

THE NATIONALS

ADRIAN PICCOLI MP

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGEE

SHADOW MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES

SHADOW MINISTER ASSISTING IN NATURAL RESOURCES & ETHNIC AFFAIRS



31 March 2005

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*The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia
CANBERRA ACT 2600*

BY:.....

Dear Sir

I write to pass on my thoughts in relation to the current Inquiry into Teacher Education.

I wish to focus on several areas that are of concern to the local communities within my Electorate of Murrumbidgee. The first is the best way to attract teachers to local schools.

It is my experience that the best way to attract people to regional and rural areas is to keep local people local. This means providing local training opportunities so that our young people do not have to leave the area in order to gain their qualifications. Once these people leave their hometowns, it can be difficult to get them to return.

Anything that can be done to enhance local training opportunities, such as providing course through local TAFE campuses will go a long way towards alleviating these problems. This also encourages older people to train to teach, as they do not have to leave their families and jobs in order to retrain. I firmly believe that this is the way of the future for many professions, and with technology improving all the time, I cannot see why this shift in thinking and training cannot come to fruition.

Attracting teaching staff from outside our local area is a unique challenge. Griffith in itself is always going to experience problems in attracting professionals such as teachers. Our lifestyle here is fantastic, our facilities are good and are improving all the time, but the cost of housing is prohibitive. When schools are able to secure teaching staff, they often leave after a short period of time, as they are able to work elsewhere for the same salary but lower living expenses. If a teacher is offered a position, they often decline once the accommodation issue is examined.

The provision of teacher housing in Griffith in particular is limited, with a small number of flats being available. These are not suitable for families, who are left to compete in the market place where suitable homes are very hard to find.

For this reason, incentives such as rental subsidies, car and salary packages and the like need to be offered to counteract the cost of living in this area and our relative isolation from Sydney. Each area in NSW has its own unique circumstances, and I believe that more attention needs to be given to tailoring employment packages for individual areas.



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Another significant need of our local school communities is the issue of casual teachers. In our area, in centres such as Griffith, Coleambally, Finley and Jerilderie (just to name a few), the lack of casual teaching staff is a real issue, and has a real impact on the quality of education being delivered in our schools.

I have been told in the past that the shortage of casual staff is not due to a shortage of qualified, trained teachers within the State or most communities. The issue is that these people are choosing to work in other occupations, not to work as a casual teacher.

The reasons for this are varied, with accommodation again being a major issue. Many young, mobile casual teachers are reluctant to consider working in rural areas as they must source accommodation in these areas while they still pay rent in their hometowns. The provision of subsidised accommodation for these staff needs to be considered as a way of fixing this significant issue.

I am also aware that most teachers who rely on casual teaching as their main source of income need at least 2 ½ - 3 days per week, and need to average this throughout the whole year so that they can sign a lease and make the usual financial commitments. The hardest time for casuals is over the Christmas holiday period when there is a long period of no income. It has been suggested that most casual teachers would prefer regular, fixed employment in schools, which will enable them to budget, plan their lives and seek other complimentary regular employment. The appointment of full-time relief/casual staff, which can be shared by a group of schools within a town or small area is one solution to this issue.

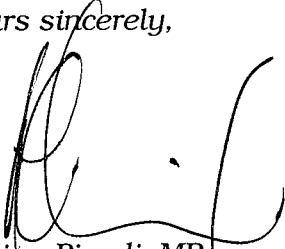
I also believe that qualified teachers who are contemplating returning to the profession need more support to return to the school community than is currently available. A primary or secondary teaching qualification obtained many years ago does not mean that a person can capably manage and teach a class. Many people are hesitant to return without briefings and training on recent changes to curriculum and teaching practices, student discipline and so on.

The last issue of concern that I would like to raise is that of mature age / career change teachers. I have met with several male constituents who have been interested in changing to a career in teaching. One constituent, who has two trades, was informed that he would have to undertake two years of study to gain his teaching qualifications. He feels that a loss of income for this two-year period makes this option extremely unattractive to suitably qualified, interested and experienced people – and I must agree. There must be some recognition of this issue and some compensation or financial incentives put in place.

Another male constituent was informed that once he had done his mandatory retraining he could not elect to remain in his hometown, which is a recognised area of need for teachers. This is certainly illogical to the point of being absurd – there has to be a recognition that mature people undergoing retraining have commitments and families in the areas in which they live which make it impossible to leave – they should not be penalised for wanting a job opportunity in this town or outlying area.

I hope that the points raised in this submission will be fully considered. I would be pleased to discuss them in detail at any time if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Piccoli', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Adrian Piccoli, MP
Member for Murrumbidgee