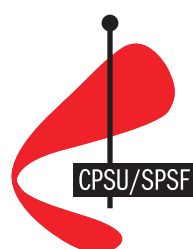


**SUBMISSION**



**CPSU SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW TO INFORM  
A BETTER AND FAIRER EDUCATION SYSTEM**



## **Introduction**

Public Education is at a vital cross-roads. Due to the pandemic we have a perfect storm coming through our education system, with lost effective learning time, increased student mental health problems, staff shortages across all roles, back logs of diagnoses for learning difficulties due to a stressed health system, and general costs of living making more families enter poorer socio-economic status in absolute terms. This has created another divide or gap between schools with independent mechanisms to raise funds and pay for gaps in the education the school system provides with those in lower socio-economic areas unable to leverage off the community, thus exacerbating inequity.

The disconnect of government (state) school systems to the urban planning departments of government has seen more than just inadequate number of classrooms in the learning environment. We have seen established schools experience booming numbers due to increased infilling and urban consolidation, urban fringe and growth corridors, and regional centres increase enrollments. It is not unheard of to see enrollments reaching designated capacity levels of nearly 200%. This is causing major staffing and resourcing issues for individual schools as well as for the tertiary systems which supply a number of the support staff such as allied health, both private contractors and school supplied.

This review of the National Schools Reform Agreement has the opportunity to start fixing the problems with our education system, including problems exacerbated by a once in a lifetime pandemic. For too long the solutions have been seen as fixable in the classroom, however, we submit that for many of the issues our students face, they are only repairable in the broader school system environment, the community, and the financial and social policy settings of the government.

Additionally if one state is doing something well, then this improvement should be shared and facilitated by this new National Schools Reform Agreement.

### **Who is the CPSU?**

The CPSU has over 120,000 members and covers workers in state, federal and territory governments. One of the groups of members of key importance for the CPSU is that of school support staff who we cover across the country, exclusively or jointly, who are the non-teaching staff in schools.

There is a workforce of tens of thousands of professional school support staff workers in our schools across the country. These workers support learning, undertake school administration, human resources, and undertake a range of other related functions including but not limited to grounds, facilities and contract management, community engagement, business development, financial management, Aboriginal cultural liaison,

disability support, health support, student mental health, event management, administration of custody orders, and emergency management to name a few. This is supported by our members in the public service who work in management and policy of our education systems in the ever shrinking government education agencies that support our workers in the schools. Despite economies of scale and the capacity to drive systemic change all Government Education Departments have faced ongoing “efficiency dividends” aimed at “back office” staff. The effect has been to load our “front facing” staff with many of these roles.

Between 80%- 90% of school support staff nationally are women and, due to the gender composition, the work has been found to be chronically undervalued and understaffed. The CPSU has undertaken a range of salary negotiations for this group of workers including two gender pay equity cases. The recent New South Wales case (2019)<sup>i</sup> saw the work of 21,000 school support staff in that state being found to be undervalued to the tune of 19-35% of similar work in occupations where women do not make the majority.

Whilst not as large as the teaching workforce, school support staff make up approximately 90,000 strong Full Time Equivalent workforce in our public schools nationally and are key for functional education system in our schools, improving student outcomes and addressing teacher workloads.

	<b>NSW</b>	<b>Vic</b>	<b>Qld</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Tas</b>	<b>Total States</b>
FTE	25820	19950.6	21827	13004	6518.4	1486.86	88606.86

**Source-** most recent Departments’ Annual Reports, Workforce Profile Reports\*

*\*Various states have different reporting dates and this may be an amalgam of 2022 and 2021 reports.*

The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission into this review of the National School Reform Agreement and acknowledges the terms of reference. These submissions are based on consultations with delegates from across the country.

## **Terms of Reference**

1. What targets and reforms should be included in the next NSRA to drive real improvements in student outcomes, with a particular focus on students who are most at risk of falling behind and in need of more assistance - for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional, rural and remote Australia, students with disability, First Nations students and students from a language background other than English

### **1.1 Base Funding**

The base funding arrangement appears to operate on an inverse relationship, whereby 80% base funding goes to non-government schools from the Commonwealth and 20% goes to government schools from the Commonwealth. It cannot be fair that the system that has the greatest number of students, has students across all the socio-economic areas, and has students across all of Australia, only receives Commonwealth funding for one in four dollars of the often more wealthy non-government systems.

In effect this is a privatization by stealth, with a number of non-government schools experiencing regular surpluses in amounts similar to the Commonwealth funding envelope, plus additional significant contributions to capital works that allow these schools to differentiate themselves in marketing campaigns from other local government schools, and drain much of the talent that will contribute to the performance of all the schools.

This imbalance in funding must be reviewed to enable greater equity in the system.

We understand that there is a loading system for example for students from ATSI backgrounds or low socio-economic background, lower performance students, etc.. However, these are often taken advantage of by non-government schools, who routinely screen scholarship applicants for scholarships on their needs and their existing performance, thereby gaining extra funding loading, and not actually improving overall outcomes for students who would otherwise perform well.

### **1.2 Multi-disciplined approach**

A multi-disciplined approach is needed to address educational performance targets as the educational approach in isolation has not worked.

