



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017

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# BETTER LEADING FOR BETTER LEARNING

REPORT OF THE MIDDLE LEADERSHIP TASKFORCE TO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017



This report is the final in a series of reports and papers by PPTA's Middle Leadership Taskforce. It summarises the issues for middle leadership, and the work of the Taskforce to seek to address this. It also contains a section about the Workload Working Group 2016, and the ways in which that group's recommendations are relevant to the issues for middle leadership.

Progress on securing action in response to these recommendations has been slow, and it is becoming increasingly evident that the only way to make real progress to address middle leadership workload will be through the Collective Agreement bargaining in 2018. In the words of the conclusion to the paper, "The need to find solutions to the issues for middle leaders is critical, and is important to the whole secondary teaching profession and to the successful operation of our schools".

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the report be received.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Middle Leadership Taskforce was established after an impassioned speech during general business at the 2014 PPTA annual conference by Anna Heinz, a middle leader from Nelson College for Girls and long-time PPTA activist.
- 1.2 She argued that the Association needed to do more to address the workload, pay and other conditions of middle leaders in secondary schools. The resolution of conference was “That PPTA establish a taskforce to review the role of middle managers in secondary schools with a particular focus on contribution to achievement, remuneration, responsibilities, status and job size”.
- 1.3 In the end, the work to address this brief required a longer timeframe, and so the taskforce presented an interim report to annual conference 2015, and then a major paper titled ‘The middle leadership problem’ to the 2016 conference.

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## **2. THE IMPORTANCE OF MIDDLE LEADERSHIP**

- 2.1 Skilled and knowledgeable middle leaders are essential to the successful functioning of a secondary school.
- 2.2 Curriculum middle leaders have students and teachers as the heart of their work. They ensure high quality teaching in classrooms, safeguard the school’s assessment systems, lead and support the teachers in their teams on a daily basis, help to grow the profession through their work as professional leaders and appraisers of the staff they work with, have a leadership role in supporting new teachers, and provide the focus on learning at the centre of the school.
- 2.3 Pastoral care middle leaders support the wellbeing of students, support teachers in their pastoral work with students, and provide a link with specialist services such as the guidance and health teams of the school.
- 2.4 Middle leaders are rapidly becoming a scarce resource, with declining pools of applicants for positions and increasing numbers of teachers unwilling to take on the responsibilities. This is a potential crisis in secondary schools.

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## **3. SUMMARY OF ISSUES FOR MIDDLE LEADERS**

- 3.1 The 2015 paper identified these as follows:
  - 3.1.1 The tensions between needing to do an excellent job as both a middle leader and classroom teacher.
  - 3.1.2 Constant change that is often poorly managed, so that there is never a stable state during which to reflect and evaluate.
  - 3.1.3 The pressure to constantly drive up student achievement, leaving no room for work/life balance for teachers, especially middle leaders.
  - 3.1.4 Competition for students between departments and schools leading to a drive to increase student achievement at any cost.

- 3.1.5 Low trust, compliance-focused approaches in some schools.
  - 3.1.6 The variability of school-based decision-making about allocation of time and units to middle leaders.
  - 3.1.7 The paucity of management units available because numbers of units have not kept up with the changing environment in education.
  - 3.1.8 Low rates of applications for middle leadership positions because of the unmanageability of the job.
- 3.2 In their discussions since then, these issues have not greatly changed, but the evidence base has grown:
- 3.2.1 In early 2016 PPTA surveyed middle leaders, both curriculum and pastoral care, and the report of that survey identified significant numbers of teachers who had no wish to be a middle leader in future because of the high workload for the time available, and the insufficient financial reward for the extra responsibilities.
  - 3.2.2 The Workload Working Group conducted focus groups with middle leaders in the schools visited, and the kinds of issues identified by the taskforce were reinforced in these.
  - 3.2.3 The taskforce has studied a number of Masters and PhD theses by New Zealand teachers and academics on the subject of middle leadership.

