Where Have all the Teachers Gone?

I have a very simple question for you... would you become a teacher?

For over a year now there has been a great deal of media attention regarding the teaching crisis and more recently the employment negotiations. These issues have not suddenly appeared overnight, rather these are issues that have been growing steadily over a number of years. Reporters, unions, politicians and principal’s groups have all thrown in their two cents worth regarding these issues with contradictory facts and opinions all the while missing the fact that all this is having a very real impact on our young people.

As a parent and as a principal I am confident in assuming that any parent would like their child to have a teacher who is well trained, highly qualified, highly skilled as well as being highly motivated, compassionate, inspiring and caring.

Many of the people described above are leaving the teaching profession or simply not choosing to enter it in the first place. The average tenure in teaching for a new graduate is around 3-4 years before leaving to pursue other careers outside of education. People who would make amazing teachers are not choosing teaching as a valued or desirable career. The number of adults training to become teachers is at an all-time low. The combined impact of all these factors is a rapidly shrinking workforce and a real risk of diminishing quality.

To cope with rapidly increasing shortages schools are employing teachers from overseas, some are combining classes and some have resorted to placing learning support teachers and/or senior leadership members back into classrooms. The knock-on effects of this are clear, more teachers needing time and support to build understanding of the New Zealand curriculum and culture, larger class sizes, limited support for students with additional needs, more children with behavioural issues remaining in class to be dealt with by classroom teachers, reduced support for teachers as school leaders become unavailable.

Surely what we all want in New Zealand is a situation where the best and brightest are motivated and inspired to get it into our classrooms. Classrooms where those with specific needs receive the support they need to be successful, where class size is such that teachers have time to really know and understand every child academically, socially and emotionally, where we have the utmost trust in those lucky enough to become teachers.

We cannot be drawn into the blame game or an us against them game. This is not about unions, politicians or attention-grabbing headlines...this is about our young people. This is about identifying what would make a positive difference now and for the future and doing everything we can to achieve this. What better place to invest than in our children.