

The Hon. Adrian Piccoli, Minister for Education

NSW Education Symposium 2016

27 October 2016

High Expectations Must Be the Standard for All Schools

Let me begin by acknowledging we are on the traditional land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people here today.

Thank you Aunty Norma for your welcome to country.

Acknowledge:

- Simon Breakspear
- Pasi Sahlberg
- Xiaoyan Liang
- Mark Scott and Geoff Newcombe and Rosalie Nott representing Brian Croke.
- Charles Leadbeater and other international guests

I would also like to welcome Mr Jeff Johnson, President of the Alberta Teachers Association, who has joined us from Canada.

Good morning and welcome to the NSW Education Symposium.

We are excited to have gathered together such an esteemed group of Australian and international educators and leaders of the profession.

The purpose of this symposium is for you to influence the future direction of education in NSW; it is also an opportunity to acknowledge the great work already occurring across 3137 schools, 92,000 teachers and 1.2 million students in NSW.

And, in particular, it's a great opportunity to recognise the great work done by you – the 270 teachers, principals and educational leaders invited here today – invited because of your outstanding contribution to what I am confident is a common endeavour: to help our students achieve their full potential.

Five years ago we began a comprehensive education reform agenda in education in NSW.

When I say we, I mean myself, as Minister for Education for all schools, and education stakeholders, especially our principals and teachers. We have worked together and there is a lot we can all be proud of. We are implementing evidence-based education reforms, we are seeing additional resources flowing to where they are needed and we are starting to see real, sustained change in our schools.

We have shown a willingness to do things differently. And to take hard, sometimes unpopular, decisions because they were right

As for the Government's role in all this, we have tried to get the big picture policy settings right so that the teaching profession is better respected, better prepared and better resourced.

And all of this with one clear goal: to allow students to reach their full potential.

Ultimately, however, the Government sets the macro policy framework but I teach no children, I lead no schools. For the full effect we need your explicit support and enthusiastic commitment as we drive micro reform, with a forensic attention to what we know works and how to make it happen not just in some classrooms and in some schools, but in every classroom, in every school, every day.

We are well placed to drive that micro reform, those changed classroom practices, because our reform settings are based on Australian and international best practice. We have taken the advice of experts such as those speaking at the Symposium over the next two days. And we have taken advice from you, the profession.

The key advice was that government must take the teaching profession with it from the start, otherwise you cannot deliver change in the classroom. And you must be prepared for it to take time to take effect.

In this I am particularly mindful of the experience in both Finland and Canada where cooperation – not just for months but for years -- was core in successfully reshaping their education systems. It is clear to me that systemic and sustained reform in education can only be achieved with the support of the teaching profession.

We have been able to achieve that broad consensus in NSW – across the sectors, which are working more closely than ever before – with all stakeholders on board and often with the support of the Opposition.

So the scene is set.

Let's take a moment to look at where we are.

We listened to the profession about the critical importance of raising the status of teaching.

We commissioned eminent NSW educators to develop policies that would result in the best quality teaching and learning in NSW schools. Great Teaching, Inspired Learning was welcomed by the profession and has shaped the national conversation on quality teaching.

GTIL's guiding principle is that at every stage of the teaching career, from entry level teachers to the principalship, the focus is on high quality professional practice.

GTIL is about attracting the best and brightest into teaching and giving them the best quality teacher education programs.

It's about accrediting teachers according to best practice standards, and then requiring them to maintain their professional growth and development.

It's about recognising outstanding teaching, accomplishment and leadership.

But improved teaching and learning comes at a price. To deliver on this goal we secured increased funding – an additional \$5 billion as the first state or territory to sign up to the 'Gonski' agreement, a sector-blind

funding agreement that sees funding increase for public, Catholic and Independent schools. I remind my friends in Canberra again – every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend.

We have led sustained cross-sectoral intervention to highlight the importance of literacy and numeracy, beginning with early intervention for struggling students in Kindergarten to Year 2.

And it is working. I've seen great results in a **Hari Krishna** independent school on the North Coast, at St James Catholic School in Muswellbrook and at Hillvue Public in Tamworth, to name a few.

I announced last month this work will be expanded to 673 schools across sectors with an extended focus to secondary education.

We targeted reform to bridge performance gaps between students in rural and remote schools, and their metropolitan peers.

We have reformed the state's education architecture with advice from stakeholders and from eminent educators.

Next year the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards becomes the new NSW Education Standards Authority. Its charter will include a strong focus on monitoring, maintaining and improving education standards in all schools across the state.

I want the three key drivers of education in this State, overseen by the Authority – curriculum, assessment and teaching -- to feed into each other. What we learn from assessment needs to feed into teacher professional development and initial teacher education; it then needs to influence curriculum development and teaching strategies. Assessment data will tell us how successful we have been and guide us on what to do next.

A good example – our NAPLAN data has been telling us that we need to improve in writing. BOSTES has analysed the data and is explicitly targeting what needs to be learnt and what teaching strategies are needed at different stages of schooling to improve writing. Data from future assessments will then tell us how successful we have been.

We want to create a system that uses data to constantly monitor, refresh and renew approaches to teaching and learning.

The new agency is the first of its kind in Australia.

Am I happy with where we are? Yes, but we can and we must do more. It's got to happen in the classroom.

Pasi Sahlberg, who has been travelling with me across far western NSW this week, will be talking about small data. And it's a very powerful idea:

the way to improve outcomes across a school or a system is for everyone to focus on collecting the small data – the small detail to inform and direct explicit teaching to ensure children are not left behind and, instead, grow and learn every week they are at school.