The CPSU covers non-teacher staff across the country with the exception of nurses. This includes occupations such as:

- School Administration Support
- Teachers Aides- School learning support officers
- Teachers Aides- Student Health Support
- Speech Pathologists (not employed in all states)

- Student Support – Youth and Social Workers
- Psychologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Aboriginal Education Officers
- Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers
- General Assistants and Farm Assistants

## **1.3 Mainstreaming and Diverse Health, Disability and Learning Needs**

### **1.3.1 Diagnosis Backlog**

With most of the students with diverse learning and disabilities migrated into mainstream schools, and the increase in students with behavioural support requirements and neuro-diversity, managing school classrooms has become more challenging for teachers.

It has been suggested by representatives of our branches that several mainstream school classrooms are becoming similar to classrooms in special purpose schools or even youth detention schools, with frequent violence to staff and other students, and constant behavioural disruptions.

There are a number of students with un-diagnosed behavioural issues who do not attract additional funding. There are several reasons for the lack of diagnosis including:

- lack of awareness by families of how to access these services and a diagnosis,
- lack of finances for diagnosis as many assessments are not covered or carry a gap under Medicare,
- waiting times for a diagnosis,
- students presenting with several complex issues which make diagnosis difficult without ruling out or considering other factors e.g. EAL background, history of trauma or family violence, other diagnoses such as ASD,
- long waiting times to access to access multi-discipline teams for diagnosis of many conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Lack of social capital amongst our at risk demographics can be exacerbated negotiating this health access process.

With appropriate knowledge of learning difficulties, screening tools, and closer observation of students' work, it is often evident where students are having difficulties (e.g., spelling errors may indicate that a student has poor knowledge of letter-sound combinations etc.). This often does not require a formal assessment, however, currently requires a medical diagnosis.

However, amongst the largest obstacles presented at the moment, is that of waiting times for paediatric specialists, speech pathologists and psychologists. Paediatricians waiting times in the public system are being quoted at between 2-3 years in several states of Australia. There are many paediatricians who have had to close their books. Without a diagnosis the school cannot attract extra funding for that student for learning support.

The diagnosis gateway is extremely limiting for schools to provide students with the necessary access to learning support funds and, unless the school is able to fund the learning themselves, the students and the teachers are often limited as to how they can improve student performance. This delay in diagnosis may have the effect of advantaging already privileged schools performance who have access to their own community of health providers and referrals, whilst condemning those without resources or contacts to poorer performance.

We understand that new Disability Inclusion Policies are being rolled out and trialed in different regions of our states. However, this will not be enough to tackle the problem that is present at the moment, wasting more years of learning. The CPSU submits that for the term of this agreement that there needs to be a parallel system inside the Government system for assessment of disability through the department's allied health services, to allow for an interim learning assessments to access additional funding and additional learning support, when the pediatric diagnosis is not available. This needs to be done through hiring additional staff, as current allied health professionals are stretched and would not be able to absorb this additional duty.

Schools can and are paying for additional learning support in schools that they can afford, however, in schools where there is limited community funding available, schools and their teachers simply have to work with the disruptions. This is leading to a widening of the education gap based on the SES for all students and with regional areas already performing sub-optimally, and loss of vital and committed staff.

The problem was reported as being particularly acute with children coming through the school system in Kindergarten and Year 1 with many having missed their regular community health check-ups as toddlers during COVID. One delegate in a growth corridor at the edge of one capital city reported that this year's kindergarten had roughly 15-20% of the students requiring additional learning support, which the school pays for out of its funds as it is not centrally funded.

Current research indicates that 1 in 14 people in Australia have Developmental Language Disorder and life-long conditions impacting on a child's ability to communicate and ultimately to develop literacy skills<sup>i</sup>. Our Speech Pathology delegates are reporting that language disorders are presenting at a higher rate in several states, with delays in getting speech pathologists assessments, leading to delays in providing evidence-based multi-disciplinary

intervention and support.

Whilst there is additional funding based on NAPLAN results in the bottom three Bands, students are not assessed under this category until Year 3 (4 years into their education).

These young students require higher than normal support but without access to the funding. In government schools these students cannot be simply expelled away, or asked to leave if they also have behavioural issues and the parent does not seek a diagnosis. This creates problems with delays in accessing education for these students and also negatively affects their classmates' learning.

Due to the increase of numbers of students, urban consolidation, growth in regional centres and urban fringe growth corridors, and expanded demand for services in other sectors such as aged care, NDIS, health and child care, the supply of non-teaching staff and allied health professional in schools has not kept up with community needs and requirements.

Whilst poor behaviour is not the case in all school classrooms, a trial of providing a trained or experienced learning support officer in every classroom in schools of lower socio-economic background, schools with higher numbers of learning and behavioural issues and schools with poorer performance, and in all classrooms up to Year 3, may be a mechanism to improve the student outcomes and reduce teacher workloads and stress. This would alleviate not only teacher workload, but also assist students who are un-diagnosed due to lack of available timely affordable paediatric services.

Additional funding for a workforce plan that includes training and employment of future school based clinical and allied health staff in order to assist students get appropriate learning support for the term of this agreement will assist in students being identified as needing additional support.

