"The Territory teacher’s rejection of the Martin Government’s offer of a 10% pay rise over three years is perfectly justifiable, says Terry Mills, Acting Opposition Leader.

"Asking teachers to accept what is in effect a pay cut and refusing to negotiate on a range of other issues will just harden the teachers resolve and increase the likelihood of industrial action."

"The Martin Government has clearly learnt nothing from its protracted dispute with Territory nurses and will adopt a similar bloody minded approach to negotiations with the teachers.

"This flies in the face of Paul Henderson’s claims that he is serious about improving education outcomes for Territory students.

"It is teachers who have the greatest bearing on a student’s academic achievement.

"To offer a pay increase that is less than the rate of inflation whilst ignoring a range of matters that relate directly to student management corrodes the morale of teachers in the Territory.

"Poor staff morale will inevitably lead to lower staff performance that will impact upon the quality of education delivered in Territory schools.

"Consequently the Minister’s claim that this is about improving academic standards is just empty rhetoric.

"Where the Opposition and Government do agree is in the use of stand down time for professional development. However, I stress my support is qualified.

"Because of the Martin Government’s inadequate and insensitive response to a range of professional issues raised by teachers, simply demanding that teachers use stand down time in a particular way falls well short of the mark.

"Particularly with the increasingly heavy load borne by teachers resulting from the mismanagement of the middle school changes.

"Changes to stand down arrangements must be part of a comprehensive package that respects the needs and wishes of the teachers. Slashing wages and conditions doesn’t achieve that."

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594