

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Education Policy Brief

Australia Has Amongst the Highest Teacher Shortages in the OECD

A new OECD report reveals that Australia's education system is facing a diabolical staffing crisis. Since 2018, teacher shortages have soared leaving Australia among the worst-performing nations in the OECD on this measure. Despite the scale of the problem, little meaningful action has been taken to reverse the trend.

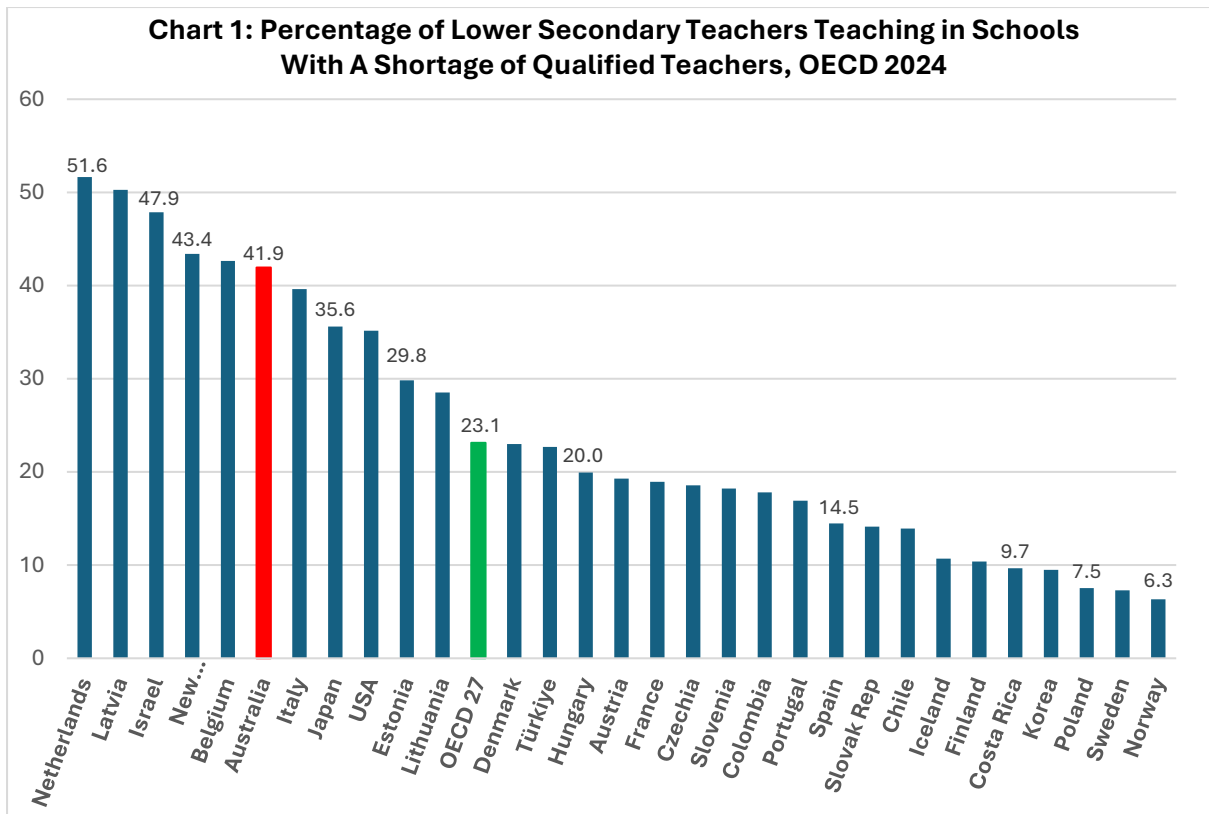
The lack of qualified educators is most acute in public schools, disadvantaged schools and schools in regional towns. There is also a very large shortage of special education teachers. Among OECD countries, Australia records the largest shortage of staff in disadvantaged and regional town schools, and the second largest in public schools.

