

A celebration of excellence in teaching and educational leadership

Gregor Ramsey, Chair: Teaching Australia – Speech at Awards in Teaching Excellence, Parliament House, 29 October 2009

What a grand occasion! Let me add a warm welcome from Teaching Australia and particularly our Board of Directors to you all – here to celebrate the achievements of our teachers, principals, support staff, and schools. This ceremony draws school people from all over Australia together in our national capital, an entirely appropriate venue for this celebration.

Teaching Australia has been privileged to be part of the Australian Government's national awards for excellence in schooling since 2005. The awards are an excellent opportunity to showcase a few of the many outstanding achievements within this great profession of ours.

We look forward to the teaching profession having a continuing role in the awards over the coming years. It is an important and positive interface with the Australian Government.

We are seeing a huge national effort by government and education authorities to improve student outcomes and invest in Australia's future through the social, economic and technological gains that will follow.

The Australian Government's support for the Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence is part of that national effort. Quality teaching and school leadership are, of course, at the heart of improved outcomes, and as I should remind you, so is strong parental support.

The awards recognise that good systems and processes, new curricula and materials, and national testing take us only so far.

In the end, we look to the professionalism and unswerving commitment of individual teachers, principals and other school staff working positively with students to achieve the best possible outcomes not only for students, but for parents and school communities as well.

This year's awards show once again the enormous contribution that teachers, principals and support staff make in our schools. The high quality education they support.

The award citations speak of passion, dedication, imagination and energy. Of individuals who show boundless initiative and leadership. Of school communities that work together with real commitment for common goals.

They are inspiring tales of people who make a real difference in the lives of our young people—and who are helping to shape a creative, harmonious, forward-looking society.

We are fortunate indeed to have such people in our schools, showing the way in what can be achieved.

What comes through very strongly in the success stories represented today by the awardees is the spirit and power of collegiality.

At the core of any profession is a collegiality committed to serving the client, in the case of teaching, our students. This is something that Teaching Australia has focused on, which must not be lost in our successor organisation.

I am impressed, too, by the wide use of research to inform practice.

These are hallmarks of a vigorous profession, and also a rigorous one.

In the citations I find people who embody the values and commitments of the *Charter for the Australian teaching profession*.

The Charter, which has been adopted by over 30 national professional associations, is a touchstone for teachers and principals about the profession to which they belong and offers a compact with the community. I commend it to you.

Its objectives encapsulate the achievements of our award winners:

- They have set high standards for every student and responded to individual needs.
- They have challenged their students to be all that they can be—to set demanding goals for themselves—and to make a contribution to others.
- They have created schools that welcome students—and fostered the development of values so that all students—whatever their personal circumstances—can participate and thrive.
- They have provided experiences that engage each student's capacity to learn.
- And there are many truly wonderful examples of award winners who have, and I quote from the Charter:

'inspired students to discover the joy of learning, drawing them into a world of knowledge ideas and creativity... and set them on the path for 'a lifelong engagement with education.'

Many award winners have wholeheartedly taken on the challenge of making schools places that bridge social and cultural divides.

Their work has

- helped refugee children and families adjust to life in a new land,
- given young people in the juvenile justice system a better chance in life,
- provided rich learning opportunities for students with special needs,
- and - dear to my own heart - worked tirelessly to achieve equal outcomes for Aboriginal students, particularly in remote communities.

Others have drawn disengaged students back into education by opening up new pathways to bright futures.

Award winners have used values and pastoral care to weave the fabric of student wellbeing—and social capital has been built with thriving school communities to build healthy schools.

I've been especially taken with achievements in engaging students with science and mathematics, my own teaching background, which I have recently returned to, trying to assist my grandchildren. These are critical areas of capability for

Australia's future. But we are all familiar with the reports of too few people taking on careers in those fields. Here, perhaps, are hopeful signs of a turnaround.

As a recent visitor to Antarctica, I'm in awe of one award winner who has inspired students with her own research in Antarctica and work with NASA scientists.

Not everyone can do that, but award winners have shown a host of other imaginative ways to get students interested in science, and build their understanding.

Language teaching – another area in which we've had concerns about our national capability - seems to be prospering, at least in the hands of our award winners. If the work of our award winning teachers of Indonesian and French is any indication, there will be a turnaround of interest there too.

The awards also show solid foundations being laid for lifelong learning - through leading practice in early childhood education and innovative approaches to developing literacy and numeracy.

What features strongly in the work of many award winners is the creative use of new technologies:

- to connect the real world of today's students with their schooling
- to engage students, in ways that respond to different learning styles and rates of progress
- to extend learning opportunities, taking students to exciting places beyond school walls
- and to exploit their potential as sophisticated learning tools

Our schools are a microcosm of our society, with all its complexities and challenges. And we look to those in our schools to embrace the opportunities thrown up by change.

I encourage you all to read the citations for the award-winning principals, teachers, support staff and schools. They are testament to a trust well-earned, and to a healthy national education system, despite what is sometimes said in the press.

I'm sure you will feel, as I do, that our young people are in good hands.

Warmest congratulations to all our award winners for a job exceptionally well done.

Thank you all.