

APPA Submission - *Valuing the teaching profession - an independent inquiry (NSW) - 2020*

Changes to school operations arising from jurisdictional strategic responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have brought the nature of teaching, and the overall calibre of its practitioners, into the public focus in ways not seen before.

There is a fresh widespread recognition of the critical importance of teachers in the daily lives of children, families and economies the world over.

It should be a matter of regret that it has taken such dire circumstances for this level of recognition and acknowledgement to occur in Australia.

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) Report of 2014 made over 40 recommendations for changes to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) – all of which were adopted. Our universities have come under increasing pressure to expand their curriculum to include more training in application of information technologies; teaching students with disabilities; cultural awareness and competency; teaching students who are the victims of trauma; addressing issues related to poverty and other forms of disadvantage; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; literacy; numeracy; a broad range of capabilities; together with teaching a general curriculum that is already considered overcrowded and unwieldy.

The two ‘Gonski Reports’ have strongly signalled the complexities of school education in our nation and the combined recommendations of these two reports, have been widely publicised and broadly welcomed by the education community. They reflect levels of support needed by Australia’s schools and teachers as they continue to provide world class education through a diverse range of school contexts, constantly adapting to a wide range of evolving social circumstances – including recognition of the rise in mental ill-health amongst school aged children which is the subject of a report released by the Australian Primary Principals Association in January 2020) – and all before the rise and impact of an unprecedented global pandemic.

The time is long overdue for a re-setting of the community’s perceptions of the teaching profession – including the profession itself taking responsibility for pointing to community support for its work as a way of reassuring teachers that their work, care and concern for their students *is* recognised, and following periods of off-site learning supervised by families, at least now a little better understood.

There are, though, some other factors that must not be forgotten. It is a matter of record that for many years, teachers and school leaders have been subject to increasing levels of verbal and physical abuse by some members of the community and students. It is also a matter of record that the various forms of the media have been fixated on negative comparisons between schools based on scores in NAPLAN and other international testing, *despite warnings from the authorities conducting the testing programmes* that data arising from such testing, is just a snapshot or a starting point for a much more developed positive discourse about the contexts of schools and their students, and the mix of policies, training and cultural support that all work inextricably together to shape learning and determine learning outcomes.

If public perception of the value of teaching is changing for the better, this is something to be warmly welcomed. However, if this is the case, this changed tide must be brought to a high point and maintained by an enduring shift in culture, away from a focus on competition, towards a focus on what success really means for each child, and how that can be established as a cornerstone for Australia's continued development as a model democracy, economy and society.

For this to occur, our society must publicly demonstrate its support for our educators. Some of this *is* happening, but it must become a genuine and lasting cultural shift. It needs to become a collaborative, constructive, community-wide passion that concentrates our efforts on continuous improvement of our education provision, with a sincere and sustained commitment to equity, fairness and respect. This has implications for school facilities, staffing and financial resourcing. It also includes commitment at state and federal levels to industrial arrangements which reflect the high levels of knowledge, skill and commitment extant in the teaching profession, and will lead to the attraction and retention of Australia's finest to what should be espoused as one of the most warmly recognised and deeply rewarding professions in our society.



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