

Embargoed: Until 6am Friday 16 March 2018

**Queensland teachers earn national recognition with awards
'Strong calling for deaf education' & 'coaching teachers to find students'
sweet-spot'**

Two teachers from Queensland will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) today at a presentation ceremony in Melbourne.

Kirrili Balshaw from C&K Camp Hill Kindergarten (Brisbane) and Monica Wright from Burleigh Heads State School (Gold Coast) will join another 10 fine educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from around 1450 nominations in 2017, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching. Now in its 23rd year, the ASG NEiTA awards have contributed more than \$1 million in professional development grants to outstanding teachers in Australia and New Zealand.

Kirrili Balshaw is also a teacher of the deaf and special needs children.

"From an early age, I felt a strong 'calling' to teaching deaf and young children. I have many children with special needs in my class each year who teach us that we are all unique and special."

She was nominated by a parent whose child has autism and says Kirrili's children are the major winners of her commitment and generosity.

"I don't know what would have happened with my boy had we not had this teacher, diagnosis, early warning systems and intervention? But we know that he's had a great start to schooling life thanks to her and her professional, warm and loving care."

The teaching of Australian Sign Language (Auslan) as a second language is a central part of Kirrili's teaching.

Children are introduced to the deaf class bear 'Bernie' who teaches them signs that enhance their learning opportunities and play experiences. Auslan is also learnt through songs, rhymes and stories.

"Families request my class as they value that learning to communicate with deaf people is a relevant, important and wonderful opportunity. The children feel very proud and they are so passionate about learning to sign that they teach their family and friends."

Kirrili says learning Auslan also promotes the development of language skills, increases early literacy skills and creative thinking and stimulates both sides of the brain as children learn verbally, visually and kinaesthetically.

"The prep teachers at our main feeder school report that the children from our kindergarten are better able to maintain concentration, self-regulate, problem solve and form warm relationships far easier than other children."

Other initiatives Kirrili has established include: introducing STEM learning to teach children early computer programming and incorporating the 'You Can Do It' and 'Zones of Regulation' social and emotional programs.

"In my class I provide opportunities, challenges and encouragement to help empower children to build identity, capacity, skills and dispositions for future learning. I am passionate about teaching the skills necessary for wellbeing and happiness and it is a privilege to be the first step in a child's lifelong learning journey."

Monica Wright is the literacy coach at Burleigh Heads High School, working with teachers to create a growth mindset culture and to search for the 'sweet-spot of learning' for each student.

"My passion for teaching is fuelled by my motivation to make a significant impact on student achievement, irrespective of their circumstances. I am convinced every student can learn, if we can just find the way in. As a coach it's highly exciting to communicate this big picture vision, to inspire, embrace and lead, curriculum change."

Monica started her coaching journey at Burleigh Heads High School almost five years ago, creating instructional and cultural change from the classroom out.

Instructional coaching disrupts and reframes habitual ways of thinking and highlights best practice teaching.

Monica says it's work that challenges others to venture beyond their comfort zone and demands great care and sensitivity.

"My first aim was to communicate a moral imperative for change, creating a buy-in for a shared vision.

"With most people not having been coached before, I needed to reassure each teacher that our work together was about building capacity and was in no way related to performance management. Recognising their talents and abilities went a long way and it was only when trust was established that teachers were comfortable to be honest, show weaknesses and become vulnerable. This is when real growth started to take place."

Monica audited the school's literacy program and devised strategies to shift the teaching focus in classrooms from a whole of language approach to explicit teaching and differentiation.

"In providing specific research and assessment data, I allowed teachers the opportunity to process the need for change and be ready to take action."

Together they have planned differentiated pathways for various ability groups of students and matched instructional methods to phases of learning. Monica also models best teaching practice, observes teachers, provides feedback and frames learning goals for each student.

Monica says over the last four years the school has made 'massive progress' with year 3 and year 5 students meeting and sometimes 'far outstripping' national minimum standards (NAPLAN) in writing and reading.

"One of the joys of my role is that I have the opportunity to work with, track the progress and celebrate the successes of over 500 students. They actively seek my feedback and it's such a privilege to witness the amazing growth of so many students.

"Teachers also report that having tasted the intrinsic buzz of setting gaudy goals, working toward them and achieving them, they're motivated for more."

The national recipients are selected by a panel of seven judges comprising Director of Early Learning, Ruyton Grammar School, Sarah Denholm; Director of Collegiate Institute, Julie Rimes; Zig Zag Public School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Tiffany Sirisavath; Principal, Saddleworth Primary School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Sheree Mader; Director of Leadership, The Southport School and 2016 ASG NEiTA national recipient, Keith Fennell; Emmanuel Christian School, previous ASG NEiTA national recipient and Space Camp leader, Drew Roberts and ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt.

The selection process is rigorous, including a comprehensive nomination outline, a written paper and video presentation by the nominated teacher.

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated the 12 deserving and inspirational recipients.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says the national recipients have made their mark in local communities throughout Australia.

"It's so wonderful to see teachers being singled out by members of the community for their personal contribution to education. It's in local townships, villages and indeed larger, city centres where our ASG NEiTA recipients can be the heartbeat of these communities. For every student they teach, they could be impacting multiple lives as they establish relationships with parents, grandparents and connect the home and school life, creating an eco-system of continued and shared learning and support networks.

"The thread that ties our 12 ASG NEiTA recipients and brings communities together are their common values and educational aspirations. Motivating students to push themselves, creating inclusive spaces, identifying specific developmental and communication needs, and letting students take charge of their learning are the key drivers behind teaching strategies and innovative approaches happening every day in schools.

"I thank our ASG NEiTA recipients for their passion and persistence in teaching today's young people and for the communities who nominated them, in recognising their outstanding and inspirational qualities."

ASG CEO Tim Mitchell-Adams says the ASG NEiTA recipients are passing on one of the most valuable gifts a young person can receive.

"I congratulate the ASG NEiTA recipients for their significant and personal contribution in achieving better education outcomes for Australian school children. Teachers have an enormous responsibility and right from early childhood education, our ASG NEiTA recipients are putting the building blocks together so that young people are equipped to become confident and competent lifelong learners.

"As students navigate their educational and life journey, our ASG NEiTA recipients are going on a journey of their own. A journey of excitement and wonder as they see their students achieve, through taking risks, accepting challenges and breaking down barriers. Some of these teachers have seen students blossom on the world stage and have careers they love. Our ASG NEiTA recipients are a huge part of these success stories, encouraging, mentoring and leading students to map out their future and reach their full potential, regardless of what that looks like. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years. The community thanks and applauds you for the countless hours and dedication you put into teaching their children."

The 12 national recipients will each receive \$5000 professional development grants. For more information and to view their ASG NEiTA profiles go to: www.asg.com.au/neita

For more information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:

Nicole Saleh

ASG

M: 0448 167 578 / 03 9276 7520

E: nsaleh@asg.com.au

Editor's notes:

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 540,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.8 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.

The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 35,500 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries. More than 1000 teachers have received \$1,000,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.

For more information visit: www.asg.com.au