

# South Australian Primary Principals Association Submission To The Inquiry Into Teacher Education.

## Summary of recommendations

- *That there is a variety of options for entering training and education programs in preparation for teaching, including flexible delivery and school based internship models which allow people to train with minimal disruption to family location*
- *That recommendations are made to employers that they work more closely with training institutions to tailor training programs to suit hard to staff areas and areas requiring specialist training and to actively resource these programs*
- *That employers actively participate in the training of new entrants to the profession and that the induction year is included in that program*
- *That all graduates are able and required to gain experience in a wide variety of schools, particularly those in disadvantaged and culturally different settings*
- *That trainees are exposed to and trained explicitly in the total work of teachers, including student behaviour management, parent teacher relations, managing student wellness and engagement, extra curricula activities etc*
- *That teachers are trained for inclusion and therefore able to deal competently with the special needs of children, including those with disabilities, health issues including mental illness and special education needs*
- *That greater time and resources are provided to improving the length and quality of the practicum*
- *That training and education programs reflect the complexity of teaching in the primary years and the need to understand not only the nature and development of the primary aged child but the full scope of curriculum that child requires*
- *That trainees are competent educators of literacy, numeracy and technological applications in learning*
- *That the curriculum of candidates for teaching reflects contemporary knowledge about cognition and learning styles as well as current pedagogical theory which incorporates latest research and development*
- *That advances in professional knowledge relating to the management and well being of children from other disciplines such as the brain sciences, social work and counseling form part of the curriculum content of training programs*
- *That trainee teachers are only able to undertake practicum with recognized and accredited skilled practitioners who are included in the total training process as partners and supervisors*

- *That the requirements and the content of the school based practicum program be reviewed and given equal weight to that of the academic programs*
- *That all teacher trainees do a minimum time of practicum and that experience is assessed against a set of agreed standards that form the basis of minimal competency status for registration*
- *That the practicum is resourced well to ensure supervising teachers are fully involved as partners in training*
- *That the full school year is used for teacher education and training and that students are expected, as part of their studies, to engage in school, community based children's activities or some other recognized and approved activity that will develop the leadership and teaching expertise of students*
- *That there is a quality assurance process using a formal set of standards for teacher preparation and education across Australia and that these are used to accredit providers of teacher education and training programs*
- *That employers and registration boards contribute to a mandated component of induction for new graduate teachers*
- *That the ongoing professional development funding arrangements of educators is reviewed and that minimum standards are applied to continuous professional learning and qualifications improvement as a precursor for teacher re-registration across the nation*
- *That pre-service training and education programs recruit and train teachers from all age cohorts*
- *That programs ensure a range of different pathways towards teacher training that draw from other fields of experience and training*
- *The profession of teaching is positively promoted to young people in the community and those representing the cultural complexity of South Australia*

## **Introduction**

The South Australian Primary Principals Association presents this submission to the inquiry with a particular focus on issues pertaining to the training and education of teachers in South Australian Public Schools.

The public school tradition in South Australia is a strong and innovative one that has continued, through the work of its educators, to reform primary level teaching and learning. Through this work, it has built a strong reputation for quality teaching and has contributed substantially to the professional reputation and profile of educators, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

## **South Australian geography and demographics**

All children in South Australia are entitled to public primary education, either in schooling or distance mode settings. Services are provided in a wide range of very

interesting and sometimes challenging settings, ranging from inner city multicultural schools, to remote rural and specialist schools for Aboriginal and Anangu Children.

Given that most of the population in South Australia is centred around the city and suburbs of Adelaide, a small number of regional cities and larger towns, then predominantly in small rural towns and centres, recruiting teachers and retaining them for reasonable periods of time is problematic.

This is further exacerbated by the restrictions on studying teaching degrees and undertaking teacher training and education that is still only accessible in Adelaide. There are no variations to the standard semester based, on-campus university programs. Opportunities to study and gain school based experience and complete practicum requirements by distance or mixed mode program delivery, summer school intensives and other flexible packages are still not available. Such options would be a productive option for those who reside in country areas and whose family interests mean relocation is not possible.