The increased shortage of teachers represents a damning failure by governments to ensure that all public schools have a full contingent of qualified teachers. The increased shortage restricts learning in schools, especially in disadvantaged public schools. It is a major obstacle to reducing the [large achievement gaps](#) between rich and poor. The continuing shortage also threatens failure to reach even the weak equity targets for 2030 set out in the [Better and Fairer Schools Agreement](#) between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments.

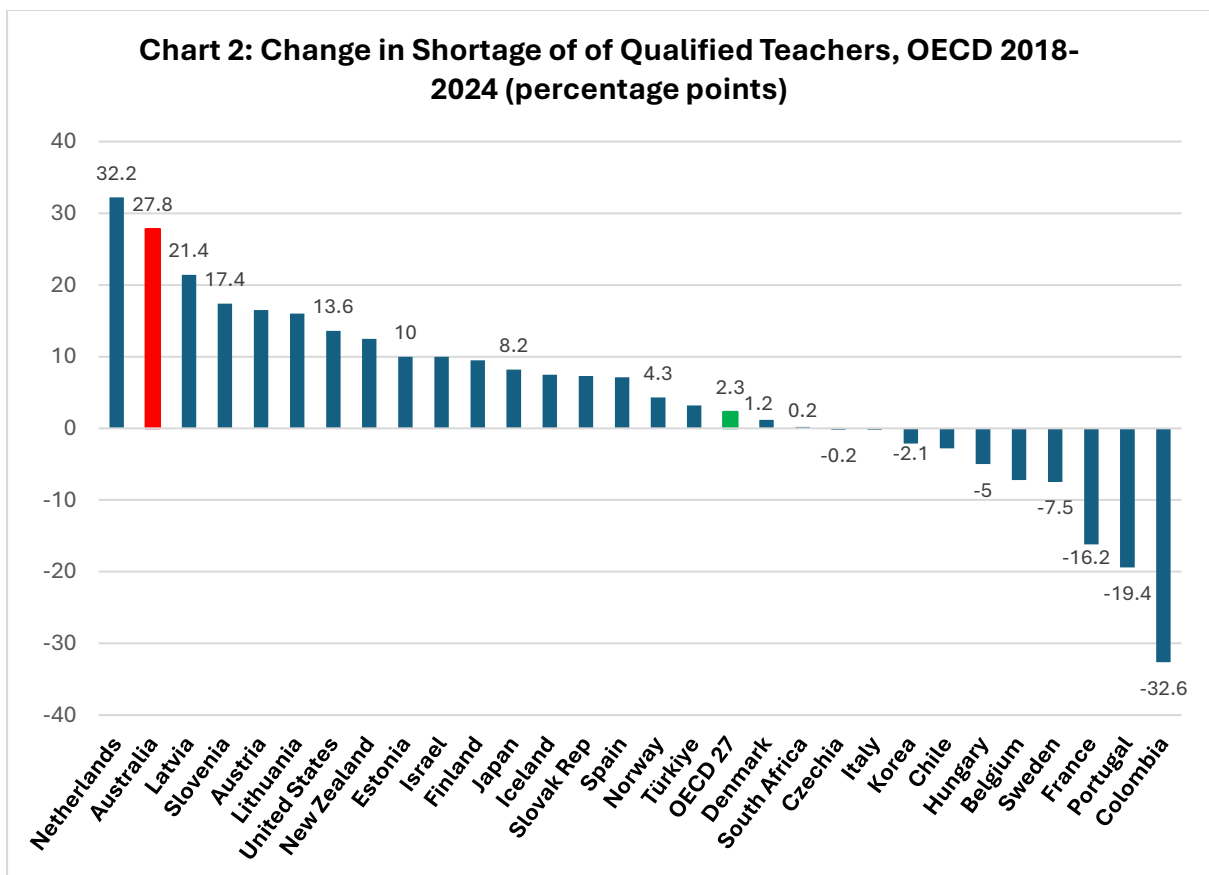
[The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey \(TALIS\)](#) for 2024 found that 42% of Australian lower secondary teachers are teaching in schools with a shortage of qualified teachers [Chart 1]. This is the sixth largest proportion of 30 OECD countries included in the survey. It is almost double the average of 23% reported for 27 OECD countries. The highest shortage is 52% in the Netherlands and the smallest shortage is 6% in Norway.

