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School of Education

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra
Canberra ACT 2600

<div align="center">Re: Status of the Teaching Profession</div>

Submission

Terms of Reference 1

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

There is no doubt that many teachers and principals leave the profession because of the workplace conditions that they experience. These include dealing with students with challenging needs (Simon & Johnson, 2015), the demands of the curriculum, the emphasis on high-stakes testing (e.g., NAPLAN) (Ryan, von der Embse, Pendergast, Saeki, Segool & Schwing, 2014), demands of parents (see for example, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-09/school-principals-stress-public-private-teacher-support/9522360 and https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2014/december/riley), and the perception of lack of support from their immediate line managers and the wider school community. Other issues include, out-of-field teaching where teachers are required to teach subjects that they have not been prepared to teach and for which they lack either the pedagogical content knowledge and/or perhaps solid content knowledge. This situation can lead to anxiety and stress, mental health issues, lack of confidence, and feelings of insecurity and disconnectedness with colleagues and students in the school (du Plessis et al., 2014). These are factors that have been suggested to also affect student academic and social outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). Other issues that teachers and principals recount include the need for a diversity of career options and leadership structures for both teachers and principals who seek to enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and capabilities in specific ways. Mismatches between perceptions of professional identity and actual professional practice also contribute to the decision to leave teaching (Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2016).

Recommendations:

1. There is no doubt that **teachers and principals require professional support** if they are to be retained in the profession. For teachers, this often includes being able to exercise agency, work autonomously, and make critical decisions related to their practice – an indication that they and the work they undertake are valued (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018); factors that contribute to a sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and

job satisfaction. Similarly, principals report that they would like to exercise more autonomy over the management of their schools, the staff they employ, and the curricula they implement. In short, teachers and principals need to have opportunities to engage in leadership practices where they are recognised as professionals who have the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to exercise initiative and make decisions in the best interests of the students with whom they work.

2. ***Professional mentoring*** is critically important for teachers across the spectrum. For beginning teachers, this may include having a designated and more experienced teacher who can provide guidance and professional assistance with issues such as student management, diversity of curricula for students with a range of needs, pedagogical approaches to teaching specific curricula content, and planning and evaluation approaches (Heikkinen et al., 2018).

For more experienced teachers, when organised effectively (Mackey, O'Reilly, Jansen & Fletcher, 2018), co-teaching provides opportunities for teachers to review and constructively comment on each other's teaching approach. Professional learning communities where teachers discuss a topic of common interest and inquiry is another approach to professional mentoring that has been shown to be valuable in promoting teacher professional learning, improving teacher practice as well as student achievement, enhancing teacher efficacy in support of student learning, and creating a positive change in the work environment (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bolam et al., 2005; Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018).

One example of a successful Early Career Teacher (ECT) Support Framework is RETAIN, an early career teacher (ECT) retention program that was implemented in Cornwall in the United Kingdom (a region with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage) with the aim of using evidence-based practices to support teacher development in schools. The program provided workshops for ECTs on understanding and mitigating against social disadvantage, pedagogies that promote literacy, and professional teaching processes, structures and career pathways. In addition, the program harnessed in-school professional support and promoted the development of professional learning communities.

The RETAIN program was independently evaluated and the findings demonstrated that it was the combination of professional learning workshops, coaching, and collaborative professional learning which improved self-efficacy, confidence, and the quality of teaching in ECTs (Ovenden-Hope et al., 2018). Furthermore, all ECTs who completed the program have remained in teaching and all have achieved leadership roles in their schools; clearly demonstrating the value obtained from supporting professional mentoring for ECTs.

3. ***Investing in professional learning activities*** is critically important if teachers and principals are to keep abreast of recent developments in research and practice, and this requires investing in on-going professional learning (Hardy, 2012; Hargreaves, 2012). Providing professional development for teachers and administrators provides professional staff with opportunities to learn and refine the pedagogies needed to provide today's students with the skills they need to be competitive in the 21st Century

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, there are multiple types of professional development activities teachers can engage in from formal academic study to more informal activities (e.g., action research projects), depending on teacher and school needs (Bautista et al., 2015). We must remember that initial teacher education programs are 'initial'. Some situations require professional development at specific times, such as when a teacher is allocated to a class including a student with a low-incidence disability. Targeted, individualised support is essential to ensure teachers have the strategies and resources to effectively teach the class. This minimises stress and reduces the possibility of challenging behaviours developing (Faragher & Clarke, 2016).