The preparation of qualified teachers prepared to work in remote and isolated areas has been supported by a special program, which has had significant support from the Department of Education and Children's Services over recent years. The recruitment program to the Pitjantjatjara/Anangu Lands has been particularly successful. Specific training and induction for work in bi-cultural communities is essential if the children in these areas are to receive an excellent service. Incentives and positive marketing of rural teaching options are important throughout training and during the transition from training programs to the induction year.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- ***That there is a variety of options for entering training and education programs in preparation for teaching, including flexible delivery and school based internship models which allow people to train with minimal disruption to family location***
- ***That recommendations are made to employers that they work more closely with training institutions to tailor training programs to suit hard to staff areas and areas requiring specialist training and to actively resource these programs***
- ***That employers actively participate in the training of new entrants to the profession and that the induction year is included in that program***

#### **Teachers working with complexity**

Similarly, in data collected from members in relation to teacher education and training, it is apparent that much greater attention must be given to the preparation of teachers who work in significantly disadvantaged areas. Poverty and the consequences of this and other factors which limit children's capacity to engage fully in their schooling, means teaching in these schools is demanding and requiring a substantial repertoire of professional knowledge, skill and pedagogical expertise.

The limited opportunities student teachers have to observe and work in schools with significant numbers of disadvantaged students means that often, their first appointment is the first exposure to schools with complex student learning and support needs. Many teachers graduate with unrealistic expectations of teaching and with a low level of commitment to working in schools that serve a diverse mix of students from significantly disadvantaged schools.

More explicit training in student counselling, behaviour management, cross cultural communication and effective home school relations is a fundamental part of training that must be incorporated into the total package of teacher education and training prior to appointment.

Public education also has a commitment to and responsibility for the inclusion of all children in the primary years, including those who have intellectual, physical or other disabilities that require intensive support and special provision of care, facilities and teaching programs. In the main, such children are enrolled in the mainstream and participate in the local school setting in regular classes or special class provisions.

All teachers are expected to deliver services to children with specific learning needs, and in particular, to children with disabilities. Teacher education curriculum must accommodate the special education needs of children and know how to facilitate the design and delivery of individual learning plans for them.

***Recommendations:***

- ***That all graduates are able and required to gain experience in a wide variety of schools, particularly those in disadvantaged and culturally different settings***
- ***That trainees are exposed to and trained explicitly in the total work of teachers, including student behaviour management, parent teacher relations, managing student wellness and engagement, extra curricula activities etc***
- ***That teachers are trained for inclusion and therefore able to deal competently with the special needs of children, including those with disabilities, health issues including mental illness and special education needs***
- ***That greater time and resources are provided to improving the length and quality of the practicum***

**Curriculum and learning**

South Australia now works within the S.A. Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework, (SACSA) which is the mandated curriculum and with which all teachers program and assess student learning. Primary educators are required to deliver programs incorporating at least 6 areas of the curriculum, with some flexibility for 2 specialist areas, as well as a range of cross curriculum essential learnings.

There is limited subject specialisation in primary years, and still a tradition of one class, one teacher. The most frequent specialisation is in languages, physical

education and the arts. However the ability to staff schools within formulae and use specialist teachers is often more possible in schools located in high socio-economic areas or are well-funded and/or creative.

It is essential that training teachers focus on not only their capacity to teach across 8 areas of the curriculum, but to have a well developed specialisation that augments the school's overall teaching capacity. Languages are of particular importance. This includes the capability to integrate literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Given the generalist nature of the primary educators work, it is important that teachers are aware of the long-term implications for programming and planning. The present practicum processes are limited and do not give a clear picture of the complexity and accountability of primary teachers work nor the long-term nature of the program over a full year. Nor do they necessarily deal with those aspects of the teacher's work that are critical to the ongoing professional services offered to parents and caregivers. The home-school relationship, reporting to parents about progress, resolving issues and concerns, negotiating special curriculum provisions, student management issues, and the management of critical incidents are all part of teachers work.

As well as exposure over a range of school settings in order to broaden the perspectives and get a realistic picture of the complexity and diversity of students in public school settings, it is important that candidates also build a long term relationship with a single site that gives them a deep understanding of the role of the teacher over an extended period of time and trains them in the peer, student and family relationships that are required of them in their teaching role.

### **Recommendations:**

- *That training and education programs reflect the complexity of teaching in the primary years and the need to understand not only the nature and development of the primary aged child but the full scope of curriculum that child requires*
- *That trainees are competent educators of literacy, numeracy and technological applications in learning*

### **Innovations in teaching in the primary years**

The field of primary education has been the locus of significant reform over recent years. The "Learning to Learn" project that many public schools in South Australia have been involved with, along with the continued professional development and research work that departmental initiatives, principal and other professional associations, and educators in schools have done in reforming classroom practice, has meant substantial change in the design and delivery of the primary years curriculum.

These influences along with our increasing knowledge of how the brain works and the integration of learning and support technologies in primary classrooms has meant significant advances in the nature of the work of teachers and the way children learn.