### **1.3.2 Certainty of Funding**

A school staffing profile in a school often comes from a range of funding sources, including part for loading for disabilities, part for learning disorders and performance, others for new programmes, or more administrative support. This has to stop being regarded as a "temporary funding", from one NSRA to NSRA. Different percentages of the support staff workforce are employed on fixed term temporary or casual basis, often for more than a decade. Whilst states such as NSW are now currently converting thousands of support staff to permanent, there are tens of thousands of support staff who are in non-permanent roles for work that will be continuing for many more decades.

By not securing ongoing funding, these workers will turnover their employment more often and this will reduce the learning outcomes for the students as we lose these worker's

experience and knowledge.

### **1.3.3 Increased Administrative Burden on Schools with NDIS Students**

The NDIS is a welcome funding model for people with disabilities, but has not been adequately supported in the school workplace. One student may have a range of services provided by private providers with allied health providers including occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, and psychologists. Each new professional requires hours of additional work for the school. It is not uncommon for disability providers to have a rotating number of professionals attend a school for the same service and student, due to the highly casualized nature of the disability sector.

The assessment of and re-assessment of students with high needs is also a further burden on the school system, with teachers reliant on support from school administration, and executive staff to undertake the extensive paperwork in order to access the additional support. Mental Health re-assessments are required more frequently than other disabilities with time limitations on assessments.

The school administration support worker will typically have to review the contract with the provider, schedule the visit, ensure that there is a child protection clearance with the department, clarify that there is workers compensation policy, and public liability policy etc. Many schools have minimal staffing to undertake this work, often causing disruption for families, and impinging on other important tasks. Ministerial complaints and threats of discrimination claims often surround student's access or speed of access to disability support in the school environment that is not equipped to provide this additional support.

### **1.3.4 School Based Accommodation for Specialist Allied Health**

A number of government systems run school based services for visiting doctors, visiting dental services, school employed or visiting psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, nurses as well as the array of visiting services from the NDIS. They will be stationed in single location hubs for large schools or migrate to different schools in a region.

With many schools not having enough space for classrooms for growing student populations, we are seeing these services being conducted in teacher staffrooms, assistant principal offices, in print rooms, gymnasiums, libraries, wet rooms, student change areas, storage cupboards and other areas that are not conducive to best outcomes from the service, let alone maintaining student privacy or confidentiality.

There is a need for investment in government schools' infrastructure to increase the number of offices and clinical rooms to enable these allied health professionals to run their services, without having to constantly move or have appointments interrupted due to booking clashes and unsuitable spaces.



## 1.4 Student Attendance

In regional locations and areas of the urban fringe, Attendance Officers (a role with various names including AWOL officers) have been utilised, with varying success to assist disengaged students start attending more regularly (See comments below in closing the gap).

The NSRA should look at funding Attendance Officers in schools with poor attendance near and below the 90% threshold to assist achieving better school attendance.

## 1.5 Closing the Gap

A key Closing the Gap Target is Target 5 in education.

**Target 5:** *By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.*

With Supporting Indicators performance measures to close the gap including:

- School attendance
- School retention rates
- At or above National Assessment Program
- Mean scores of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 15 year olds

The gap has been closing but has stabilised and continues see the gap sitting at 16%. CPSU members work in a range of occupations that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders reach these Closing the Gap targets.

Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) and Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) are distributed across states and work with students in schools and also with their families in the communities. They work within the school environment to make adjustments and liaise with school resources to assist students achieve their educational goals. They will often work with community in addressing school attendance, and retention, addressing cultural barriers and creating a vital link to keeping students attending school and remaining at school.

Aboriginal learning support officers, and education assistants (teachers aides) are also utilised in several states to support the work of teachers in the classroom.

Additionally, Aboriginal General Assistants and Attendance officers in regional areas are utilised to meet these indicators through school bus pick up and drop off and collecting additional students who did not make it to school. For these key roles assisting students with attendance, there needs to be trust within the community to be able to locate the student and assist them to school.

## 1.6 Special Case- Children at Most Risk

Children at risk involved with child protection or having youth justice orders against them have particularly poor educational outcomes.

*“ Children from areas of greatest socioeconomic disadvantage were 10 times more likely than those living in areas of least disadvantage to be under supervision (youth justice) (140 per 100,000 compared with 14 per 100,000)”<sup>ii</sup>*

Children in child protection, particularly in their teens, are experiencing homelessness at higher levels, poorer education, poorer health outcomes, and also becoming over-represented within the cycle of the criminal justice system. These children may also often have alcohol and other drug health issues and this will typically place them at conflict with mainstream school systems.

*“Children under youth justice supervision are an especially disadvantaged group (RACP 2011). Research indicates that young people in the youth justice system have often experienced:*

- *high rates of child maltreatment and neglect, including time spent in out-of-home care (Cashmore 2011; Stewart et al. 2002)*
- *drug and alcohol abuse (Kenny & Nelson 2008; Prichard & Payne 2005)*
- *trouble at school, including issues with poor school attendance and performance*
- *parental substance abuse*
- *parental incarceration*
- *homelessness or unstable accommodation (JH&FMHN 2017).”<sup>iii</sup>*

Unfortunately, some of the other social safety nets, such as child protection and housing, are letting down these students, with record homelessness, and with child protection unable to cope with the workload in most states due to under staffing, unfilled vacancies because of their skills shortages, and not enough out of home care places to place the children. These systems breaking down elsewhere mean that hundreds of school-age children in out-of-home care live in hotels or child protection offices on a daily basis across our country, making it difficult to maintain regular attendance at school.

