

# A Tough Assignment: Teacher Placements in Government Schools

Report 9 – October 2000

## Background

The Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) employs about 20 000 teachers at nearly 800 government schools. More than 5 000 appointments, transfers and promotions of teachers are made each year. Staffing policies and practices have to respond to general educational trends, and address the often conflicting needs of students, teachers, schools and the system as a whole.

## What the examination found . . .

### Staffing overall

There is no overall shortage of teachers in Western Australia. Vacancy levels are normally very low but there are difficulties in staffing some subjects and schools, mainly in rural and remote locations.

### Variations in profiles

Teachers are not evenly distributed across the State. The most sought after schools tend to have older, permanent staff and low turnover. Less favoured schools tend to have younger, fixed-term teachers and high turnover.

### Merit selection

Principals, deputy principals and heads of department are now selected on merit rather than length of service. More women are now being appointed to these positions.

### School-based selection

About 120 schools can select some or all of their teaching staff, allowing applicants to be individually assessed against the special needs of the school. This appointment method allows teachers to by-pass the centralised placement systems.

### Country incentives

A range of financial and career development incentives apply at remote and difficult to staff schools. Applications and retention rates are improving at these schools.

### Vacancy matching systems

An automated system has improved the efficiency of centrally administered placements. The disadvantage of automation is that applicants are not directly assessed for their suitability for individual positions.

### Challenges and options

Various fine-tuning adjustments and more radical options should be considered as staffing policies and practices respond to trends and challenges.

## What the examination recommended . . .

### Staffing indicators

EDWA should define indicators, such as profiles and turnover rates, and measure whether staffing is moving compared to the preferred directions.

### Evaluation of changes

All changes to staffing practices should include measurable objectives and be rigorously evaluated.

### Review and action

EDWA should establish a structured program of review and action for staffing policies and practices.