
Teacher Quality Crucial for Student Achievement

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) has called for higher ATAR score requirements and a more rigorous and reliable selection process for those wishing to become teachers.

APPA President Norm Hart said that the quality of teaching is the single greatest in-school influence on student achievement. Steps should be taken to improve the selection process, course work and professional experience before students enter the profession as classroom teachers.

“APPA believes that ATAR requirements for education degrees should be higher, with applicants for education courses demonstrating academic achievement in the top 20 per cent of the population.

“In addition the selection process should include an interview to assess whether applicants have the social disposition and emotional intelligence to work with students, parents and colleagues,” Mr Hart said.

Mr Hart added that student selection is rightly the role of universities, however, participation of school leaders in selection interviews would strengthen the process.

“Schools are very busy places and workloads and stress on teachers is increasing. APPA believes that somewhat haphazard placement practices would be improved through better collaboration between governments, universities, employers and schools.

“We recommend that an independent agency should be set up to provide quality professional development experience for teaching students in a range of school settings.

“Professional experience should be introduced early in university courses and be sustained throughout. This would help teaching students to understand the profession and, if teaching is not right for them, they should be able to withdraw from the course without financial penalty.

“We recommend at least 100 days of professional experience with a final placement of at least six weeks towards the end of the course,” Mr Hart said.

Mr Hart said that an internship model should be introduced so that pre-service teachers get more hands-on experience and should be remunerated for their work in the same way as interns in other professions are inducted.

“Pre-service teachers need to get an early understanding of the reality of day-to-day teaching so that their suitability can be determined early on,” Mr Hart said.

“Beginning teachers have to accept sole responsibility for their students on their first day in the classroom. It’s important that universities ensure graduating teachers have the skills and personal characteristics necessary for effective teaching.”

Mr Hart said that he hoped the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group would address these issues in its report to be released in early 2015.

APPA represents 7,200 primary school leaders in Government, Catholic and Independent Schools across Australia.

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**Media contact: Norm Hart (APPA President)
 0458 010 949
 Dennis Yarrington (APPA Incoming President)
 0466 655 468**

