

# Supporting Teachers Initiative



Teaching is a profession essential to our community. We place the care and education of our children in the hands of our nation's teachers. The teaching profession should be valued highly and remunerated accordingly. We have an obligation to support teachers in their invaluable work. Unfortunately, governments seem more comfortable blaming teachers for the shortcomings of the education system than providing them with the resources to create supportive school environments to produce the best outcomes.

The Greens are proposing a three tiered approach:

- Reduced workloads for first year teachers;
- Dedicated teacher mentors in schools; and
- A focus on creating supportive school environments for teachers.

## BACKGROUND

Research suggests that 30% to 40% of all new teachers resign in their first three to five years, often from burn out. As the teaching profession faces the crisis of an aging demographic and large numbers of teachers are reaching retirement age, we cannot afford to educate teachers only to have them leave the profession early in their careers.

Appropriate remuneration and the development of better career paths are important elements in retaining teachers. The Australian Greens support increased salaries and better conditions for all our teachers. We also believe enhanced career paths can be developed in consultation with teachers and principals.

## THE GREENS SUPPORTING TEACHERS INITIATIVE

Along side increased remuneration and better career paths, the Australian Greens propose a plan of support and mentoring for early career teachers.

### Workloads

First year teachers in particular often feel overwhelmed in the job and run the risk of becoming burnt out. A simple way of lowering the risk of burn out is to ensure first year and early career teachers have more appropriate workloads, including reduced class time.

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This allows more time for preparation as well as coping with the emotional stresses of a classroom.

Reduced workload for some teachers does not need to mean increased workloads for others but it does mean we need more teachers. The Australian Greens are already committed to ensuring we have more quality teachers through our Commonwealth Scholarship program. A plan to ensure reduced workloads will need to be developed in consultation with state governments.

## Mentoring

Support and mentoring from experienced teachers within schools is an important means of assisting early career teachers to develop, not burn out and stay in the profession. The Australian Greens propose a scheme whereby experienced teachers in schools are given a reduced teaching workload and take up specific mentoring responsibilities. Mentor teachers would be trained for their roles in supporting other teachers.

Many states already have some form of mentoring training or support program. We want to see a dedicated and integrated program that recognises the value of the mentoring role and assist schools to employ mentoring teachers. We would like the states to work with the Commonwealth to create the most effective mentoring training using what states already have developed. We propose the Commonwealth would fund mentoring training programs and assist states with the additional costs of teachers taking on reduced classes.

## Creating supportive school environments for teachers

A supportive teaching and school community can be an essential element in keeping young teachers in the job. Principals and teachers face many stresses in their work. They are not always going to have the time to properly help first year and early career teachers settle in and adjust to the ways of the school or the teaching job.

We believe our new mentoring teachers play an important role in creating more supportive environments for young teachers. Collegiality is a vital ingredient in any successful work place and it often needs to be developed, encouraged and supported if it is to be sustained. Such environments are more likely to see young teachers stay in the profession for longer and continue their important role in educating our children.

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We propose a trial in 2000 schools across the nation, chosen after consultation with states, schools and teacher and principal representatives. The Commonwealth would fund the training of the teacher mentors and assist the states in employing more teachers to allow reduced workloads.

The plan would involve the Commonwealth subsidising the trial schools for up to \$70,000 for the cost of employing additional teachers to allow for reduced workloads and up to \$5 million for establishing and running the mentor training. The total cost per year would be around \$150m.