4. ***Career and leadership structures*** need to be clearly articulated if teachers and principals are to understand the various avenues to career advancement and personal promotion. For example, in Singapore, the Ministry of Education has developed a professional development model that provides teachers with three different tracks that they can pursue for their professional careers: a *teaching track* for those who want to become Principal Master Teachers (teachers who manage other teachers so they reach professional excellence), a *leadership track* (provides career advancement opportunities to teachers with leadership potential), and a *specialist track* (teachers who develop deep knowledge and skills in specific disciplines). This strategy was developed to respond to teachers' professional goals and to foster talent and capacity in a systematic way. Furthermore, teachers can move between tracks, provided they meet the requisite requirements for each track (Tan, Wong, & Goh, 2010). Career pathways for teachers and administrators in Australia need to be similarly elucidated to clearly indicate career progressions that are available to those in the profession. Also, in undertaking such work, efforts need to be made to learn from other contexts, such as Sweden, where inadequate attention was given to orchestrating a new category of 'first teacher', with problematic effects upon morale, and subsequent collaborative learning opportunities, amongst other teachers (Hardy & Rönnerman, 2018). Additionally, a common factor for early teachers leaving the profession is multiple short (6-month) contracts in state schools, necessitating moves among schools to keep employed in the profession. This on-going insecurity and need to frequently familiarize oneself with the school context are additional factors that affect retention and need to be addressed.

Terms of Reference 2

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

Change in the teaching profession is happening at a phenomenal rate with teachers often being overwhelmed by being left to deal with these changes with minimal support from the educational system in which they work (Gillies, 2015). Teachers report that expectations around the 'crowded curricula'; evaluations and assessment demands; teaching students with a diversity of behavioural, social, emotional, and learning needs (often without the specialized pedagogical training); and keeping up-to-date with technological changes are just some of the stresses they experience. Other stresses include the lack of resources to implement innovative and creative ideas because of poor ICT-infrastructure (e.g., computer software that is

redundant) and the lack of technological know-how and support to resolve digital and computer maintenance and processing problems.

Recommendations:

1. ***Supporting teachers*** as they deal with a range of stressors in their workplace conditions is vitally important to help them negotiate and manage changing expectations around their role. Creating a working climate where teachers feel supported and able to explore innovative teaching approaches is characterised by attitudes of open-mindedness toward different opinions, collective reflection on what has been achieved and what still needs to be accomplished, and a recognition that individuals learn from mistakes (Vermeulen et al., 2017). In this environment, principals play a key role in creating lively learning communities where the work teachers do is valued and supported and where the principal and staff work together in the best interests of the students in their schools (Christensen et al., 2018).

2. ***IT Support*** for 21st Century teachers not only includes IT-infrastructure support such as internet connections, PCs, relevant software, and access to educative programs, it also includes the importance of developing an IT policy and vision, and a sufficient degree of competence by teachers and principals to use the relevant IT resources (Vermeulen et al., 2017). Moreover, UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework (2011) emphasizes that it is not enough for teachers to have ICT competencies and be able to teach them to their students; teachers also need to be able to help students become collaborative, problem solving, and creative learners by using ICT so they will be effective citizens and members of the workforce.

   Given the importance attached to the development and implementation of IT knowledge and skills, it is clearly important that teachers and principals are provided with the relevant IT resources and infrastructure to enable them to harness these technologies in their teaching to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students. This requires investment in IT support for personnel in the form of professional learning and the acquisition of relevant resources, as well as efforts to foster concrete support to enhance teachers' motivation to improve the quality of their engagement with ICTs in classrooms (Uluyol & Şahin, 2016). An understanding of strategies to support the safe, responsible and ethical use of ICT in learning and teaching is also essential for teachers.

Terms of Reference 3

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

It is well known that teachers spend considerable time out-of-hours preparing for the classes they teach. Weldon and Ingvarson (2016), in a report on a school staff workload study, found that full-time teachers in Victoria work about 14 to 15 hours per week over their required hours spending the majority of that time on teaching-related activities, such as planning, preparing and, particularly at the secondary level, marking.