There was a dramatic increase in shortages since the previous TALIS survey in 2018. The percentage of lower secondary teachers teaching in schools with a shortage of qualified teachers has tripled from 14% in 2018 to 42% in 2024. The increase of 28 percentage points was the second biggest in the OECD, only exceeded by 32 percentage points in the Netherlands [Chart 2]. By contrast, several countries managed to reduce their shortage of teachers since 2018. They include France (by 16 percentage points), Portugal (by 19 points) and Sweden (by 7.5 points). There was no statistically significant change in several other OECD countries.

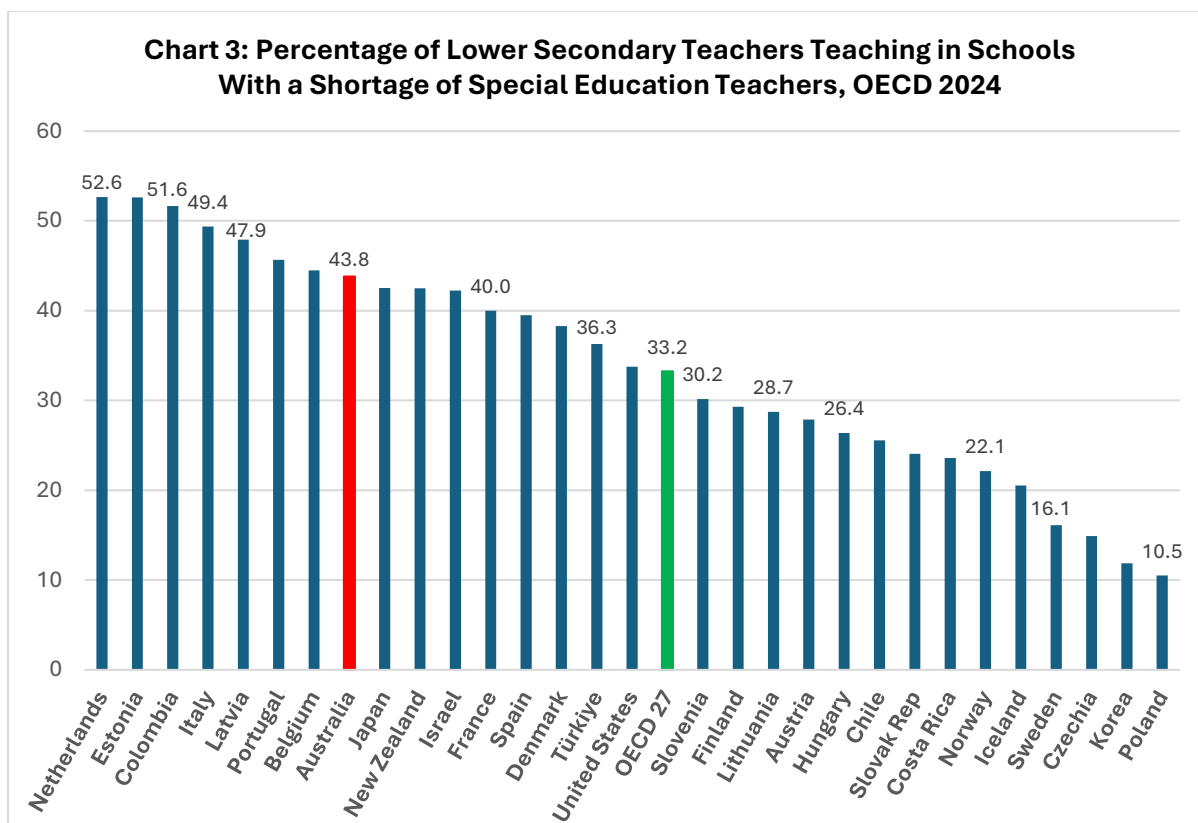
The shortage is just as dire for special education teachers. The survey found that 44% of lower secondary teachers are teaching in schools with a shortage of special education teachers [Chart 3]. This is the eighth largest shortage in the OECD and much bigger than the average of 33% for 27 OECD countries. The biggest shortage is in the Netherlands where 53% of teachers were teaching in schools with such a shortage. The smallest percentage is in Poland with 10.5%.