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#### **4. THE WORKLOAD WORKING GROUP**

- 4.1 Annual conference 2016 asked the Middle Leadership Taskforce to focus on three areas:
  - 4.1.1 Engaging with branches and regions to consider ways to address the problems of work overload and stress that are causing a chronic undersupply of middle leaders.
  - 4.1.2 Continuing its programme of research, including focus groups with members.
  - 4.1.3 Continuing to develop ideas for STCA claims for the 2018 industrial round.
- 4.2 Events overtook the first two of these recommendations. In particular, the Workload Working Group with the Ministry of Education and other government agencies, which operated during the second half of 2016, focused very strongly on the workload of middle leaders, and therefore some of the taskforce's work was taken up by that working group. This had the significant advantage of engaging government agencies in helping to identify the issues and finding solutions.
- 4.3 A sample of branches was visited by PPTA and ministry staff, and focus groups were conducted with senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. It was felt that it would be pointless for separate focus groups to be conducted for the taskforce with middle leaders when so much rich information had already been gathered.
- 4.4 The areas that were identified by the Workload Working Group as the biggest contributors to middle leader work overload and stress were the following:

- 4.4.1 NCEA
  - 4.4.2 Performance management, appraisal and certification
  - 4.4.3 Compliance and administration
  - 4.4.4 School management
  - 4.4.5 New initiatives
  - 4.4.6 People and resourcing, particularly supply issues
  - 4.4.7 Issues specific to Maori and Pasifika middle leaders.
- 4.5 It would be fair to say that the workload issues identified by the Workload Working Group were not news to the PPTA members of the group. On the other hand, it was very instructive for Ministry of Education officials to hear teachers talking about their realities. Also, the involvement of officials from other agencies, such as NZQA, the School Trustees Association, Education Council, and the Education Review Office was highly productive and has led to ongoing work with these agencies on issues where they have power and influence.

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## 5. PROGRESS SLOW

- 5.1 Despite all the above, the work overload and stress of middle leaders continues unabated in practice at the school level. Outcomes from groups like the Workload Working Group are always slow to materialise, and there have been delays caused by the recent change of minister. The final report of the Workload Working Group has at least now been able to be published online on both the ministry's and PPTA's websites.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.2 The new minister, Nikki Kaye, has now read the report and asked officials to develop an action plan with PPTA and the other parties to the report. A very large spreadsheet ranking the recommendations as "Quick completion", "Medium term 3-12 months", "Ongoing work", "Long term 12 months +" etc. has been drawn up. The various parties meet from time to time, however progress is painfully slow.
- 5.3 Many of the recommendations from the Workload Working Group are relevant to middle leadership. These include:
- 5.3.1 Advice to schools to stop them "over-engineering" NCEA requirements such as those for internal moderation and other quality assurance practices.
  - 5.3.2 A cross-sector group to identify the key factors that drive compliance and administration workload and agree a plan to address these.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ppta.org.nz/advice-and-issues/teacher-workload/> and <https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/School/working-in-a-school/Secondary-Teacher-Workload-Working-Group-Report.pdf>

- 5.3.3 Promotion of the use of support staff to free up leaders to concentrate on teaching and learning.
- 5.3.4 Joint work to stop the over-engineering of performance management, appraisal and certification.
- 5.4 There are also recommendations advocated by PPTA alone because the other parties to the report would not agree. These included:
  - 5.4.1 Additional time allocations for middle leaders to provide for NCEA assessment, moderation and administration.
  - 5.4.2 Resourcing of community liaison positions for Māori and Pasifika.
  - 5.4.3 ERO to monitor operational and management practices and personnel management in schools to ensure that teachers and leaders can concentrate to the greatest extent on teaching and learning and leading learning.
  - 5.4.4 Ministry to develop change management protocols to ensure that additional compliance and administration effects are assessed before any implementation of change.
  - 5.4.5 Additional resourced time allowances for the leadership and management functions of middle leaders.
- 5.5 It is worth noting that anything which involved significant spending by the Ministry of Education was not agreed to, and PPTA was told to “bring it up in the next STCA round”.
- 5.6 PPTA representatives were always clear at the outset of this process, and articulated at the meetings of the working group, that what was not achieved in the joint talks would be likely to be part of the union’s next STCA claim.

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## **6. IDEAS FOR STCA CLAIMS**

- 6.1 This was the third area of focus identified for the Middle Leadership Taskforce in the 2016 conference paper. The taskforce has had extensive discussions about the kinds of claims that might address the recruitment, work overload and stress issues for middle leaders.
- 6.2 Their current thinking is that the focus should be a combination of time and money, with various options being proposed for mechanisms to achieve this.
- 6.3 The taskforce has produced a paper for the negotiating team, to assist them in preparing the industrial strategy for 2018.

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## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1 The need to find solutions to the issues for middle leaders is critical, and is important to the whole secondary teaching profession and to the successful operation of our schools.