

## Regional focus



By Gabrielle Clark



WA State of our Schools survey respondents who are currently teaching, or have taught, in regional areas have identified several issues for those working in the country.

High staff turnover was the biggest issue, with 71.98 per cent of respondents reporting this to be a problem.

Teacher shortages were highlighted by 64.30 per cent of respondents and the shortage of specialist teachers by 52.59 per cent.

The condition, cost or complete lack of Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) were serious issues for many respondents.

A lack of opportunity to transfer to the metropolitan area was another shared issue with 46.26 per cent experiencing this problem.

Other issues facing regional and remote area teachers were violence in the community and violence in the workplace.

While there are significant issues facing teachers in regional and remote parts of Western Australia the survey also found that some teachers saw several benefits to teaching in rural areas.

When asked about the benefits of teaching in regional areas one teacher said they experienced “lovely students, supportive colleagues, community support” while another said, “staff were very supportive, especially when you are alone.”

Another teacher said “As a young teacher, I took advantage of the transfer system to travel the entire state. I worked in some fantastic places and met terrific people. There were some hard times (not being paid for more than a month in an isolated Mid-West town for example), but these led to me becoming very good at my craft - innovative and resourceful. These opportunities facilitated my growth as a teacher and built my confidence.”

One teacher said “Developing my capacity as a culturally responsive practitioner. I am forever changed by my 3.5 year (so

far!) stint in the Kimberley; I have met some of the most amazing cultural leaders and learned so much. In my experience, there are boundless professional development opportunities and opportunities to take on leadership roles early in your teacher career if that is what you wish.”

Some other positive comments in the survey about teaching in a regional school included:

- “Everyone was so welcoming, staff and students, and treated me incredibly well.”
- “Connection to country, culture and building positive relationships with students.”
- “A more forgiving environment as a beginner teacher! Generally not large class sizes. Less distractions to cope with.”
- “Better lifestyle. Ability to be out on country. Relationships with First Nations colleagues, friends and community members.”
- “Affordable housing, access to wonderful locations (beaches, forests etc), no traffic jams, quick commutes to work, extra pay for some regional schools. GROH housing if available.”
- “Experiencing a different lifestyle and therefore children with different outlooks. I think every teacher should do a country stint.”

Overall, the survey found that there was around a third of respondents that are teaching, or have taught during their tenure, in regional areas. The most common area that teachers worked in was the Wheatbelt, followed by the South West.

While there is an alarming number of issues facing teachers in regional areas from high staff turnover to violence in schools, there were several benefits to teaching regionally too, the survey found, from smaller class sizes to living a different lifestyle when compared to metropolitan teaching.

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