

Submission for the Inquiry into the state education system in Victoria

KEY POINTS

- Solutions sort to deal with teacher crisis is contributing to the poor student outcomes
- Incentivising Casual Relief Teaching (CRTs) runs the risk of drawing people away from the teaching profession.
- Casual Relief Teachers are not being required to assess students, leading to substandard education whereby students are not receiving authentic feedback.
- Casual Relief Teachers find it difficult to establish ongoing relationships with students which is contributing to behavioural issues in classrooms.
- Students at some schools are not getting school reports.
- Lack of reporting by CRTs (on student progress) is contributing to unsustainable workloads for existing staff.

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to specify that this submission is not in relation to a formal complaint about a school, but rather about the current 'solutions' that are being relied upon to deal with the teacher shortage crisis and the perhaps unintended impacts of such solutions.

Although I will refer to the school that three of my children currently attend ([REDACTED]) it is in order to give an honest and personal account of the situation that is playing out in our community and family.

The concerns that I am writing to you about are in regard to the situation my children and many other students are facing due to the teacher shortage crisis in Shepparton. Specifically, I am troubled by the fact that my son who is in Year 9 has not received his end of semester report for English, which is an essential document for assessing his academic progress. My son is a very academic student who in all other regards has had a positive experience at [REDACTED]. This is also true of my daughter in Year 11 who I will refer to shortly.

My son has high aspirations (a value of the school) and hopes to either complete the International Baccalaureate in his senior years (at a different institution) and/or attend an international university in his adulthood. Having myself been a teacher for over 18 years, I have supported past students to apply for universities in both Europe and the U.S. As you may be aware, these educational institutions often require a comprehensive educational history of the student, and it is not uncommon for them to request all of a student's past high school reports and transcripts. My son has now not had a permanent English teacher for 6 months. I raised my concerns with his Assistant Principal at the start of the year when I learnt that he was beginning the year with three Casual Relief Teachers for three core subjects. While the school was able to fill two of these classes with substantive teachers, long-term CRTs have been allocated to his English class. At the end of the Semester, it was apparent that despite my son working hard to complete all course requirements, he received no feedback for English and more alarmingly, his progression points have not moved. I have attached his last two reports and the Compass notification that was sent out to all school parents at the conclusion of the Semester.

As you will see, the school has stated that 'In some instances, where students have not had a consistent teacher we have not been able to assess their progress and therefore have left them in the same position'.

As a responsible and informed parent, I understand the importance of regular reporting of student achievement and progress. According to the Victorian Education Policy on Reporting Student Achievement and Progress, it is the responsibility of schools to provide timely and accurate reports to parents and guardians. These reports are crucial for parents to gain insights into their child's academic development, strengths, and areas for improvement. Furthermore, the importance of feedback for student learning has long been established as a core component of learning growth.

According to the Department of Education's own policy on **Reporting Student Achievement and Progress Foundation to 10** –

- *Schools are required to formally report student achievement and progress to parents/carers at least twice per school year for each student enrolled at the school.*
- *The report must be a written report (print or digital), be in an accessible form and be easy for parents/carers to understand.*
- *Schools must report directly against the Victorian Curriculum F-10 achievement standards.*
- *Both student achievement and progress must be included in the report. This means that for each curriculum area taught, the report includes:*
 - *a teacher judgement(s)*
 - *an indication of progress since the curriculum area was last reported on*
 - *a five-point scale.*
- *Opportunities must be provided for parents/carers and students to discuss the school report with teachers and/or school leaders.*
- *Schools must upload their student achievement data via CASES21 twice yearly – by 30 June and 31 December each year.*
- *Student reports must be kept for identified time periods. In some cases, student reports are considered permanent records, which prohibits their disposal.*

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing teacher shortage, my children's school is facing significant challenges in meeting these important obligations. While the opportunity to discuss my children's reports has been provided to me since the release of the reports, the content of these conversations have been about the reporting process in general, not my son's progress. The ability to speak to someone with authentic knowledge about my son's English progress is not currently available to me nor have we had the option of parent teacher interviews for the subjects taught by replacement teachers. Am I to assume that the report I received, which from an outsider's perspective looks as though my son did not progress at all in 6 months, is the information that has been entered into CASES21 and will now be on his permanent record? A situation which is likely to be duplicated in Semester 2 (as my son still lacks a permanent teacher).

According to the discussions I had this week with one of the Assistant Principals, the lack of qualified and available teachers has resulted in the school having to recruit a high number of Casual Relief Teachers through an agency who, according to the CRT conditions of employment, cannot be asked to assess students. I query then, how my child's work is being corrected? If this is being done by substantive staff from other classes, then this in itself is not ideal as my child will be missing out on essential formative feedback aligned to his learning style and unique needs. Furthermore, if this is in fact the process that is occurring, I worry that this will be contributing to a strain on the substantive staff, leading to delays in various aspects of education (including report generation) and difficulties with staff retention.

In regard to the other two children I have currently enrolled in [REDACTED] (a daughter in Year 11 studying VCE and a daughter in Year 8- dual enrolment with [REDACTED]) it was disappointing to learn that my daughter in Year 11 will now be sharing her VCE Sociology teacher with the VCE Legal Studies class. This means that her teacher will now only be face-to-face with the Sociology class for half of the lessons and a CRT will take the class the other times. Whereas my daughter who is in Year 8 would be having four CRTs for four core subjects if she was participating in a full-time timetable at [REDACTED] (the subjects impacted are Humanities, Italian, Health and Physical Education and Maths).

I firmly believe that every student deserves the opportunity to receive a comprehensive end of semester report and ongoing formative assessment from a teacher who can build strong, productive relationships with them and care for their wellbeing. Reporting not only helps parents track their child's progress but also allows teachers to identify areas where additional support may be required. Without these reports, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents and educators to collaborate effectively in supporting a student's educational journey.

I kindly request your immediate attention to this matter. It is imperative that the government takes proactive steps to address the teacher shortage crisis and ensure that our children receive the education they deserve. With a new independent Anglican school opening in Shepparton in 2024, I believe sadly, that the challenges will only exacerbate.

It is alarming that Casual Relief Teachers can be employed in schools on longer-term fixed contracts and not be required to assess. Allocating additional resources towards recruiting and retaining qualified teachers is appreciated but I fear that it is not having the impact that is desired. Evaluating the work expectations of Casual Relief Teachers would perhaps go a long way in resolving this issue and preventing further disruptions to our children's education.

Unfortunately, I believe that continuing to incentivise CRT work (over substantive work) runs the risk of having experienced teachers leaving their substantive roles for casual positions, which is in-itself contributing to retention issues within schools.

I appreciate your dedication to improving the education system in Victoria and trust that you will take my concerns seriously. I am a proud supporter of State Education and all of my five children have always been enrolled in State schools.

Kind Regards,

Katherine Neall

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]