

Monday, 29 January 2024

## **Teachers to stop work over staffing shortages**

More than 180 Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) members in three regional secondary schools will stop work in the first week of February in a bid to have ongoing teacher shortages addressed by the Queensland Department of Education (DoE).

The QTU members at North Rockhampton, Sarina and Biloela State High Schools are taking industrial action after years of teacher vacancies continue to take a toll on teachers and school leaders struggling to provide their students with the education expected by DoE.

QTU President Cresta Richardson said industrial action was always a last resort by the union and its members, but QTU members had no choice but to take the one-hour stop work action.

"Ongoing teacher vacancies have seen oversized classes, classes doubling up to cover emergent leave, teachers taking a range of subjects outside their areas of expertise, beginning teachers receiving less support from experienced staff, even some classes being temporarily covered by supervision only," Ms Richardson said.

"School leaders are taking on teaching loads outside of their expected duties, which in turn means they are working extended hours on weekends and leave periods to catch up on their administrative responsibilities, including recruiting staff, juggling operational arrangements to cover teacher absences and shortages, and focusing on student learning and behaviour."

Ms Richardson said teachers and school leaders were also sacrificing professional development, non-contact time, career opportunities and collegial engagement due to their excessive workloads.

"The QTU has long said that teaching conditions equal working conditions; if DoE is genuine in pursuing equity and excellence in all Queensland state schools, it must assist school leaders to provide the best support for students and the best professional working conditions for teachers," Ms Richardson said.

The three schools have started the 2024 school year with up to 11 teaching vacancies, across a range of subject areas including science, maths, English, and industrial design and technology. Teacher shortages have impacted each of the schools over a number of years.

Ms Richardson said the QTU and its members wanted DoE, both centrally and in the regions, to find both immediate and long-term, sustainable solutions.

"Until all teaching positions are filled on an ongoing basis, students will suffer learning disruptions, while teachers and school leaders will suffer negative effects on their psychosocial health," Ms Richardson said.

"The QTU has been trying to work proactively with DoE on addressing the teacher shortages, including advocating for incentives for teachers to move to and remain for several years in areas proving hard to staff.

"Other important considerations – not just in these schools but in all regional and remote areas – include teachers' ability to move to their preferred location (often based on their family connections) after several years' service, and the availability of housing."

Ms Richardson said the QTU and its members were hoping that immediate and effective action by DoE would be enough to address the ongoing issues of understaffing, for the benefit of students, staff and whole school communities.

The QTU has requested that parents and caregivers support the teachers in their fight for the stable learning environment their children deserve by withdrawing their children from the schools during the one-hour stoppages. Unless the stop work action can be averted by DoE offering effective solutions, there will be no QTU members on duty at these schools during the one-hour stoppages, as members meet to discuss further actions in their campaign for sufficient staffing.

North Rockhampton State High School: 2-3pm, Monday 5 February.

Biloela State High School: 2-3pm, Tuesday 6 February.

Sarina State High School: 2-3pm, Wednesday 7 February.

Further comment is available from:

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