Recommendations:

1. ***Develop a workloads policy*** where the extent of the demands of teaching on teachers is analysed. For example, Machado (2018) writing in *Educational Technology Solutions* suggests ways to dramatically reduce teacher workloads with smarter timetables:

   1.   (a) be parsimonious in the subjects that teachers are required to teach and encourage teacher collaboration to share planning and resources;
   2.   (b) timetable teacher meetings so they occur during school time. This will mean the careful allocation of personnel resources to ensure the core business of teaching students continues;
   3.   (c) create balanced timetabling with free periods spread evenly across the week. This will provide opportunities for lesson planning to be spread across the timetable; helping to reduce teacher stress and workloads;
   4.   (d) use automated staffing software that draws from sets of teachers to achieve a better overall staffing balance of load and class assignments. These auto staffing software packages can also be applied to duty rosters, planning time rosters and on-call rosters. This ensures equity in allocation of duties and placement to less busy days thereby reducing workload and stress, and;
   5.   (e) identify potential periods when teachers may need to cover other classes. For a teacher, nothing is more frustrating than having that free period that was set aside for lesson planning disappear due to a class that needs to be supervised. While there is an expectation that teachers will undertake supervision of other classes as part of the job, unexpected supervision requirements can increase stress and workload. Timetabling periods where teachers are considered to be 'on-call' is one way of reducing stress and ensuring teacher availability.

2. ***Invest in providing financial support to schools*** to help them acquire the resources needed to develop a workloads policy to ensure a more equitable allocation of teacher resources and timetabling.

3. ***Minimise the extent of out-of-field teaching that occurs in schools.*** Out-of-field teaching contributes significantly to teachers' workload and sense of efficacy (du Plessis, 2017). Minimising the extent to which teachers work out-of-field has significant advantages for teachers' mental health and the provision of quality schooling experiences for students (du Plessis, 2017).

Terms of Reference 4

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

A 2016 report on *What do we know about attrition of qualified teachers following employment in Australia* by AITLS argues that the current rate of attrition of ECTs can only be estimated and these estimates are highly variable, depending on the methodologies used to collect the data and the types of studies undertaken. In a 2018 study on early career retention

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in Australia, Weldon (2018) maintained that in spite of the widely held belief that 30-50% of Australian teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching, there is no robust evidence that this is the case. In fact, Weldon suggested there are six major factors that affect the decision of ECTs to leave teaching. These include:

- inability to find regular employment
- personal or family reasons
- feelings of being unsuited to the role
- decision to pursue alternative employment
- lack of support within the school
- poor performance or illegal activity.

6.   In a study of 292 first year primary teachers in Belgium that investigated the interplay between factors at the school level (e.g., transformational leadership of the principal, collegial support) and at the teacher level (e.g., self-efficacy), Thomas et al. (2018) found that transformational leadership is directly related to teachers' positive attitudes to their work. Moreover, transformational leadership of the principal is also indirectly related to these attitudes via both professional collegial support and teachers' self-efficacy. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) investigated the effects of working conditions on teacher retention across a three year period in Arizona, USA and found that teacher retention appears to be related, in part, "to how teachers perceive and value their ability to work autonomously, make critical decisions related to their practice, the quality and efficacy of school leadership, and the amount and quality of support from the community and the students' families" (p. 618).

Recommendations:

1. ***Provide formal training for personnel in administrative positions to learn about transformational leadership*** and the effect it can have on teachers' attitudes to their work. Such training would need to include developing an understanding of how transformational leadership is linked to: (1) intrinsic motivation in the job (e.g., strengthening teachers' feelings of belonging to a team); (2) affective commitment to the organisation (e.g., demonstration of genuine interest and respect for teachers' endeavours and distributed leadership practices that enable teachers to be involved in decision-making processes relevant to their work); and (3) job satisfaction reflected in a willingness of individuals to work towards the collective goals of the team.

2. ***Recognise that ECTs are developing their craft and will need to have ongoing support*** in the form of professional conversations and mentoring from their teacher colleagues, the principal, and various scholars in the educational field. Time needs to be allocated within the timetable for this to occur. Clandinin et al. (2015) revealed how ECTs considered their future intentions in relation to a range of issues, including: 1) support within the school; (2) an identity thread of belonging; (3) tensions around contracts; (4) concerns that new teachers will do anything; (5) how to compose a balanced life (particularly in relation to working hours); (6) the struggle to not allow teaching to consume them; and (7) asking themselves the question 'Can I keep doing this?' Consideration of each of these elements would seem necessary to providing substantive support for ECTs.

3. ***Reduce burnout through the development of whole school Wellness Interventions
for teachers***. These interventions need to include finding ways to foster nurturing
environments in schools not only for the students but for the teachers, provide teachers
with adequate preparation and training to perform their jobs, and create social
networks to minimise a sense of social isolation. Applying these principles will help to
promote teacher wellbeing while concurrently reducing stress and burnout (Herman et
al., 2018).

Yours sincerely,

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