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NSW educators receive national awards

Three New South Wales teachers will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

Tiffany Sirisisavath from Zig Zag Public School (Lithgow), Leanne Gardiner from Maryland Care and Early Education Centre, and Cathryn Ricketts from Kellyville High School join nine other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from more than 1000 nominations in 2014, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Ms Sirisisavath, whose school is in a remote part of the Blue Mountains, was nominated by school parents and will receive an Innovation Award for driving technology growth and the school's digital literacy. Ms Sirisisavath developed and implemented technology tools to create positive change in the school's programs and in students' thinking and learning processes.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says he applauds her vision and practical application.

"Ms Sirisisavath has made a huge impact in the last 12 months. She broadened the school's technology scope to include digital literacy, digital citizenship and digital security. It focuses on students being able to inquire, create, communicate, operate ICT and develop digital ethics. This sort of approach adds to the quality of education that children can access in schools and is a credit to the value-add our ASG NEiTA teachers bring to education."

Student learning was also enhanced through a system of individual 'Login Key Ring Cards' which Ms Sirisisavath designed to manage access to computers. The login cards are now also used to assist students in accessing a myriad of online platforms and programs.

Ms Leanne Gardiner from Maryland Care and Early Education Centre was nominated by parents and will also receive an Innovation Award for bringing her love of travel and wonders of the world into her teaching programs, as well as her mentoring work with teaching staff.

Last year Ms Gardiner planned a trip to Peru and immersed her children in the adventure. What started as a simple discussion about the differences between schooling in Australia and Peru turned into an art and craft drive, with families donating items for Ms Gardiner to deliver to the children in a school in Cusco, Peru. The children also learnt basic Spanish and were able to follow her adventure in the country.

Mr Blewitt says Ms Gardiner's innovation makes for an exciting classroom environment and instils an eagerness to learn about the world and how it works from a young age.

"Having three year-olds discuss travelling to Machu Picchu is a constant source of amazement for their parents and it really makes learning about the world, fun and hands on. Ms Gardiner has demonstrated that with imagination, research and family involvement children can be transported to a different world, learning about various cultures, foods, languages, transport and housing. This develops a curious and questioning mind and it gives children context about what is around them and where they fit in."

Ms Cathryn Ricketts from Kellyville High School was nominated by the student council and will receive an Innovation Award for developing a drama therapy social skills program, giving all students, including those with a disability, an equal yet differentiated learning environment.

As a member of the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) team in 2013-2014, Ms Ricketts led a team of three teachers in coordinating student feedback and identified boys with learning and behavioural difficulties. Ms Ricketts has had extensive success in reducing incidents of the boys involved through drama therapy.

Mr Blewitt says drama therapy is used to achieve psychological growth.

"Drama therapy is also essential in ensuring the wellbeing of all students within the classroom. School can often be an escape for students. They may have issues going on at home that cause them to feel unsafe. There is a duty of care to provide a safe place for students to learn and thrive as happy and healthy individuals."

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated these inspirational recipients.

Chief Executive Officer of ASG NEiTA, John Velegrinis says he is humbled by the teaching calibre and the depth of experience of the award recipients.

"I congratulate Ms Sirisisavath, Ms Gardiner and Ms Ricketts along with the other NEiTA recipients. Their dedication, leadership and initiative is a true reflection of what NEiTA represents, celebrating quality educators in Australia. There is compelling evidence linking teacher quality to student achievement, and accomplished teachers demonstrate inspiration and enthusiasm for teaching and student learning. This is why NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years, because the community thinks these teachers deserve recognition.

"All of our national award recipients are passionate about the need for greater quality pre-service teaching programs, and they are teachers who also continually strive to better themselves, pushing the status quo and learning and adapting with their students."

The national awards are divided into three categories: leadership and development, innovation and community engagement. For more information on the 12 national awardees, including profiles go to: <http://www.asg.com.au/neita>

Eleven national award recipients will receive \$5000 professional development grants with one teacher getting the incredible opportunity to go to Space Camp in the U.S. One teacher is also awarded a \$2000 Disability Inclusion Grant.

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