Source: TALIS 2024



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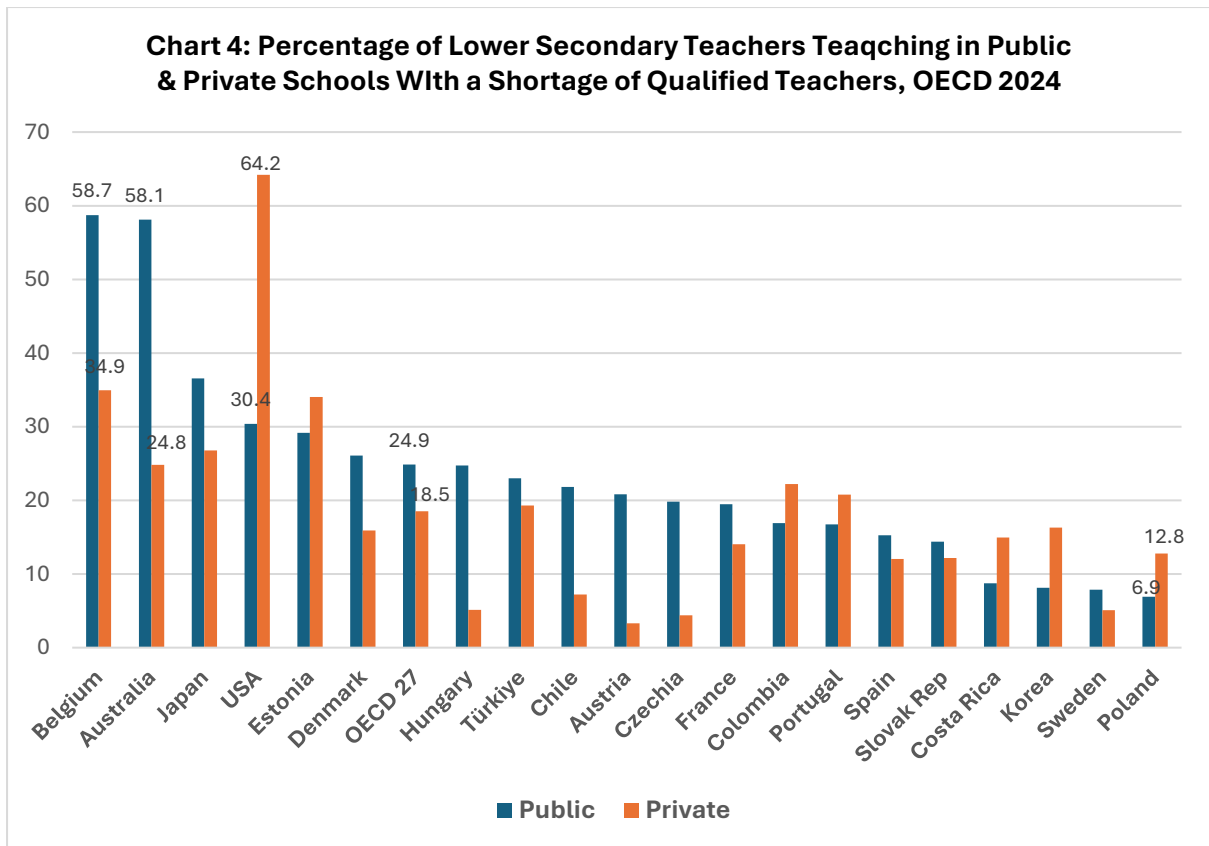
Source: TALIS 2024

The report found that the shortage of lower secondary teachers in public schools in Australia is the second highest in the OECD. It shows that 58% of lower secondary teachers are teaching in public schools with a shortage of qualified teachers. This is virtually equivalent to that of Belgium at 59% which has the biggest shortage. These shortages are more than double the average of 25% for the OECD [Chart 4]. Poland has the smallest shortage with only 7% of teachers working in public schools with a shortage of teachers.

