lower amounts of time on health-promoting activities such as exercise (Garrick et.al., 2018). This problem is compounded by current teacher shortages.

Schools often respond to teacher shortages in the short-term by some combination of: assigning teachers to teach in subject areas in which they are not fully qualified; increasing the number of classes that teachers are allocated; or by increasing class sizes. Such responses, which ensure that classrooms are not left without a teacher, and that a shortage is not readily evident, nevertheless increase the burden for already overworked teachers (OECD, 2005).

In moving forward with this inquiry ISQ welcomes any initiatives that will reduce the workload and burden for teachers but also contends that it will be important to address issues of undersupply in order to reduce the work burden for teachers.

Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession, and avoid 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

The literature is clear that teachers are experiencing increasing levels of attrition, stress and burnout (Pillay, H., Goddard, R. and Wilss, L., 2005). Emotional labor, teacher burnout and workload burden have all been cited as contributing factors (Lee, Ye Hoon, 2017). Other factors include: demand effect—teachers unable to find regular employment; personal effect—leaving for personal or family reasons, such as illness; compatibility effect—leaving due to feeling unsuited for the role; career choice effect—leaving to pursue an alternative career; environment effect—leaving due to lack of support, school and leadership culture, workload, etc.; performance effect—teachers sacked/de-registered due to poor performance or illegal activity (Weldon, P., 2018.).

In addressing the terms of reference of this inquiry the complexity of these reasons, including attrition, teacher wellbeing, school leader well-being, reduction of work burdens, and perceptions of professionalism, will need to be fully explored in order to ensure that the 'solutions' do not simply add further complexities, particularly in contextually specific situations such as remote, regional and special assistance schools.

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