Noori Ahmad acts locally but thinks globally. As a Year 6 teacher at Al Siraat College in Epping in Victoria, she creates an innovative and creative learning environment where risk-taking is encouraged.

Noori promotes a positive respect-based rapport with her students and their parents. She adapts teaching techniques and strategies to meet their individual needs, and employs a differentiated learning system in her classroom.

She tailors literacy and numeracy groups to different achievement levels and students are encouraged to choose activities such as group box, exploring different worksheets, iPad apps and educational board games.

A mentoring system developed by Noori, which sees high-achieving students matched with weaker performers in mathematics and reading, helps bridge the learning gaps. Noori also believes in active learning through whole-of-class class teaching, small group or whole class discussions and interactions with the students.

Encouraging students to share their work with the class is something that Noori promotes to build confidence and leadership. She tells her students they should learn from their mistakes, modify and try again because a confident attitude is essential for success in life.

Noori provides positive incentives to her students by giving verbal and written feedback. She does this to curb mediocrity and acknowledge excellence. She promotes a ‘C3B4ME’ strategy (see three people before you see me) that encourages children to share and ask for help from their peers before coming to a teacher.

<table>
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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Kirsten Boerema
Castlemaine Secondary College
Castlemaine, VIC

Kirsten Boerema is a former opera singer who has brought her musical talent and experience to Castlemaine Secondary College for the benefit of her students and the wider community.

Her career transition from performer to teacher was triggered in 1997 by the merger between the Victorian State Opera and Opera Australia that required a permanent move to Sydney. She declined that option, instead studying for a Diploma of Education and becoming a teacher. It was a life-changing decision and she has never looked back.

Viewing music as a discipline and describing her teaching style as ‘fun, yet rigorous’ Kirsten leads by personal example. She describes how her students have ‘watched me as I have learned the violin, viola, trombone and piano to assist them in their various ensembles’. She’s also proud to say that her students see her ‘undertake the same work they do every day’.

Kirsten takes care to engage the enthusiasm and passion of her students by tailoring learning and performance opportunities to their interests. Students are asked whether they would prefer performing rock, jazz, a cappella or mixed classical musical styles. Specialised tutors are then engaged to guide students’ progress in the musical genre they have selected.

Kirsten’s students have consistently achieved higher VCE results than the state average for the past four years. Outside of school Kirsten created the Goldfields Youth Symphony Orchestra to bring the joy of music to the Victorian town of Castlemaine.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Kirsten Boerema
Principal/Director: Mary McPherson
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Marianne Condon
Holy Spirit Community School
North Ringwood, VIC

A versatile teacher with 20 years experience, Marianne Condon uses SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) goals in her classroom. The children work out their goals before discussing and confirming them in a teacher conference. Once confirmed they share them on the SMART goals wall, and then assess their progress each week and set new goals when necessary.

Marianne also implements a ‘Growth Mindset’ with her Year 5/6 class at Holy Spirit Community School in North Ringwood, Victoria. She adds the word ‘yet’ to statements where the students say ‘I can’t do that.’ She has found it has shifted the students’ mindset from unattainable to possible and probable.

Another important tool in Marianne’s teaching bag is feedback. She is a strong believer in the power of feedback and provides it for students who are doing well and those who are not. She ensures it is reciprocated and encourages students to give her feedback on her teaching.

Marianne believes that learning outcomes are strongly hinged to a happy and productive student–teacher relationship. It is the determinant, she says, of student success and wellbeing. If a child is unhappy in the classroom then little learning will occur no matter how high achieving they are, and making sure her students are happy to be at school is essential to her.

She doesn’t have to look far, though, because her students and their parents often tell her how much they appreciate the learning environments she creates.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Marianne Condon
Principal/Director: Peter Camilleri
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Email: mcondon@hsringwoodnth.catholic.edu.au

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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Sarah Johnstone
Nambrok–Denison Primary School
Denison, VIC

In her role as principal of the Nambrok–Denison Primary School in Nambrok Victoria, Sarah Johnstone’s 25 years of experience helped her steer her school in a time of major social change. Described as a leader whose ‘capacity to give, contribute and lead is limitless and inspiring’, Sarah has united her school community and also created meaningful connections to neighbouring schools.

