

Teacher Housing in Victoria – Turning Around decades of neglect

While there was no specific recommendation from Victoria's 2019 Expert Panel for Rural and Regional Students concerning Teacher Housing, its Report did endorse the finding of Commonwealth's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, released in 2018 by Emeritus Professor John Halsey.

Professor Halsey found 'that availability of good quality, affordable housing is essential' to attracting and retaining teachers and school leaders to rural and regional Australia.

While all states, including Victoria, provide limited housing for teachers in rural postings, some also provide rental subsidies as part of a package of supports to enable rural schools to attract and retain staff.

DE's policy on teacher housing begins with the following statement

*The Teacher Housing portfolio is supported by the Department, primarily as an incentive to attract Teachers to take up positions at **particular remote locations***

Victoria is an outlier amongst the states and territories in the teacher housing area in that

- the stock of teacher housing in Victoria (about 200 residences) is less than one tenth of that in each of NSW, WA, and Queensland each of which have in excess of 2000 residences
- the housing stock is managed as a passive asset within the portfolio of the Victorian School Building Authority. Residences are disposed of from time to time, however, there is no investment in new stock to replace them or to grow the asset base
- Teacher housing is only available in particular locations. It would make sense if those locations were connected to hard to staff schools or to areas where the private housing market is problematic. The relationship between availability and need is tenuous

At present, there are twin shortages impacting the staffing of rural schools:

1. a general shortage of teachers and
2. an acute shortage of housing

which is exacerbating the challenge for rural schools in attracting and retaining staff.

CEP would like to see:

1. The Department's policy of disinvestment and passive management of teacher housing be replaced by a policy of growth and its integration with the other incentives to support teachers to take up rural postings
2. The Department undertake a comprehensive analysis of the short, medium and long term need for teacher housing, taking account the challenges in:
 - a. finding staff in particular areas and schools,
 - b. changes in the patterns of teacher recruitment and
 - c. the conditions in local rental markets
3. This analysis form the basis of an investment strategy for the next decade with a benchmark of reaching a similar number of residences to comparable states

4. This investment strategy be supported as an ongoing component of the Departments capital budget initially set at 3% but able to be varied on the basis of the benchmark set and the analysis undertaken
5. As an interim measure, schools and the Department work together to reserve accommodation which is likely to be required for teacher housing as it becomes available in local rental markets and this be funded through the Department.
6. DE install a Teacher Housing management team or individual to oversee the teacher housing across the state, beyond just the maintenance program provided by the VSBA
7. VSBA and CEP set up regular meetings to discuss teacher housing issues/ concerns/challenges.

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