

INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

Organisation: Wentworth Public School
Name: Mr James Wilton
Position: Principal
Telephone:
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Theme:

Summary

Opinions from James Brian Wilton, Principal of 39 years, presently Principal Wentworth Public School

The following opinions are not in preference order, but have equal weight. In expressing these I understand that the new Institute of Teachers will address competency standards, so my opinions are targeting recruitment and training.

RECRUITMENT

There should be two avenues to teacher recruitment:

1. The present avenue through academic achievement and choice
2. An alternative avenue of a traineeship, in which those persons not attaining the TER can opt to do a mix of work in a school and university training. A possible progression could be;
 - a. Teacher Aide – academic requirements similar to present Certificates 3 and 4 offered currently by the DET, offering an opportunity to specialise over a one year period, with 50% of time spent in class
 - b. Trainee Teacher – academic requirements similar to present two years of University training, but with emphasis on syllabus knowledge and classroom management. A substantial period of up to 50% of this 4 year period would be spent in teaching and related activities (assessment, programming and preparation)
 - c. Conditional Teacher – Able to teach under this existing classification devised by Institute of teachers. Complete final university qualifications during period set by Institute.

Some of the best teachers are not necessarily those who have the highest TER, or those with 5 years of training. The best teachers are those open to learning from their peers and from learning opportunities while on the job. We should give opportunity to suitably motivated and qualified persons to enter DET traineeships, which have a high practical component of training and expect the same academic qualifications as present.

Such an avenue to teaching would overcome disadvantage in aspiring persons from Aboriginal, isolated rural, rural low socio economic male, and low socio economic backgrounds, without lowering teaching standards.

TRAINING

Present University qualified probationary teachers lack knowledge and skills in syllabus content (especially in English and Mathematics), and in practical class management and organisational skills. While they have a significant knowledge of the background theory of learning – this does not equate to proven skills and knowledge in applying this knowledge in the classroom.

The following should be included in training:

1. A requirement that ALL teachers can demonstrate how to program, assess and teach reading and writing.
2. Increased emphasis on syllabus knowledge, so that the teacher can demonstrate a thorough understanding of each required syllabus they will be expected to teach.

3. Increased teaching practicum requirements in each year, with minimum requirements of successful completion of:
 - a. Years 1 and 2, 1 hour of teaching per week under supervision (such as formally provided in the days of Teacher Colleges)
 - b. Year 3, Four, three week periods of teaching with gradually increasing time in front of the class in full control of the assessment, programming and teaching cycle. Culminating in term 4 with 2 of the 3 weeks being in full control of the class.
 - c. Year 4, a one term practicum in full control of the class.

In all practicum sessions the trainee teacher must show an increasing degree of class management and class organisational skills. In the final two practicum sessions it must be clear that the trainee teacher understands how to assess, program and teach a developmental sequence in all KLA's they are responsible to teach, and that this include for secondary teachers "English". This would be in line with the DET's emphasis on Literacy across the curriculum.

TYPES OF TRAINING (EARLY YEARS)

At present we offer Primary and secondary training with some allowance for specialisation, such as "rural and remote scholarships" recently announced by the Premier.

An additional specialist stream should be developed for the Early Years (to cover developmental stages of a child 3 to 8 years old)

All international research indicates that the Early Years experiences of a child are the major factor in subsequent learning and social success.

In France this is recognised by specialist training and salary increases. In NSW the specialist infants and Infants mistress positions are a thing of the past, and pre school teachers are paid less, and largely work in pre schools run outside of the DET. In other words the Early Years are marginalised, in spite of our recognition of their importance.

While the inquiry, this is addressed to, cannot recommend the establishment of schools catering for 3 year olds up, it can recognise the need for specialist training for teachers of children 3 to 8 years.

The inquiry must recognise the essential need for teachers skilled in developing literacy, numeracy and social skills in the Early Years through the development of specialist courses outside of the present University offerings.

Minimum requirements should include:

1. Existing teacher requirements for K-6 teachers
2. Emphasis on literacy and numeracy in pre school years
3. Speech therapy (most low socio economic and Aboriginal students have moderate to severe language delay.
4. Emphasis on social development. (Social skills development delay is another major contributor to learning failure)

CONCLUSION

Teacher recruitment needs to provide opportunity for other than academic TER based entry, as previous practice indicates that there are more important qualifications than academic excellence. Such provision should give opportunity for the disadvantaged sections of society to gain entry to our Public Education system

Teacher training must provide a better practical base of syllabus knowledge, classroom management and organisation, and practical on the job training.

The teaching of literacy (the teaching of reading and writing in particular) must be mandatory for all teachers. It should be an expectation across the teaching levels and areas.

Teaching can only be learnt and assessed on the job. The amount of practicum time must be dramatically increased to prepare teacher trainees for their role.

Teacher training specifically for Early Years must be a priority, as these are the most vital years in a young person's education. Government policy has reduced the level of accomplishment and relevance of training provided, and eliminated it as a career (except for pre schools). It is of greater importance to have a successful Early Years Teacher training provision than it is to provide specialist secondary teachers.

Put simply without the foundations a child's education will not endure and grow.

**JIM WILTON
WENTWORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL
WESTERN REGION**