When the small family farms that previously dominated the region were sold to larger conglomerates, the demographics of the region substantially changed and Sarah needed to unite a school community that was at risk of splintering. Under her leadership, Nambrok–Denison became a candidate for the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) trial school program. The initiative led the way for a network-wide initiative that saw all 26 government schools in the Wellington Shire working together to promote consistent practice through teaching, and re-teaching school values and promoting collaborative behaviours that supported the cultural changes.

In the complex process that required Sarah to oversee major organisational and educational change, she integrated ‘Kidsmatter Primary’ core modules into her school curriculum. These enhanced the behavioural, emotional and social development necessary for the children’s wellbeing through the promotion of positive mental health.

Sarah also assumed a leadership role in the creation of a learning alliance with seven other rural schools in her regional network. Informed by the research of the Country Education Project (CEP), this alliance has brought together teachers from across the network who are combining their literacy and numeracy data in order to teach units of work collaboratively across all eight schools.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Sarah Johnstone
Principal/Director: Sarah Johnstone
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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Lesley McCarthy
Flemington Primary School
Flemington, VIC

As principal of Flemington Primary School, Lesley McCarthy is motivated by the desire to promote a passion for lifelong learning to the children in her care.

Teaching for 30 years, Lesley has taught from kindergarten to Year 6 with a focus on literacy, mathematics and digital learning. As a principal, she actively mentors fellow teachers while continuing to provide personal attention to individual students.

Presiding over a primary school in inner-Melbourne, Lesley’s student community comes from more than 50 culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and the focus is on student wellbeing, differentiation in teaching and learning, and family support. Flemington Primary students receive specialist teaching in Art, Music, Science, Mandarin Chinese and PE. They also have access to a rich library, extensive grounds and sporting facilities. Students learn in a rich digital learning environment based on Challenge Based Learning through the 1-to-1 iPad program, banks of laptops, netbooks and iPads and computer lab. They are offered a rich array of extra-curricular programs, as well as an extensive instrumental music program and before-and-after-school care. Lesley oversees a partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training in the ‘New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Program’, University of Melbourne in the ‘Assessment for Learning Program’ and the ‘Teaching Academies for Professional Practice Program’.

Despite so many demands on her time Lesley endeavours to know every child in her school, and to be highly visible and available in the classrooms and school grounds.

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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Grattan Stephens
Mooroolbark East Primary School
Mooroolbark, VIC

Grattan Stephens was studying to be a PE teacher when he realised that classroom teaching was what he really wanted to do.

For Grattan, teaching is an integral part of his life and he goes to work every day filled with enthusiasm and energy to engage and challenge his students. Over the years he's taught several children with disabilities and his extraordinary work going 'above and beyond for children in his grade with additional needs' has been greatly appreciated by the parents in his school community.

Teaching Grade 4 at Mooroolbark East Primary School in Victoria for the past eight years has provided Grattan with the opportunity to continually build on his teaching practice. He says he learns as much as his students in lessons, and he happily embraces the opportunity to improve and extend on student learning, as well as his own teaching practice.

All Grattan's students start the day with a five-minute run around the school and have regular breaks in classroom learning for exercise. He also taps into their interests, personal experiences and abilities to make teaching more meaningful and attractive for them. About 10 per cent of his students are on individual learning plans.

The relationship between home and school is a focus of Grattan's teaching philosophy and he works hard to create positive relationships with his students’ families. ‘Encouragement and support from home benefits students, teachers and parents’, he says.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Grattan Stephens  
Principal/Director: Debbie Nelsson  
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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Hollie Testa
Elliminyt Primary School
Elliminyt, VIC

With the Great Ocean Road on one side and Colac on the other, Elliminyt Primary School occupies an idyllic spot on the map of Victoria. The small community school has 180 students enrolled and for Hollie Testa, it’s the perfect place for a graduate teacher.

Hollie is highly regarded at her school. Her interactions with the students are described as ‘amazing’, and her love of teaching is so transparent that the children return it in spades. She also regularly attends sporting and musical events out-of-school hours when her students are playing or performing, and her pride in their accomplishments makes her a teacher they’ll long remember.

It’s important to Hollie that her students know she believes in them, and her classroom door is also always open to students from other grades who come in for a chat in the mornings or after school.

Hollie teaches year one and she says they’re always interested in being challenged. So she gives them ‘super challenges’ in their tasks and acknowledges their mistakes as ‘good things’ because they learn from them and usually don’t make the same mistake again.