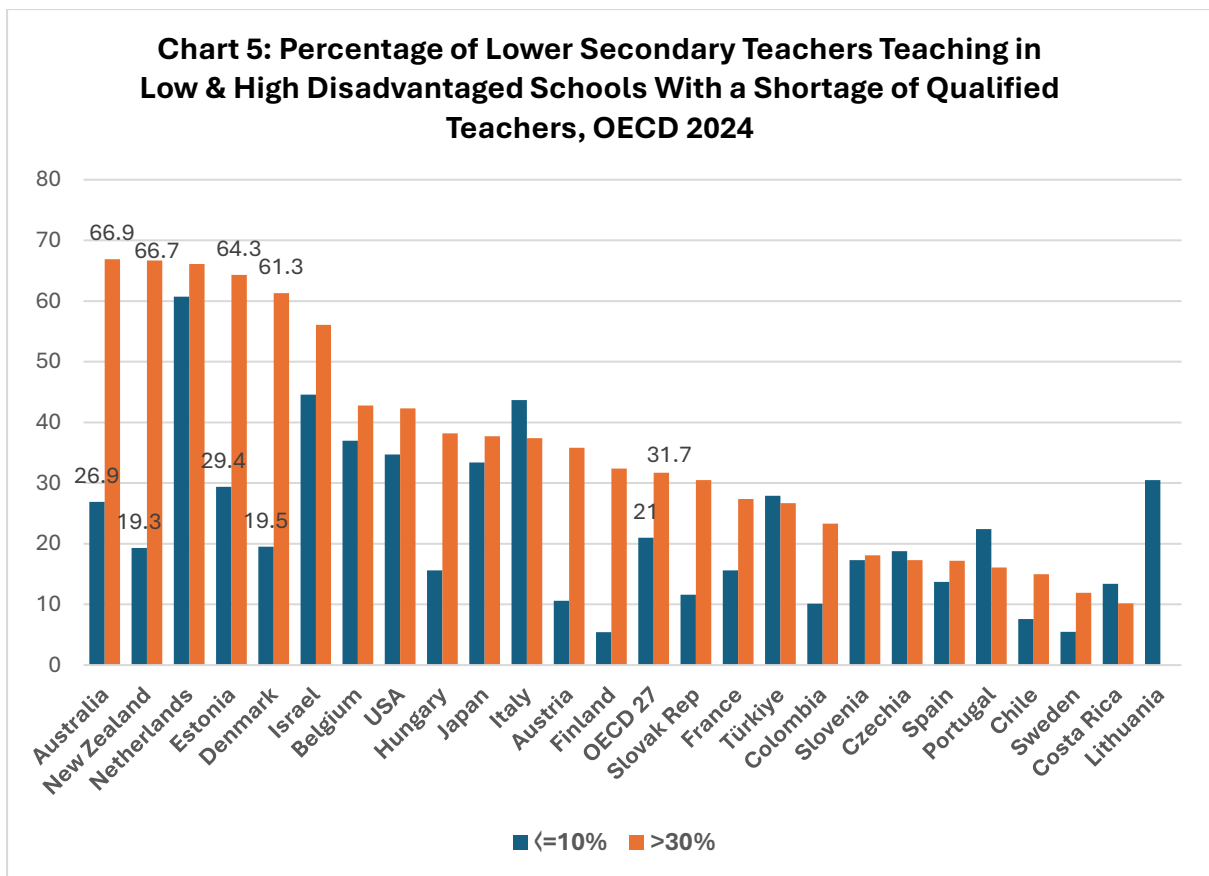
There is a huge gap in the shortage between public and private schools, with only 25% of lower secondary teachers working in private schools with a shortage of teachers. The gap of 33 percentage points between public and private schools is the largest in the OECD.

