

What do teachers do in the school holidays?



By Vaughan Cruickshank and Brendon Hyndman



Many people believe teaching is an easy job involving short days and long holidays. Anyone working in the profession, however, will tell you this is not the truth.

They will tell you teaching is a rewarding job, but that teachers are stressed and overworked. This has been made worse by a severe teacher shortage in recent years.

In fact, teaching is almost never a 9am to 3pm job; a lot of “invisible” work happens before school drop-off and after pick-up time. And the school holidays, while allowing some much-needed rest for teachers, can also be a busy time for them, as they prepare for the term and year ahead.

More than just teaching students

Classrooms generally open around 8:30am and most teachers are at school well before this time to prepare for the day. They don't get much of a rest throughout the school day – even their lunch “break” is often spent supervising children.

The job of a teacher involves much more than just teaching students.

After the school day, teachers can stay later to assist students who require extra help and there are usually meetings several afternoons a week.

Additional roles are also expected at different times throughout the year. These include things like:

- Coaching school sports teams.
- Running and attending information nights.
- Working on school camps.
- Attending school fairs and discos.

- Conducting parent-teacher interviews.
- Organising and producing school concerts.

After that, many teachers take student work home with them to mark at night and on weekends, especially around report card season.

These non-teaching roles and responsibilities can all add up to teachers doing over 15 hours of unpaid overtime each week, on top of the 37-40 hours of work their positions require.

Consequently, teachers are often exhausted when the end of a term arrives.

Work over the holidays

While most teachers have students in their classes for around 40 weeks a year, they are not just on holiday the rest of the time. Many teachers are busy beyond business hours and work during the holidays to meet the needs of children, parents, colleagues, leaders and system requirements.

Yes, teachers use this non-teaching time to rest and refresh themselves, but they also spend time doing all the tasks they don't have time to do during the busy school terms.

This can include:

- Planning and preparing for the term ahead.
- Designing curriculum-aligned learning tasks at the appropriate level for 25-30 different children and developing the required resources (such as activity cards and assignments).
- Marking and providing feedback on student work.
- Administrative tasks such as setting up and decorating classrooms, paperwork and writing student support referrals.
- Purchasing items for the classroom.
- Uploading data to various parent communication and reporting platforms.
- Training and various professional development units.
- Conducting extra-curricular activities such as summer school, holiday sports camps and school trips.

These things are not easily done while you are also teaching and managing the behaviour of 25-30 students, so many get pushed to the holidays.

Enjoying things like being able to go to the bathroom whenever they want is also a welcome change!

Resting, recovering and catching up on life

And similar to people in other professions, teachers use their holidays to rest, recover and decompress. They catch up on things like sleep and Netflix and gardening and dentist appointments and maybe go on a holiday with their family.

It should be acknowledged teachers generally don't get a choice when they take their leave. They often cannot afford to travel with their families as their holidays are in the most expensive and most crowded times of year.

So while teachers may appear to get more holidays than most other professions, the reality is they are not actually on holiday for all of this time.

It is more a mix of flexible work from home, school-based meetings and preparation for the following teaching term and some holiday downtime to unwind in between tasks.

Research shows many people deeply appreciate teachers' dedication to our school communities.

However, there is work to be done to change widespread and incorrect perceptions about their work hours or holidays, which misrepresents and devalues the work they do.

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They work, plan and rest



Authorised by Mary Franklyn, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.

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