

It's no wonder we're running out of teachers



Jill Poulsen

August 31, 2018 7:00pm

Subscriber only

-
-
-

WHO'D be a teacher?

They're [the punching bags of the public service](#).

In my almost 10 years as a journalist I've written stories about the work conditions and issues affecting teachers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses and doctors and the greatest level of vitriol is always reserved for our teachers.

I've never received emails or seen comments on stories about nurses or fireys getting a pay rise with people saying they don't deserve it. But even the slightest hint at an improvement in conditions for teachers and the usual suspects poke their whingeing heads out of the woodwork.

"But they get so many holidays!"

"They don't even work a full day!"

"Our NAPLAN results aren't the best in the country and that is entirely the fault of our teachers!"

"My child has behavioural issues and I'm sure it's everyone else's fault except mine — I deserve a pay rise!"



Despite all the information we have, a misconception about how hard teachers work remains. (Pic: iStock)

In March, *The Sunday Mail* reported that young Queenslanders were shunning a career in teaching, [with enrolments in education degrees tumbling by a quarter](#).

University bosses have warned of a teacher shortage at a time when 9000 extra students are cramming into the state's classrooms every year.

Australian Catholic University vice-chancellor Greg Craven said teaching enrolments had plunged 20 per cent in Queensland, NSW and Victoria in 2018.

"We'll be importing teachers from overseas," he said.

Applications from school leavers listing an education degree as their first preference for university crashed 26 per cent this year to just 4740 students.

And why wouldn't they?

Anyone who knows a teacher knows what kinds of demands are placed on them.

They may only be in the classroom from 9am until 3pm but if you think that's when their day starts and ends you're kidding yourself.

Lesson planning, reports, marking, parent and teacher interviews and myriad other things mean they're often there well before 9am and past 5pm.

Weekends are rarely free from having to do work and most will spend countless hours of their own time on supporting kids in extra-curricular activities like school musicals, sporting events and debating.



Teachers are expected to be educators, social workers, substitute parents and behavioural experts. (Pic: iStock)

Our teachers are expected to be educators, subject matter experts, social workers, substitute parents and behavioural experts all while coping copious amounts of abuse from wayward pupils and parents.

Then there's the issue of pay.

According to an article on academic website *The Conversation*, a graduate dentist from a five year course earns \$130,000.

In contrast, [the starting salary for secondary teachers](#), the majority of whom have also completed a five year program, is \$65,486, reaching \$71,000 after five to 10 years.

This week the Queensland Government announced a new program called the Highly Accomplished Teacher and Lead Teacher program.

It means state school teachers will have the opportunity to earn up to \$122,000 per year under the new classifications. But the idea has gone down like a lead balloon with at least some in the community, if the comments posted on the story online are any gauge.

“What a joke — wonder what the average (teacher in Kazakhstan) gets paid — we need to issue them 457 visas,” one wrote.

Or this from another: “Low entry scores combined with high graduate wages, seems like a perfect storm ... in slow motion.”

On the issue of low entry scores I was as horrified as anyone to hear the low bar that has been by some universities for their teaching degrees.



We have a shortage of STEM teachers, but why would our best and brightest go into teaching when the pay is terrible and they aren't respected? (Pic: iStock)

And earlier this year *The Australian* reported that 19 out of 52 tertiary institutions had more than 10 per cent of students fail a component of the literacy and numeracy test introduced in 2016 to bolster the quality of teaching graduates. Meeting a minimum standard, which has been likened to a Year 9 level, is a requirement of the registration to teach.

But I'm reminded of the old adage; you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.

We have a nationwide shortage of STEM teachers and shockingly up to one-third of maths and science teachers were not trained in science, technology, engineering or maths subjects.

Of course we want our best and brightest STEM students turning into STEM teachers, but why would they?

Naturally gifted students in this area could easily go on to have careers as medical professionals or engineers and earn double what they could make as a teacher.

We need to attract talent with favourable conditions and that includes pay.

Out of the more than 30 odd teachers I was taught by in my time at school there were only one or two duds. The vast majority were wonderful educators who had a lasting impact on not only my education but my life.

As far as I'm concerned, teaching is one of the most important professions in our society and teachers deserve respect and support from their communities.

So back to my initial question of who'd be a teacher?

Only people who truly believe that educating young minds is a worthy pursuit to dedicate their lives to.

They're not the kind of people who are in it only for the money but that doesn't mean we shouldn't pay them what they're worth.

Jill Poulsen is a senior writer for The Courier-Mail.