The use of activity based methods and the notion of constructivist learning theory has been an emphasis in primary schools for some time, and particularly since the introduction of the SACSA. Classroom and school design has not kept abreast of the developments in teaching approaches, the physical size of children in senior primary classes and the knowledge teachers now work with to improve engagement and efficacy of learning.

***Recommendations:***

- ***That the curriculum of candidates for teaching reflects contemporary knowledge about cognition and learning styles as well as current pedagogical theory which incorporates latest research and development***
- ***That advances in professional knowledge relating to the management and well being of children from other disciplines such as the brain sciences, social work and counseling form part of the curriculum content of training programs***

**Arrangements for practicum and trainee educator access to schools**

Presently there are limitations to the relationship of the practising profession and the training institutions in relation to the professional preparation of teachers. The connection between the public system and the training institutions is governed by University policy about students contacting schools and doing extra or voluntary practicum work outside the formally negotiated and compulsory school experience arrangements.

There seem to be problems getting sufficient placements for trainees and the connection between the academic staff and the school based supervisors is tenuous in most cases.

Financial and time restraints limit the amount of in school time for university staff in order to refresh their practice as educators of primary aged children, and in the process of school based training and assessment of teaching students.

The small amount of financial remuneration for supervising teachers is a disincentive to them becoming regularly involved in the training of teachers and the way this remuneration is paid is also limiting. There are no funds to service a whole school commitment to teacher education, from the employer or the training institutions, and therefore the capacity to release teachers, provide expert instruction at the school site and provide other school based enrichment of teaching student's programs is limited to the goodwill and capacity of individual teachers. Indeed the formal development of school based teacher training expertise is urgently needed and warrants special funding and program development and accreditation.

This issue warrants some further discussion at the professional association level to ensure that the profession itself plays an important part in ensuring highly skilled teachers train its prospective members. There are opportunities for rich partnerships with employers, universities and associations to ensure the best training options are available to prospective teachers in public primary schools.

It is of concern that some students undertake the minimum length of practicum when proceeding through to post graduate level studies at universities. There are cases where students proceeding into honours level and beyond, can do the minimum first year practicum prior to gaining qualification. Members expressed similar concerns about the limited exposure to schools the one-year postgraduate teacher education courses provide.

There is now a significantly different process for teacher training through special teacher training providers such as Tabor College in South Australia. Candidates spend a greater length of time in school-based components from the very beginning of their courses. A long term relationship is built up with a school over time.

The actual content of teacher education programs at the university is subject to the specialist expertise, professional interests and talents of the staff within them. There seems to be a need to work not only on internal consistency in programs but cross institution consistency to ensure quality and complementarity between institutions.

The separation of training and preparation of prospective teachers and the responsibilities for the continuation of novice teachers in their induction year is an important issue that needs further work. There is presently little institutional support, resourcing or explicit policy for the quality induction of graduate teachers by the Department of Education and Children's Services.

***Recommendations:***

- ***That trainee teachers are only able to undertake practicum with recognized and accredited advanced skill practitioners who are included in the total training process as partners and supervisors***
- ***That the requirements and the content of the school based practicum program be reviewed and given equal weight to that of the academic programs***
- ***That all teacher trainees do a minimum time of practicum and that experience is assessed against a set of agreed standards that form the basis of minimal competency status for registration***
- ***That the practicum is resourced well to ensure supervising teachers are fully involved as partners in training***
- ***That the full school year is used for teacher education and training and that students are expected, as part of their studies, to engage in school, community based children's activities or some other recognized and approved activity that will develop the leadership and teaching expertise of students***
- ***That there is a quality assurance process using a formal set of standards for teacher preparation and education across Australia and that these are used to accredit providers of teacher education and training programs***
- ***That employers and registration boards contribute to a mandated component of induction for new graduate teachers***

- *That the ongoing professional development funding arrangements of educators is reviewed and that minimum standards are applied to continuous professional learning and qualifications improvement as a precursor for teacher re-registration across the nation*

### **Age profile of primary educators**

The average age of primary teachers is now in the mid-high 40's range in South Australia. Despite predictions of a nation wide teacher shortage, there have been few direct recruiting strategies. Given the downsizing of the public sector and the retention of teachers in the system and their right to statewide industrial conditions, most recruitment is to country or to short-term contract positions.

#### ***Recommendation:***

- *That pre-service training and education programs recruit and train teachers from all age cohorts*
- *That programs ensure a range of different pathways towards teacher training that draw from other fields of experience and training*
- *The profession of teaching is positively promoted to young people in the community and those representing the cultural complexity of South Australia*

The South Australian Primary Principals Association is prepared to discuss this submission further should the committee require further elaboration on the ideas presented here.