Typically attending a mainstream school will lead to conflict with other students and teachers, for this cohort. Several states have special schools to assist students who are considered at risk such as those with severe Child Protection and youth justice interactions. Where they can include wrap-around health and wellbeing services, they can set students up to succeed.

There is limited availability of these types of schools in most jurisdictions.

## **1.7 Youth Justice Education**

School systems are required to provide an education to school-aged youth justice detainees. However, for many, this schooling is a lost opportunity.

Different states educate their youth offenders in different manners. Most attempt to provide an education, however, are limited due to behavioural risk management, an array of learning deficits across the student population, and the short period of education for most under short sentences.

Opportunities to address deficits such as literacy, and language with specialist speech pathologists support could be utilised during these interactions.

Additionally, several states offer life skills such as home economics and vocational skills such as hospitality and farm work through TAFE.

The Commonwealth needs to support research projects assisting students to achieve better results when in the youth justice system both in custody and in the community.

## **1.8 Medication and Nursing**

A number of schools have dozens of students requiring medication throughout the day. This task can take much of the day and is often assigned to an administrative officer with only first aid training.

There should be recognition of this greater need and additional staff resources provided to assist students with medication needs within the NSRA. This should be appropriately trained staff under appropriate medical professional supervision, supported by appropriate medical indemnity insurance, and remunerated for the work that they do.

Despite the recognition that there are increasing interactions between health, disability and educational outcomes, several of the states have vacated the field of nursing supply and relied upon less skilled administrative staff with no medical background or training. This has even occurred in schools for special purposes with profoundly ill and disabled students.

Several government systems are down to less than a handful of nurses in the government system structure, where other states have maintained in-house nurses or community nursing style servicing a number of schools in a region.

## **1.9 Breakfast and Lunch Programmes**

A number of states operate school breakfast and lunch programmes in varying degrees in Aboriginal Communities and areas with low socio-economic status<sup>iv, v, vi</sup>.

The advantages of school food provision include improved attendance, attention, health and social outcomes. These are combined with reduced stress and financial pressure for working families providing meals for students.

When it comes to closing the gap and low SES indicators such as school attendance, overseas studies have indicated school attendance increases by 1.8 days per school year and chronic absenteeism dropped by 5.4% by implementing breakfast and lunch programmes. However, the application of breakfast and lunch programmes is inconsistently applied across Australia<sup>vii</sup>.

Again, there is a divide between schools that can provide free lunches for those students without lunch. Universally provided school food is offered overseas in a number of OECD countries including in United States, United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, France and Japan with New Zealand moving towards school based lunches.<sup>viii</sup>

Although Australian states are building the number of areas where school-supplied food is provided, this needs to be consistently applied and supported from the Commonwealth to enable the workforce and infrastructure to be installed.

### **1.10 OOSH and After School Clubs**

Out of School Hours Care and Secondary After School Clubs (Study Hubs) are becoming harder to get into in areas where they are available. These provide a good opportunity, often employing teachers in training and teachers aides to apply their skills by having guided activities and also having supervised homework and learning time.

In the secondary school learning environment, a combination of sports, coding, games play, and supervised homework activities are run by clubs and some not-for-profit organisations. These have been utilised to reduce crime and divert at-risk students from youth justice.

The services tend to instill positive study habits and positive social behaviours.

The supply of OOSH and After School Clubs is inadequate in most areas, including the areas of growth corridors, and regional centres where the SES levels are lower and often both parents work.

There needs to be a national plan, structure and supply of these programmes, run by the government school system so that students at risk and in growth corridors and regional areas can also acquire good study habits, and positive social habits regardless of parental working arrangements.

**Recommendation**

Trial the provision of additional learning support in all classrooms in schools from low socio-economic backgrounds, schools with higher numbers of learning and behavioural issues and schools with poorer performance, to apply evidence based learning techniques.

**Recommendation**

Funding is included in the NSRA to allow government schools to centralise provision of NDIS services being offered in schools, or to provide additional school support to seamlessly allow students to access these services in each school.

**Recommendation**

That the funding in the NSRA be increased to allow the state school systems to increase the training of and employment of allied health professionals in the state school system.

**Recommendation**

Additional funding for the training of future school-based clinical and allied health staff and the employment of clinical and allied health staff in order to assist students identified as needing additional support for the term of this agreement.

**Recommendation**

Recognising the greater need of professional medical skills allocation in schools including provide additional resources to state schools to support dispensing of medication.

**Recommendation**

Additional funding for the government school system to allow for interim diagnosis of students with learning disabilities through allied health.

**Recommendation**

Investment in state schools infrastructure into a number of offices and clinical rooms to enable these allied health professionals to run their services.

**Recommendation**

The Commonwealth and states should remove principal's discretion so that if funding is targeted at a particular initiative, then the deliverable requires hiring the appropriate staff and delivering the appropriate measured services to the students.