Implementing an innovative approach to spelling has reaped benefits across the curriculum for Hollie’s students. Each of them has their own keyring and they select their spelling words from a list they’ve been tested on and don’t know. It means, Hollie, says, that they all do the same task each day and work on words at their own level.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Hollie Testa
Principal/Director: Angela Hall
Phone: 03 5231 5208
Email: testa.hollie.h@edumail.vic.gov.au
Gisela White
South Gippsland Secondary College
Foster, VIC

Gisela White commenced her teaching career in a different subject area altogether to where she now teaches. For 10 years she taught humanities and then senior geography before recognising her true love of mathematics.

After studying via distance education Gisela launched into a career as a maths teacher while, at the same time, researching best practice methods and how to better impart a love of mathematics to students.

Currently Head of Mathematics at South Gippsland Secondary College, Gisela says her ‘greatest strength is engaging Years 7 to 9 students’. However, she has also taught VCE mathematics throughout her 20 years at the school and many of her students have achieved high scores in Mathematical Methods, including one with a perfect score.

Open-ended tasks, often based on physical materials, are an important part of Gisela’s teaching strategies, and she believes it engages students and enables them to understand concepts more thoroughly.

South Gippsland Secondary College is a small country school near Wilsons Promontory in Victoria where the students come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Gisela runs a well-organised, structured environment for her students, and strives to provide assistance and feedback to them all—a lot of it on an individual basis.

Gisela’s passion for mathematics has been reflected consistently in student surveys where they regularly note her enthusiasm. ‘Every student I teach would know I care about their progress,’ she says, and she considers their subsequent improved attitudes toward the learning of mathematics a significant achievement.

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CONTACT DETAILS:
Teacher: Gisela White
Principal/Director: Matthew McPhee
Phone: 03 5682 2066
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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient
Christian Williams is an extraordinary man and a gifted teacher. As a professional athlete he represented Australia in several sports including lacrosse, archery, hammer throw and luge with the ultimate dream of competing in the Olympics. But before he achieved his dream Christian was diagnosed with a degenerative heart condition called cardiomyopathy.

Christian currently teaches Years 1/2 at St Michael's Primary School in Ashburton in Victoria. Described as an incredible teacher who changes lives, a glimpse at his recent endeavours confirms he is making a profound difference in his classroom, his local community and around the world.

He was a Victorian finalist for Young Australian of the Year in 2015, and identified by the Catholic Education Office as an emerging leader. Christian also recorded a Ted Talk called ‘Please Help Me’, where he talks about resilience in the face of adversity. He has created an app called CardioChristian that encourages children to eat healthy food—which has 15,000 views to date. Christian has also been an ambassador for HeartKids for the past four years and he visits and mentors children with heart conditions.

In the classroom Christian is dearly loved teacher who goes above and beyond for his students. For example, he organised for world-renowned scientists to conduct Skype lessons with his students, and when one of them wasn’t focusing on schoolwork because he wanted to be an NBA player, Christian located the players in Australia and filmed an inspirational message for the student.

‘There is nothing more important to me than changing the lives of as many children as possible before my heart gives out,’ Christian says.

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2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards
State and Territory Award Recipient

Galina Zenin
Bonkers Beat Music Kinder and Childcare
Aspendale, VIC

Music is quintessential to teacher Galina Zenin. As director of Bonkers Beat Music Kinder & Childcare Aspendale she works hard to bring the joys of song and melody to early learners. Teaching children through music builds social bonds and enlivens the soul, she says.

Galina grew up in Russia, where she studied at the Gnessin Russian Academy of Music and then began teaching at primary schools in Moscow.

In 2006 she opened Australia's first dedicated music kinder—Bonkers Beat in Brighton East, Melbourne, believing that the earlier children are exposed to music the sooner their journey towards the fulfilment of their potential can begin.

Galina facilitates early learning through the power of music, wellbeing and play. And while the Bonkers Beat incorporates music as an integral part of its curriculum, it also focuses on physical movement, languages, literacy and numeracy.

The Bonkers Beat outdoor area has two yoga decks and a Balinese hut for kinder children and toddlers to participate in regular yoga classes. The area also includes a jungle walk and reflexology path, built with parents’ help and providing the children with a totally sensory experience.

In 2010, the Bonkers Beat Music Kinder in Brighton was selected for the E4Kids study conducted by DEECD and the University of Melbourne. The Bonkers Beat Music Kinder & Childcare Aspendale was selected as a pilot centre for the National Quality Standard and in 2012 received an overall rating Exceeding NQS.

<table>
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