

2023 APPA National Conference

The Hon Jason Clare MP

Minister for Education

31 July 2023

I am sorry I can't be there today.

But Parliament is sitting so I am in Canberra.

I wish I was there. I really do.

I have been in this job for a bit over a year now.

And I hope you can see in everything that I do that I get how important you are.

That it's you and the teachers you lead who have the most important jobs in this country.

Think back to when you were little.

When you were in those little chairs.

When you played in that playground that seemed enormous.

We don't remember much from when we are little.

Our mums and dads. Feeling love and looked after. Or not. A big family adventure maybe.

Grandparents. And school. Friends. Fun. And that special teacher.

That says something doesn't it?

About 20 years ago New York City ran a recruitment campaign. They wanted more people to become a teacher.

The message was really simple.

Here it is.

"You remember your first-grade teacher's name. Who will remember yours?"

Simple and powerful.

Powerful because it's true.

Later this year we will kick off a campaign just like this right across the country.

It's not the solution to the teacher shortage crisis.

But it's important.

To remind us as a country about how important you are and hopefully encourage a few people thinking of being a lawyer or a banker to dream bigger and better.

To think about one day becoming you.

It's being designed by teachers and it will tell the story of teachers, real teachers, in every State and Territory, and the students whose lives they changed.

When I spoke at this conference in November last year, I released a draft of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

It is now started to roll out.

It is not perfect. But it's a start.

It includes scholarships worth \$40,000 to encourage some of the young people I just spoke about, young people about to do their HSC, to study teaching next year.

I suspect there are a couple of people in the room that got a teaching scholarship just like this when you were young.

One of the things that principals told me last year when we were going through the draft plan was that these scholarships were bonded. There was a quid pro quo. You got the money, but you had to make a commitment too. A commitment to teach for a number of years.

And that will happen here too.

Applications will open later this year.

A big part of the plan is also improving teacher training at university, and you might have seen a bit about that in the news lately.

Education Ministers met a few weeks ago and we agreed to some major changes to what students are taught at university and how we can improve the practical experience they get.

One of things a lot of teachers have told me is that when they first started teaching they didn't feel ready or prepared. That the course didn't focus enough on the things they needed. That the prac wasn't up to scratch.

It helps explain why only 50 percent of students who start a teaching degree finish it, and why 20 percent of those who do finish leave the profession in the first three years.

Just imagine if we could shift that dial. If most students completed. If fewer left after a few years in the classroom. If they felt better prepared.

That's what these reforms are about.

They include:

making sure all university courses focus on the fundamental things students need to know. How children learn. How to teach children to read and calculate. How to manage classroom behaviour. How to work with children with complex needs.

a Quality Assurance Board to make sure all universities do this

improving prac with national guidelines and better coordination as well as professional recognition of the teachers who mentor and support ITE students.

making it easier for people to take up teaching mid-career.

Again it's not everything, but it's important. It's a start.

And it's been designed by talking to teachers and principals. By having teachers and principals on the panel that recommended these changes.

Last year at this conference I also talked about the great things happening in our schools.

The things that don't make the front page.

The things you did through Covid to keep your team going. To keep students learning. The visits to children's homes to drop off classwork, because they didn't have a computer at home.

The fact that the average eight-year-old today reads about a year ahead of the average eight year old 15 years ago.

But I also talked about what I worry about.

About the education gap in this country.

15 years ago the gap in reading skills of eight-year-olds from poor families and eight-year-olds from wealthy families was about a year.

Now it's two.

And so many of those children never catch up. In fact the reverse happens. The gap gets bigger and bigger and bigger every year.

It won't surprise you I suspect if I tell you that we are now seeing a drop in the percentage of students finishing high school.

Not everywhere. Where it's really dropping is among poor kids and in our public schools.

In 2017, 83 percent of students in public schools finished year 12. Last year it was 76 percent.

Next year Education Ministers will develop a new National School Reform Agreement.

As a Federal Government we have made a commitment to work with the States and Territories to get every school on a path to full and fair funding.

That's important. But it not the end of it. What's also important is what it's spent on. What it's invested in. The difference it makes.

This next agreement is a real chance to tackle some of the biggest and toughest challenges you face everyday.

To make sure we invest this money in the sorts of things that will really help the children I just spoke about to catch up and keep up and finish school.

To close the funding gap and this education gap.

That's what the Review into a Better and Fairer Education System led by Dr Lisa O'Brien is all about.

It will recommend what we tie funding to in the next National Schools Reform Agreement.

Next month the national NAPLAN results come out and I expect they will show there are more students who need additional support.

We have done this deliberately.

We have raised the bar. On purpose. To identify the students who need additional support.

The job of the next National Schools Reform Agreement is to help provide that support.

To build a better education system and a fairer one.

That funds the things that will help these students to catch up, keep up and finish school.

Just in wrapping up, can I thank Malcolm who has wrapped up as President and congratulate Angela on taking the reins.

Malcolm has been an endless source of great advice in my first year in the job and I am really looking forward to working with you Angela.

Have a great conference everyone.

I really wish I was there.