

SECOND CLASS

Schools forced to accept substandard staff

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SCHOOLS are being forced to employ underperforming teachers that they do not want, after losing the power to choose staff.

Principals have complained

schools are being directed by the Education Department to employ staff for the 2008 school year without school interviews and referee checks.

This process of "local selection" introduced by Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith in 2005, was supposed to allow schools to "hand pick" teachers

rather than accept Education Department placements.

South Australian Primary Principals Association president Glyn O'Brien yesterday said local selection was "on hold for this year" and unlikely to continue.

The problem has arisen because about 350 teachers entitled

to a job - including permanent staff with serious underperformance issues - are on the Education Department's list for priority employment.

However, there are only 230 teaching vacancies across the state.

Ms O'Brien said some of the teachers entitled to permanent

jobs and being forced on schools were so bad that principals were avoiding the process by refusing to tell the Education Department they had vacancies.

One school has been told to next year employ a teacher who had received three official warnings from the department.

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Teachers with serious health or underperformance issues are on the list, along with those returning from a stint working at disadvantaged or country schools.

Even schools which have specifically requested teachers with special skills have no choice.

One school which requested a specialist in behavioural management was told a standard primary teacher was sufficient.

Only specialist positions - like Japanese teaching - are being advertised in the metropolitan area.

Ms O'Brien said there were fewer vacancies because principals were "distrustful" of the process and were holding off recruiting staff as long as they could.

"The size of the priority pool makes some principals anxious about declaring their vacancy," Ms O'Brien said.

"Principals invariably try to do the best for their schools. They want the best staff, they want the most effective teachers and will use whatever strategy they can."

The situation was likely to remain the same unless there was "deliberate action" to change teachers' entitlements to priority jobs, Ms O'Brien said.

Compared with the 230 vacancies

for the 2008 school year, there were 700 available at this time last year.

For the 2007 school year, a total of 900 jobs were filled using local selection.

Dr Lomax-Smith said she wanted to resolve the problem.

"We are keen to work with principals and teachers to open up even more jobs to this new method of selecting and appointing teachers," she said.

Opposition education spokesman Iain Evans called on the State Government to immediately review the scheme.

"The Government has announced a policy they can't deliver," he said.

South Australian Secondary Principals Association vice president Jan Paterson said staff had complained about a lack of vacancies.

"Teachers have noticed that there's not many available, that they are not seeing many positions to apply for," she said.

An Education Department spokeswoman confirmed figures provided by the SA Primary Principals Association.

"So far this year, 230 vacancies have been declared and the process is open until prior to the beginning of the school year," she said.