




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2023

ADJOURNMENT

Sarina State High School, Staffing

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (7.18 pm): I rise to speak on the worsening teacher shortage crisis in regional Queensland schools. Sarina State High School in my electorate has not been fully staffed since December 2020. Today there are 14 teacher vacancies and a further four permission-to-teach positions, increasing the teacher shortage to 18.5 staff. Since 2021-22, Rapid Response Team teachers have taught at Sarina State High School, with the majority extending their contracts for up to three terms, but they are not eligible to extend further than that. This means that some students at school have had up to six teachers in a single year.

These shortages are having a devastating impact on student learning outcomes. The school has been forced to use inexperienced interim teachers in junior classes to free up teachers for specialised subjects in upper grades. Many others have had to be pulled from administrative and managerial positions to plug the gaps. Junior students at the school are unable to engage in woodwork and metalwork due to the shortage. That is a total disgrace given it is a trade-driven mining area. There is now a real risk that some students may not be able to complete their certificate II in engineering or achieve a QCE.

One of the main problems that schools like Sarina have in attracting staff is the town's dire housing shortage. The vacancy rate at Sarina is currently just 0.39 per cent. Most of the potential teachers who declined positions at the school over the past year cited the unavailability of housing. We have written to the minister on this situation and we hope that they can use the old hospital site. The school is now faced with 10 teachers leaving at the end of the year. When added to existing vacancies, this makes 22 positions to be filled by 2024. That is 22 teachers!

School staff have done everything they can to address the problem, but the bottom line is that the situation cannot be resolved without the employment of more teachers. Sarina State High School is now calling on the DOE to exercise its powers under the statewide transfer system to ensure the school is fully staffed according to the allocative model. This has been done previously for other critically short-staffed schools, and the situation now warrants the same measures to be used to help Sarina High State School.

This is a statewide crisis, not one confined to my electorate. Sadly, according to the Queensland Teachers' Union, the QTU, classroom vacancies have skyrocketed 38 per cent in a single year. In Rockhampton alone, teacher vacancies have jumped 60 per cent. According to the QTU, 12 schools in mining towns throughout Central Queensland are facing 'critically' low shortages. Instead of investing billions of dollars in building new schools and other infrastructure, we should be looking at spending the money on fixing the teacher shortage crisis in our schools. We should bolster teacher numbers to give our students the best education and the best start that they can possibly have going forward.