**Recommendation**

School Food should be provided for breakfast and lunch to encourage attendance and improve attention and health outcomes.

**Recommendation**

A national plan to structure, and supply through government systems adequate OOSH and Secondary after school hubs is developed.

**Recommendation**

The Commonwealth and States establish a health led benchmark as to appropriate levels of nursing staff that should be provided to schools (outside of schools located inside hospitals i.e. hospital schools).

## Term of Reference

### **2. How the next agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing, by addressing in-school factors while acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing**

The CPSU has coverage of various student support service professions that assist with mental health and wellbeing. These include school psychologists, speech pathologists and student support officers (social workers and youth workers). There are different titles for these professional workers, with their primary responsibility being to target and support student mental health and wellbeing. In most states the work of these professionals complements School Counsellors (usually teachers with double degrees). The work of this group now goes beyond career advice and school discipline, and has extended to supporting numerous issues that include but aren't limited to behaviour management, violence management, child protection assistance, youth justice orders assistance, as well as dealing with issues such as self-harm, emergency/crisis management, response to suicide, suicide attempts, body image and eating disorders, neglect, internet usage, sexual misconduct (students), attendance, family grief, family breakdown, family violence and alcohol and other drug abuse.

The following areas demonstrate a need for increased specialist mental health support in our government schools.

#### **2.1 School Allied Health Workforce Plan**

Unfortunately, in all government systems, the availability and numbers of these professional staff is inadequate, and partially due to this inadequacy and subsequent workload, many of these jobs are hard to fill. The salaries when working for the government education system, are not competitive compared to other sectors such as NDIS and there are less opportunities for career progression and often workplace flexibility such as working from home. The Education Department is not seen as an employer of choice. The inability of state school systems to keep up with enrolments driven by urban planning decisions has seen increases in enrolments but without the corresponding rise in allied health staff. A number of regions have significant vacancies.

We have seen chronic staff shortage across health, education, child protection in all jurisdictions and sectors. Positions for allied health often can't be filled, leading to further attrition. Part of the problem for this group of dedicated staff is that the workloads are high due to the small numbers of staff, the feeling of isolation from decision making due to the staff often being considered regional and not part of the student plan, and competition with other services such as the health system. An example is that most jurisdictions' health systems offer nurses free HECS courses. This, combined with higher HECS fees for social work, speech

pathology and psychology, will likely increase difficulties filling student support, speech pathology and psychology roles.

We need to listen to the professions who are calling out for more allied health professionals in schools:

Australian Psychological Society (April 2022)

*“What is needed*

- *Schools need access to multi-tiered, evidence-based, whole school mental health and wellbeing programs and a dedicated and highly skilled national psychology workforce to lead, coordinate and support school-based mental health and wellbeing programming and evaluation.*
- *Funding is required to achieve a minimum ratio of one full-time equivalent school psychologist for every 500 students. With just over 4 million students in Australian schools, at least 8,000 school psychologists are needed now.*
- *There is a critical need to grow the number of qualified psychologists through increased funding for postgraduate training, placements and supervision.*

*Funding to increase the number of psychologists in schools will only work if we have enough trained psychologists.*

- *Dedicated training places and scholarships are urgently needed in rural and remote areas and to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in school psychologist roles.<sup>ix</sup>”*

The lack of psychologists and the lack of administrative support means that there are significant resources utilised for psychologists to refer students to private psychologists.

### Speech Pathology

Speech Pathology is not consistently utilized across our government school systems, with several school systems relying almost exclusively on private contractors. Regardless of the model, there is a shortage of available speech pathologists in the government school system and across all systems.

Speech pathologists work with other professions as part of a multi-discipline team in education.<sup>x</sup> They can also assist teachers to teach phonics in the states that have adopted phonics as part of the National Curriculum ,alongside traditional reading and writing techniques that is gathering evidence to provide better outcomes<sup>xi xii</sup>.



## **2.2 Occupational Violence and Trauma**

Occupational violence is a significant problem in several areas of the government school system. This affects teachers, learning support, school administration, and anyone involved in these incidents. A number of our members in learning support have referred to their jobs as “*punching bags*” due to the regular and severe behaviour experienced by them from students at work. There is resistance from the employer to amend minimal management behavioural approaches due to funding limitations, and fear of lowering the school’s public image.

This is unacceptable and leads to good staff walking or limping away from this work to other work, or onto worker's compensation. Additionally, government schools cannot expel “*the problem*” away, like non-government schools and must accept students from the non-government sector regardless of their behavioural difficulties.

In Victoria, there is professional learning available for teachers and education support staff for behaviour support and behaviour management plans, however, many schools do not provide time release to staff to complete relevant Professional Learning, so it is often Department psychologists who support schools to develop behaviour support plans. This is clearly a resourcing deficit that is leading to further resourcing deficits.

Gaining extra funding for additional interventions often relies on a diagnosable disorder and parental consent. If either of these are not forthcoming, the stretched mental health allied professionals and the school disciplinary system are all that can be utilised to manage these students. As an example, speech pathology can identify underlying language disorders that may lead to behavioural difficulties in students.

