

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 972

Teacher Shortage the Result of Bad Education Policy

[Victorian schools are struggling with staffing gaps, with around 1000 teaching positions vacant.](#) The Australian Principals Federation says many schools are running on a “skeleton program”. And the Victorian government has invested millions into stemming the teacher shortage, including recruiting overseas teachers.

The Victorian situation is replicated throughout Australia, with perhaps NSW in the most parlous position with approximately a 10,000 teacher shortage.

The situation is reminiscent of the 1960s when the children born after the war - the ‘baby boomers’ hit the schools.

But the current situation is not just the result of population pressures. It is the result of bad policy.

Since the 1980s there has been an acceptance of the neo-liberal mantras that private is better than public; centralised education bureaucracies undermined and decentralised; accountability of centralised religious administration for expenditure of public money translated into accountability of teachers for teaching the basics; and the promotion of the ‘autonomous school’. AND, at the top of the public school administrations politicians imposed administrators on contract, many of whom had no educational expertise or background.

As more and more responsibilities have been forced onto principals and teachers at the school level, power in the matter of curricula and testing procedures have been centralised in federal bodies meeting in Canberra.

Public school teachers and principals have been the losers along with their children. Understandably, they are walking away.

Few public school teachers enjoy certainty of tenure. Many are on contract. Their salaries are not comparable with those of other professions. And the administrative tasks once carried by central administration have been delegated to the school level.

Meanwhile additional obligations have been placed upon them as they are expected to ‘inspect’ and ‘evaluate’ their own work with NAPLAN and PISA tests.

Many are resigning and walking away into less demanding and more financially rewarding employment. Others are taking up jobs in the private sector which has the funds to offer higher salaries.

Politicians are desperately trying to find stop gap measures which will put figures in classrooms around the nation. They would do better to stop and think.

There was a reason why the State public systems in Australia had centralised administrations staffed with those dedicated to the public system, with schools staffed by teachers who had certainty of tenure, promotion within the system, adequate salaries and, where necessary, provision of housing. And the issue of funding looms large. “He who pays the piper”...

Education of the nation’s children involves more than funding. But it does involve funding. And, in the Australian context, the basic principles of parliamentary government have meant that when public money is spent on educational institutions, at least lip service is given to principles of accountability. And Auditor Generals are ready to expose the lack thereof. In the nineteenth century State colonial governments controlled the public Treasury and public education systems centralised in order to fulfil those accountability expectations. The Catholic hierarchy resisted State controls and public funding was withdrawn in most States until 1964. After Federation in 1901, and even more startlingly after 1942 when the Commonwealth obtained a monopoly on income tax, the most powerful Treasury was established in Canberra.

Since the Commonwealth commenced funding both private and public education systems extensively in the 1970s, an administration has been established in Canberra. This is involved not only the funding of the nation’s schools, but their curricula, assessment, teacher and leadership training and resources.

In this latest movement towards centralisation, the State administrations and private systems have generally acquiesced largely because accountability is much looser than that expected by nineteenth century governments. But the Commonwealth Piper is calling the tune, with accountability being forced onto the teachers with NAPLAN and PISA testing.

So – an exhausted and disillusioned Australian teaching force, are quietly, and not so quietly, - walking away.

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