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Sense of wonder earns educator national award

A Christchurch early childhood teacher who nurtures the sense of wonder in young children will receive an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) on February 23 at an official ceremony hosted by Hon Chris Hipkins MP, Minister of Education in Wellington.

“When I teach, I look for moments of wonder that children experience as they grow and develop physically, socially, and intellectually. I respond creatively to the potential of these moments, nurturing each child in their learning, and encouraging their sense of self-worth and discovery.”

Helen Peters from Kidsfirst Kindergarten in Beckenham will join five other outstanding educators from across New Zealand in receiving the top awards.

Selected from around 200 nominations in 2017, the six national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching. Now in its 21st year, the ASG NEiTA awards have contributed more than \$1 million in professional development grants to outstanding teachers in Australia and New Zealand.

Helen was nominated by a parent who recognised the ‘amazing way’ she connects with little people and meets their needs.

“Helen is a special teacher for these three to five year-olds. I admire her work and dedication. . It is at the most difficult moments with children that Helen is at her best. It’s almost like magic how she interacts with the kids.”

Helen has been teaching for 25 years and says she still gets excited when she sees children sparkle with wonder and delight.

“The concept of wonder applies to all children regardless of their ability. I intentionally create the opportunities for children to experience wonder, by the way I prepare the environment both inside and outside of the classroom. Wonder leads to wondering and becomes a spark to further learning as the child begins to develop and test their theories. The children get information through their senses and as their discovery grows they’re sharing their knowledge and skills with other children and their families.

“I also keep my teaching skills fresh, recently developing new strategies to create opportunities for exploring and deepening moments of wonder with children who have extra communication needs.”

Helen adds by the time her children are ready to step-up into school, their lifelong journey into confident and competent learners is in good stead.

"I see the majority of children leave with improved social competencies and an enthusiasm for ongoing learning. Parents often report favourably on their children's attitude to school and the way they settle into the school environment.

The national recipients are selected by a panel of four judges comprising President NZ Schools Trustees Association, Lorraine Kerr (MNZM); John Paul College Principal, Patrick Walsh; Head of Department English, Social Sciences and Languages for Toi-Ohomai Institute of Technology, Joanne Hayes; former Vice-President Secondary Principals' Association of NZ (SPANZ), John Day and 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 New Zealand nominated the six deserving and inspirational recipients.

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

"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, farming 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 six 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 New Zealand 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 six national recipients will each receive \$5000 professional development grants. For more information and to view their ASG NEiTA profiles go to: www.asg.co.nz/neita

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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 \$2.5 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.co.nz