There is a need for more than just educational specialists to be involved in developing behavioural management plans for some students. There needs to be more psychologists, speech pathologists and student support officers (youth workers, and social workers), as well as school learning support who work with the students in all classes available to develop, review and supervise appropriate behavioural management plans for students with at times severe behavioural issues. This should result in reduced and better managed behavioural issues for students and subsequently lead to fewer incidents and better retention of staff. There should be appropriate additional administrative staff to support these roles.

## **2.4 All students need support**

A number of state systems prioritise secondary students by allocating psychological assistance to secondary school students. Secondary students definitely need to have this support, but not at the expense of primary students. Assistance with primary students psychological needs is also essential to address issues earlier on, so that early intervention, treatment and management can avoid mental health issues becoming larger. With COVID learning there has been increased anecdotal prevalence of anxiety and depression from our members in primary

environments. There are inadequate staff numbers in mental health to service high school students, and this NSRA should address mental health issues in primary schooling also.

## **2.5 Vaping**

Vaping is not only an issue for adults but is endemic in the school environment. Most programmes are targeted at secondary schools but the problem manifests down to students with single digit ages in primary school.

Apart from the negative physical health issues, vaping as a mechanism for taking a drug of addiction creates other mental health issues, and possession of a vaping device has been a factor in several incidents of violence.

There is a need to have a whole of school program to address the increased uptaking of vaping.

## **2.6 Structured Professional Supervision**

Due to the limited availability of Psychologists, Speech Pathologists and Student Support Officers, workers in these occupations and occupations that regularly experience trauma in the workplace, such as support staff in schools for special purposes, and youth justice schools, do not get an opportunity to manage their own mental health similar to workers working in mental health for example in the health sector. Principals and Assistant Principals, anecdotally for example in one state were asked to provide professional supervision to psychologists and student support officers because of a lack of resources or structure in the Department. Principals do not have the time, the training or skills to undertake this work and it is unsafe and inadequate. This also is considered unethical and is likely to place the psychologists standing as a psychologist at risk.

Lack of a career path also makes structured professional supervision difficult in the school environment. Restructuring of State Departmental practice leads means that there are less supervision opportunities available for School allied health professionals. The current public sector restructure in Victoria is reported to see hundreds of “practice leads” cut from health and education as an example.

## **2.7 Professional Learning and Networks**

There needs to be more consistency in the structure to support psychologists, speech pathologists and student support officers in maintaining their continuous professional education within the government systems. This should support staff accessing professional learning in the context of the school system in networks and professional supervision. Currently many must seek to do this independently at their own expense with inadequate staff training budgets.

If we are to maintain and improve professional psychological, speech pathology, and welfare support services for our school system, this aspect needs to be enhanced and supported so that these professionals do not leave the system, to a workplace where this is conducted.

**Recommendation**

Government schools are supported by the future NSRA to increase the numbers of mental health allied health staff employed in government schools, including funding to provide adequate administrative support for these additional staff.

**Recommendation**

Government schools include learning support in their formulation of behavioural management plans.

**Recommendation**

Additional funding to assist government school psychologists and student support maintain professional supervision and continuous professional learning.

## **Term of Reference**

### **3. How the next agreement can support schools to attract and retain teachers**

#### **3.1 Supporting our Teacher Leaders**

Across Australia, government bureaucracies have delegated several administrative tasks to teachers under various devolution strategies under the ideology that local principals can make the best decisions. The reality is quite different to the ideology, with centralised work under strict policy settings and economies of scale delegated to school principals to administer with few and stretched administrative staff. School administrative staff support teacher leaders by performing formerly central tasks such as finance, HR, risk management, venue and event management, and community liaison to name a few. However, for many schools, the responsibility falls back on the educational specialist and leader to maintain responsibility for all of these administrative tasks.

Several states are employing business managers in some schools, who are professional administrators tasked with managing a number of the non-education responsibilities of school executives.

This model should be expanded as part of the next NSRA so that all schools can provide professional support to our teaching leaders to lead the school's educational approach, without impinging on the existing administrative workload.

#### **3.2 Staffing Formulas- Setting up Schools to Fail**

School Administration Staffing Formulas must be increased, particularly in regional schools and primary schools.

Despite the particular growth in primary school student numbers, most states have differential funding for support staff, with urban consolidation, urban growth corridors and regional centres. This sees resources cap-out in the single digits, despite the primary school's student numbers going over student numbers of local high schools, with some primary schools well over 1000 students.

This means that school administration cannot assist teachers if they are dealing with the essential aspects of school administrative management with student populations of this size.

Additionally, small regional schools may not have enough students to generate full time student administrative support under current staffing formulas, and this leads to teachers who will often be teaching composite classes also having to take on additional administrative work for the school office due to the absence of the administrative officer.

These formulas need to be increased and supported through the NSRA.

### **3.3 School Holidays**

Most administrative support work 40 weeks. They are laid off during the school break, with some state systems allowing a discretionary additional 10 days of staff funding during the holidays.

Our members are finding, there is increasing pressure to work in the holidays, often out of good will or TOIL arrangements, which are difficult to take later in the term.