The shortage of teachers in disadvantaged schools in Australia is particularly dire. The survey found that that 67% if of lower secondary teachers working in disadvantaged schools are in schools with a shortage of qualified teachers [Chart 5]. This is the equal highest percentage in the OECD along with New Zealand. It is over double the average for the OECD of 32%. In Lithuania, there is no shortage of teachers in disadvantaged schools.

Disadvantaged schools in Australia are almost entirely public schools. The OECD report defines disadvantaged schools as having over 30% of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. [Research shows](#) that 91% of these schools are public schools.



Source: TALIS 2024

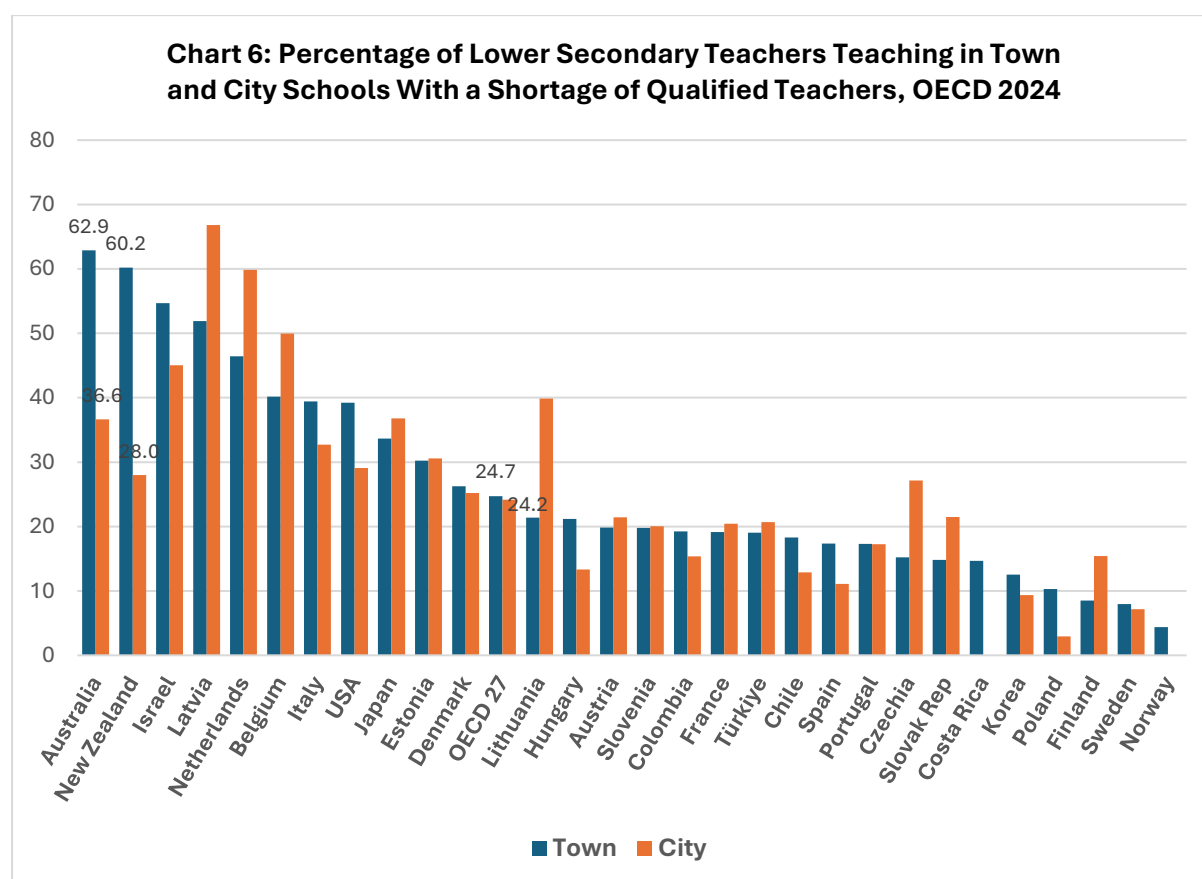


Source: TALIS 2024

The survey found that that 63% of lower secondary teachers are working in regional town schools with a shortage of qualified teachers [Chart 6]. This is the largest percentage in the OECD. It is over double the average for the OECD of 25%. Norway has only 4% of teachers working in schools in regional towns with a shortage of teachers.

