

Gold star for NSW plan to improve teaching

Published in The Australian, Page 12, Wednesday 13 March 2013

*The new blueprint should be a model for others for how to achieve education reform, writes **Ben Jensen***

A major education reform was announced in NSW last week and we nearly missed it. NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli released his strategy to improve schooling in NSW with his *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: A Blueprint for Action*.

We need to applaud this when it happens.

The NSW blueprint is what we look for in policy reform. It is evidence-based. It provides clear interventions with an implementation timeline. It was developed thoughtfully with input from all stakeholders. Not surprisingly, it was supported by nearly everyone when it was released.

The blueprint identifies what needs to be changed. At present, student teachers often receive initial education of mixed quality that doesn't prepare them to teach. Then they often enter schools with substandard mentoring, receive professional development that often has little impact on learning and work in an isolated environment.

The blueprint will raise standards so only the top students get into teaching courses at universities. The quality of initial teacher education will be assessed and the results made transparent. All the evidence shows this will have a real impact on children's learning.

Some universities that will lose government money for producing teaching graduates of a low standard have already started complaining. This was expected but will be overcome easily. No doubt they will launch a concerted campaign to prevent much-needed reform but their rent-seeking behaviour needs to be called out.

Once in schools, the blueprint will ensure that new teachers have mentoring from only the most effective teachers. Professional collaboration will be increased. NSW schools will shift from ineffective professional development courses that are a waste of money to a system where teachers continually work together to improve teaching.

This is what the world's best systems do.

The blueprint contains plans to address underperformance. Often this is met with fierce opposition from teacher unions. But they have supported these measures for two reasons. First, the unions have been heavily consulted. Significant reforms in high-performing systems across the world have highlighted the payoffs to an inclusive process.

Second, the minister has not bought into the political game of constantly calling for poor teachers to be sacked. While it may be a political winner for some, it is bad policy. Politicians should take note. If you want to address underperformance, focus on improving teaching. If you yell about sacking poor teachers, you won't get results.

Driving these reforms is analysis of what constitutes effective learning and teaching.

This sounds commonplace but many school education reforms have shied away from defining what are and are not effective behaviours.

The hard work of implementation is yet to come, which will determine the success of the blueprint. The minister and his department will have to role model these behaviours and develop a clear reform narrative.

This is the secret to successful education reform. It is not sexy. It doesn't involve new buildings or IT systems. It is slow, grinding improvement in the long term. This has been the cornerstone of successful education reform across the world. NSW is now on the right track.

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