Providing additional NSRA funding so that a skeleton administrative staff can support teachers before they start the term would lead to reduced workload when the school term starts, however, many of our delegates report that this is not enough. Despite term employment being the default, there are a number of government school systems that are realizing the need for a number of occupations to be required to work towards a full year cycle. This will reduce the administrative burden for teachers but also allow other work that does not take a break to continue.

### **3.4 Reducing Teacher Administrative Workload-In Class Administrative Support**

Teacher workload is affected by the administrative and learning support provided to assist the teacher with their role.

The School Administration Improvement Program in NSW, for example has provided over 600 additional administration roles to assist teachers with administrative tasks to reduce teacher workload and will be extended to all schools in the future.

*“The tasks the new administration staff can remove from teachers’ workload include but are not limited to:*

*Preparing excursions, liaising with bus companies and their drivers, and organising permission slips*

*Inputting student performance data into spreadsheets*

*Managing parental payments*

*Updating newsletters, social media, and school apps and texting parents about events*

*Filling out health plans for students*

*Lesson Timetabling”<sup>xiii</sup>*

This is a direct approach to lessen teacher workload by providing additional trained admin support.

The NSRA should address teacher workloads by providing funding for all government schools systems to take on additional administrative staff to support teachers with their administrative tasks, such as the *NSW School Administration Improvement Program*.

### **3.5 In-Class Learning Support**

It is difficult at present to attract funding for in-class learning support. The CPSU has discussed above, the difficulties being experienced due to a lack of diagnosis of learning and behavioural issues due to COVID and the specialist backlog. Many students will only attract extra funding once they have completed their year 3 NAPLAN exam.

Teacher's Aides can address behavioural reducing disruptions to teaching and learning in the classroom, they can also assist by working with students on evidence-based programs, supporting reading groups and literacy and numeracy exercises. When a Teacher's Aide is supplied for one student, they often support other students in the class environment.

By providing a teacher's aide or learning support to all classes Kindergarten to year 3, for the term of this NSRA, this will provide the support needed for teachers and their students to address the issues that have arisen or not been detected through the COVID years. This will not replace the need for increasing access to diagnosis, funding and support for special cases, but will provide a safety net.

### **3.6 Learning Support Professional Requirements**

It is not unheard of for entire school staff training budgets to be consumed through teacher training. There are varying requirements and support for learning support or Teacher's Aides training and ongoing learning. Some states require a Certificate 3 or 4 Teacher's Aide course whilst other states do not, and also do not require experience. These are not well-paid workers and there is a requirement for 100 hours "work placement" for staff who wish to complete their certification. This is a disincentive if the qualification is not required, the workers are in majority poorly paid women, and these workers have to donate several weeks of work to your employer to complete a course that will see better outcomes for the employer. Although the NSRA generally avoids industrial relations, there needs to be funding to encourage consistency that is applied to allow all states to recognise the higher qualifications with extra remuneration such as accelerated progression through the incremental scale or higher steps. Additionally there needs to be better recognition of prior learning for staff with a defined level of experience.

There needs to be encouragement from the next NSRA for teachers aides/ learning support to acquire qualifications by:

- Providing free courses at TAFE
- Removing the requirement for job placements to be voluntary and to be paid

- For all school systems to provide a salary step up for staff who complete the certificate 3 and 4.
- Recognition of prior learning for teacher's aides with a defined level of experience

### **3.7 Science Technical Assistants**

There are different training requirements for science support staff in different states. These vary from administrative officers with a shorty safety course, through to qualified technical assistants.

There is a need for a national qualification for science class support to be developed and staff to be supported through TAFE to acquire this qualification. Existing staff should be offered the opportunity to upskill.

### **3.8 Information Technology Support**

Schools are driving a digital transformation in our students; whilst school learning is increasingly delivered with assistance from a range of digital mediums, including via laptops in class, smart boards, and other approaches. Modern skills such as coding, and robotics are being applied to traditional subjects like maths and science. Information Technology (IT) is becoming an essential function of teacher support.

Multiple school software systems covering a range of tasks, from learning to student records, and finance, now numbering into the dozens in several states, and schools need a reliable and cost effective IT support service.

However, School IT is limited and inconsistent across the government school systems. The provision of Wifi is inconsistent within all schooling systems. Service and support are inconsistent in the government sector. With hybrid government and contractor setups, times can be difficult to manage, and wait times to fix IT issues can be extensive. These contracts are leading to significant expenditure.

The IT area is another role providing services to schools where skills shortages are creating difficulties.

The NSRA should support the acquisition of digital skills through the creation of additional IT apprenticeships in schools and also fund increased ongoing IT support.

Additionally, the allocation of laptops in schools is inconsistent across the country, and there should be supplied laptops adequate for staff and students to undertake the necessary work.

**Recommendation**

A business manager should be supported to be employed in every government school through the next NSRA.

**Recommendation**

Providing additional funding so that a skeleton administrative staff can support school teachers before they start the term reduce workload when the school term starts.

**Recommendation**

A notional qualification for science class support and staff supported through TAFE to acquire this qualification.

**Recommendation**

Teacher's aides/ learning support to acquire qualifications by:

- Providing free courses at TAFE
- Work Placements to be paid and not voluntary
- For all school systems to provide a salary step up for staff who complete the Certificate 3 and 4.
- Recognition of prior learning for teacher's aides with a defined level of experience

**Recommendation**

Support the acquisition of digital skills through the creation of additional IT apprenticeships in schools and also fund increased ongoing IT support.