But... nothing changes if change doesn't happen in the classroom, with teachers and children and that wonderful chemistry of learning.

Change is not inevitable and innovation won't spread throughout a system just because it's a great idea.

Schools are changing –we can see evidence of that today from the innovations at diverse schools like Claymore Public, Coonamble High, Riverside Girls, St Phillip's Christian School and Parramatta Marist, showcased for you today. I saw it on Tuesday at Moree East Public and yesterday at Walgett Community College.

I want to make it clear that in NSW I believe we do have a high-performing school system with a high-quality teaching workforce. But we can do better.

You are here because you know what needs to happen. You are here today because you all deliver or lead outstanding practice – the sort of quality teaching that changes lives, inspires students and helps to produce young people of whom we can be justly proud.

You know what needs to happen – but how can we as system and school leaders make it happen in every classroom?

I'm not suggesting that change at the micro level will happen overnight. Systemic change is hard to achieve. We have worked hard, and successfully, to get the system settings right. Change in classrooms is even harder to achieve. It takes a genuine commitment to reflect, assess and be prepared to change.

Before we commit to just working harder, let's ask some questions that might challenge our way of doing things.

Are we too reliant on a top-down model where change trickles slowly into classrooms?

How do we turn the trickle into a torrent?

Do we get complacent, resting on our laurels because we do have a high-performing school system with a high-quality teaching workforce?

Do we have the energy and the drive and the capacity to turn the good into great?

And, yes, I know, there will be resistance.

Frankly, I have been disappointed by the response of some leaders who, when challenged about literacy and numeracy outcomes in their schools, question the tests instead of engaging with the data and reflecting on the school's efforts.

As a minister and, more importantly, as a parent of two children I'm taken aback when I see letters complaining about setting minimum literacy and numeracy standards for our HSC students. Why shouldn't we set high expectations for the HSC and challenge schools and the government to equip students with strong literacy and numeracy skills – with plenty of time for improvement?

Let's be blunt. I hear of some teachers and schools taking the easy way out, not pushing themselves enough. The primary teacher who avoids technology lessons because her own knowledge is not up to speed. The Year 7 geography teacher who says it's not his job to teach children to read; the science teacher who lets the numeracy issues of her students pass by because numeracy isn't her responsibility.

Each teacher needs to take collective responsibility for the success of all students: not just "my students in my classroom", but our students in our NSW schools.

As a profession, teachers are wonderfully tolerant and genuinely understanding. But at times I worry the education sector is too kind to adults, too conscious of their sensitivities and concerns – and that often this is at the expense of students. It might be a school saying 'we know this is a change that will help our students, but it might upset the parents or teachers'. Or a principal who says about a teacher 'He's not great but I'll wait until he retires'.

Too often we have seen schools retreat into a social welfare mentality – at least the kids are here and not on the streets – rather than challenging

teachers and inspiring students. “What can you expect us to do, look at the students we have”, I have heard that several times.

We can't settle for 'it's the best we can do'.

Because, the fact is we can do better. Great practice, relentless focus on outcomes and high-quality explicit teaching achieves results- whatever the profile of students and the issues in the community.

I encourage you to take on the doubters, the resisters with confidence knowing that we have your back – as a profession and as individuals.

To the teaching profession I say, embrace accountability.

Accountability and standards are different ways of describing the same thing. We pride ourselves in NSW in having a high standard education system – and we guard those standards by having accountabilities built into the system.

But that accountability needs to be more than an audit condition, or a tick in a box in the registration process. It needs to be an essential ingredient in the way we understand our commitment to students. You need to hold your peers accountable – not just to achieve the minimum, but to go as far beyond as possible. And where those standards are most important is in the classroom.

Recently a principal told me about one of her teachers who had been incredibly resistant to rethinking his practice. He blamed the kids, he

blamed the school but the fact is things weren't working in his classroom and, after six years, he thought he knew all he needed to know. Finally, thanks to the work of the principal and Instructional Leader he acknowledged he needed help. Thanks to the persistence from the principal he is now one of the best-performing teachers in the school.

And students understand the power of standards too. Recently I was speaking to a class of Year 9 students about the new minimum literacy and numeracy standard for the HSC.

It's funny what you hear kids say but one of the boys up the back told his mate what I have probably been too reticent to say: "They're just doing this to make us work harder."

That's exactly right.

The fact is we all need to do better.

So, what about the next five years?

Every day parents drop off their most important asset into our care. Their future depends on us. And it's that future we want to talk about at this symposium . . .so here is my 'as a parent, I wish' moment...

I wish for every student to be excited to get to their school in the morning.

I wish for every teacher to be excited to get to school, too.

I wish for every teacher to be an expert in their content knowledge – and to genuinely like children.

I wish for a curriculum delivered in challenging and relevant ways.

I wish for students to be equipped for life with solid literacy and numeracy skills so they can immerse themselves in deeper learning.

I wish for higher understanding of the opportunities, the power and the dangers of an ever-changing and increasingly digital world.

I wish every student could have a teacher like Miss Lachlan who you will hear about in some interviews with kids recorded for the conference.

One of her students said, “I get inspired by Miss Lachlan, on her binder it says ‘Teachers who love to teach will teach children to love to learn’.”

Another said: “When you get really passionate teachers, it’s contagious; if they love a subject you can’t help but love it too.”

I wish that every student leaves school with a positive sense of wellbeing.

Finally, I wish that through our efforts over the next two days we help ensure that my children, your children, that all children in this state have an experience at school that inspires them to reach their full potential.

This is why the micro matters.

Thank you.