The shortage of teachers in city schools in Australia is the equal sixth largest in the OECD with 36.6% of lower secondary teachers working in schools with a shortage of qualified teachers. The shortage is much higher than the OECD average of 25%. Cities in Norway have no shortage of teachers.

The gap of 26 percentage points in the shortage of teachers between regional and city schools in Australia is the second largest in the OECD behind New Zealand. The average gap across OECD countries is only 0.5 of a percentage point.



Source: TALIS 2024

It should be noted that TALIS is about lower secondary teachers and does not include information about other teachers. Some of the figures look different if we had separate data about primary school teachers or those teaching in senior high schools. Consequently, these findings are an incomplete picture of the state of all teachers.

The OECD report does not canvass the causes of shortages of teachers but there is extensive research evidence showing that the main causes are low salaries relative to other professions, high workload, highly stressful working conditions and low professional status. For example, a recent international report published by [Universities](#)

21, an international network of leading research universities, found that shortages are being driven by low pay, excessive workloads, and a lack of professional recognition. A [recent study](#) published by Monash University highlighted lack of public respect for teachers, high workloads and administrative burdens and safety issues in schools.

After the long neglect of the teacher shortage by successive Coalition governments, education ministers agreed to a [National Teacher Workforce Action Plan](#) (NTWAP) in December 2022 to reduce the shortage. The plan nominates five priorities: increasing teacher supply, strengthening teacher education, retaining teachers, elevating the profession and better understanding future teacher workforce issues.

The Plan was heavily criticized for ignoring the root cause of the problem. Internationally renowned educator, Professor Pasi Sahlberg of the University of Melbourne, said that the crisis was not a shortage of teachers issue but “[the lack of adequate compensation and support for existing teachers](#). [An academic assessment](#) of teacher workforce policy in Australia criticised it for concentrating on teacher recruitment instead of teachers’ work and the status of the profession as well as ignoring priority areas such as hard-to-staff schools is also noted.

There are remarkable absences in the list of priority areas of the NTWAP. None directly address the causes of the teacher shortage as revealed by the research studies cited above and teacher surveys, namely, low pay, high workloads, too much administrative work, lack of support and safety at work. No priority is given to improving teacher salaries or increasing safety and well-being of teachers. Reducing teacher workload is largely hived off to pilot projects.

Progress in attracting more new students in initial teacher education programs and retaining existing teachers in their jobs has been glacial at best. Funding for pilot projects to examine ways of reducing teacher workload is a feature of the priority area on teacher retention. A recent [academic paper concluded](#):

...policy actions remain in the pilot phase, under development, or only loosely tied to teacher retention. [p. 456]

It is puzzling why pilot projects are needed to reduce teacher workload. The administrative load on teachers is a key factor in teacher attrition. It should be a simple matter for education departments to reduce the reporting and accountability demands on teachers. Pilot projects are just a way of kicking the can down the road instead of directly addressing the issue.

State and territory governments continue to resist claims by teacher unions for teachers to be paid at comparable rates to other professions. Workload and administrative tasks continue to be a major source of dispute by teachers as governments largely resist providing more administrative support in schools. Action to reduce workload is restricted to a few pilot programs instead of directly addressing the issue. Training and development appear to be limited to online courses teaching phonics and classroom management.

It can only be concluded that the NTWAP is not a plan to solve the massive teacher shortage in Australian but a plan to avoid dealing with the root causes of the shortage. It is a classic case of government disingenuousness. Learning in public schools, disadvantaged schools and regional town schools will continue to be restricted by the lack of teachers.

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SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education

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