**Recommendation**

Funding for all government schools systems to employ additional administrative staff, such as the NSW School Administration Improvement Program.



### **Term of Reference**

4. *How data collection can best inform decision-making and boost student outcomes*
5. *How to ensure public funding is delivering on national agreements and that all school authorities are transparent and accountable to the community for how funding is invested and measuring the impacts of this investment.*

### **5.1 Transparency**

All Schools like most other entities that receive public funds, schools should be required to have public annual report that demonstrates where they received and spent their money. This should include details around staff remuneration, parental fees, de-identified list of school spending, maintenance costs, donations in and out, as well as Profit and Loss Reports and Balance Sheets. Most Government schools are required to provide an annual report.

### **5.2 Global vs Directed Funding**

Many school systems have delegated to principals education pooled/global funding. Whilst these funding ideas are based on ideas of allowing the local experts to assess need, they are also open to unintended consequences without appropriate controls including changing outcomes of programmes.

Anecdotal examples include:

- a) Utilisation of discretionary mental health funds to train a non-teaching assistant principals in leadership skills, whilst a school has over-utilised their psychologist allocation, is an example of local decisions made that don't align with the intended purpose of the funds being provided and aren't being utilized in the best interests of students.
- b) Additional funding for administrative support to reduce teachers workload being used to pay for additional relief teachers.

Whilst there are merits in every decision, there cannot be evidence of the success of any funding initiative unless there is spending tied to the funding.

A separation of powers to the business manager, or having more funding attached to specific policies and desired outcomes will help avoid unintended consequences. Entrusting power and authority to mandated site based committees with input from staff at all levels can ensure that funding is directed appropriately and in accordance to expectations and policy aims.

## Recommendation

All schools that receive public money should have to provide an annual report.

## Recommendation

The CPSU submits on core NSRA funding initiatives, the Commonwealth and states should remove Principals discretion so that if funding is targeted at a particular outcome, then the deliverable requires hiring the appropriate staff and delivering the appropriate measured services to the students.

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<sup>i</sup> Speech Pathology Australia, Website, Resources-Developmental Language Disorder, [https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/Communication\\_Hub/Resources/Fact\\_Sheets/Developmental-language-disorder.aspx](https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/Communication_Hub/Resources/Fact_Sheets/Developmental-language-disorder.aspx)

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Children, Children under youth justice supervision, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cws/69/australias-children/contents/justice-safety/children-youth-justice-supervision>

<sup>iii</sup> ibid

<sup>iv</sup> NSW Government, NSW Education Department, Students ready to learn with the help of a healthy breakfast, 31 March 2023, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/students-ready-to-learn-with-the-help-of-a-healthy-breakfast>,

<sup>v</sup> Premier of Victoria, 30 Million Breakfast Club meals and Counting, 6 March 2023, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/site-4/30-million-breakfast-club-meals-and-counting>

<sup>vi</sup> Johnson B., Manson A., Gallegos D., Golley R., The Conversation, Australian schools are starting to provide food, but we need to think carefully before we "ditch" the lunchbox. <https://theconversation.com/australian-schools-are-starting-to-provide-food-but-we-need-to-think-carefully-before-we-ditch-the-lunchbox-193536>

<sup>vii</sup> Universal school meals improve attendance for youngest students, k12dive, [www.k12dive.com/news/universal-school-meals-reduce-chronic-absentessism/643015](http://www.k12dive.com/news/universal-school-meals-reduce-chronic-absentessism/643015)

<sup>viii</sup> ibid

<sup>ix</sup> Position statement Psychologists in schools April 2022 | Australian Psychological Society, [https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/3478fa00-0a90-43ff-8d90-99a42ea53981/22aps-ps-psych-p1.pdf?target=](https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/3478fa00-0a90-43ff-8d90-99a42ea53981/22aps-ps-psych-p1.pdf?target=file:///C:/Users/sdeguara/Downloads/FINAL_PS_SPaths-in-Education_Position-Statement.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> Speech Pathology Australia, Position Statement, Speech Pathology in Education, [file:///C:/Users/sdeguara/Downloads/FINAL\\_PS\\_SPaths-in-Education\\_Position-Statement.pdf](file:///C:/Users/sdeguara/Downloads/FINAL_PS_SPaths-in-Education_Position-Statement.pdf)

<sup>xi</sup> Teacher Magazine, Expert Q&A: Phonics and early reading instruction, [https://www.teachermagazine.com/au\\_en/articles/expert-q-a-phonics-and-early-reading-instruction](https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/expert-q-a-phonics-and-early-reading-instruction)

<sup>xii</sup> The Conversation, Teaching Phonics Skills Alongside Reading Raises Literacy Achievement Amongst Indigenous Children, <https://theconversation.com/teaching-phonics-skills-alongside-reading-raises-literacy-achievement-among-indigenous-children-62166>

<sup>xiii</sup> More admin staff to lighten teacher workload, NSW Department of Education Website, 18 May 2023, <https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/more-admin-staff-to-lighten-teacher-workload>