



All colours of the rainbow

Nadia Bettio is a passionate proponent of the Victorian public school system

I have been teaching in the Victorian public education system for the past 20 years. Currently I am the principal at Delacombe Primary School, in the south west of Ballarat. The school draws students from a very low socio-economic demographic. Around 60% receive Education Maintenance Allowance and many come from extremely disadvantaged homes. Parts of our community have a large number of single parent families on low incomes (up to 40% in some areas). The Australian Bureau



I appreciate what public education has provided me

of Statistics' Socio-economic Indicators for Areas (SEIFA) measures social and economic disadvantage across four indexes. Of the five areas in our community, two are disadvantaged on all four indexes while one records severe disadvantage in all four.

As a school, we are proud of the diversity of backgrounds from which our children come and believe it adds to the richness of our school community. I feel excited every day about what it is I do and I look forward to going to work, because what we do matters and what we do makes a real difference to everyone in our community.

We are so lucky in Australia because free and freely available education is the right of every citizen. What I have seen in my travels – across many continents and many third world countries – has made me feel even more passionate about our public education system.

I have seen fathers work three jobs to provide their children with the chance of an education. I have seen widowed mothers begging on streets and parents literally risking their life to give their children the opportunity to go to school – something we take for granted.

As a first generation Australian, born of immigrant parents, I appreciate what public education has provided me, the opportunities it has created and the world it has opened up to me. Whenever I drive past a public school I look at the front gate and think how very lucky the children inside that building are.

The government sector has traditionally been responsible for promoting social equality and inclusion through public education. And this is so important for a school like Delacombe Primary.

But there has been a shift away from public schooling. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, of all the students attending primary and secondary schools in 2007 only 66.5% were in government schools. Student enrolments in non-government schools increased by over 4% during this period but



enrolments in government schools increased only slightly (0.9%). With so many students in the private system, I am concerned about a lack of diversity from the middle/upper class within the public education system.

Most of our Delacombe families cannot afford to send their children to private schools so we have a moral obligation to provide these children with the best possible education. On the other hand, some of our families can afford to pay school fees but instead choose to send their children to our school. We have just as great a responsibility to these children. Australian children, no matter where they go to school, must know they are getting the best educational opportunity in the world. This is what public education can and should provide.

We don't judge our students by their address

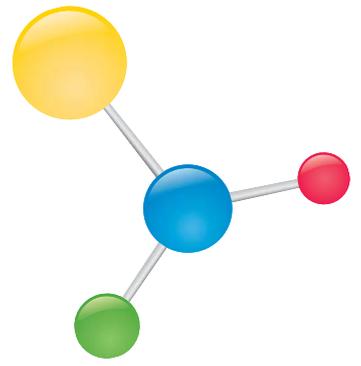


All children can learn, work hard and get smart. Failure should not be an option. But our work is to no avail if our students don't have access to quality teaching. Delacombe Primary has invested well in its teachers. Teachers who all believe in what it is we do, who go above and beyond the call of duty, who have invested in our students, who have strong curriculum knowledge and pedagogy and who work tirelessly for better outcomes.

Our focus at is to provide every child with every opportunity to shine. We don't judge our students

by their address. In fact we celebrate and embrace the wider diversity of nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds of our students and families. Our school is real life – people from all backgrounds working together, playing together, learning together and achieving together. And regardless of our students' backgrounds we have high expectation of them all.

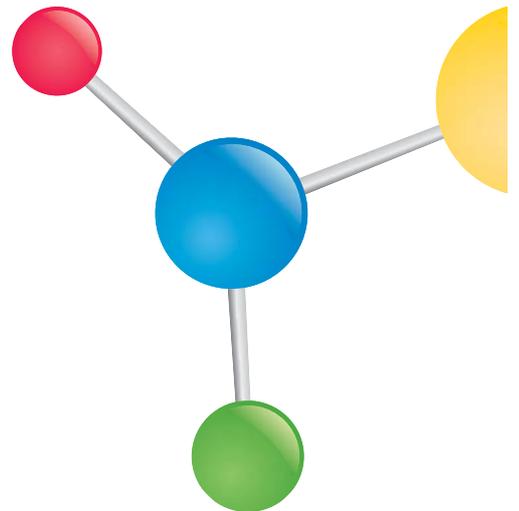
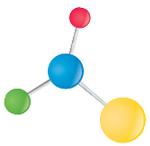
I feel so very proud to belong to such a dedicated and hard working profession. It dismays me when I hear people criticise teachers. The teachers at Delacombe Primary give up their time



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each and every week to provide our students with so much more than a 9.00–3.30 education. Breakfast Club, after school sport, maths and digital literacy learning clubs, homework clubs, environmental programs, camps, bike education, Chinese and extension/support programs all operate because our teachers are willing to give up hours of their own time. All of this is provided to our students for less than \$115.00 per year.

It is the school's experience that healthy and cohesive communities embrace diversity. We work hard to afford our students respect and dignity. The children we teach, in our eyes, are tomorrow's doctors, policemen, and women, store assistants, mechanics, councillors and endless other potential contributors to our city, country and humanity.

We learn from each other in the context of a rich and robust relationship. Students need teachers who have the ability to explain and instruct with clarity and precision. More importantly, they need teachers who are effective models and mentors, fellow learners and true companions. It is these relationships that are at the core of every successful learning partnership. It is these characteristics that determine the success of other partnerships within our community. It is the purposeful, determined, respectful and authentic relationships between teachers and students, leaders and staff, parents and teachers and government and community that determine the success of the school and the community as a whole.

At Delacombe Primary we actively engage communities to create shared responsibility for student performance and development. The first challenge is to clarify for ourselves, and within our communities, the narrative we use to make sense of who we are and what we do. We must articulate our understanding of what



***"It takes a village
to raise a child"***

it is that gives the work of public education its own special character. This provides the basis for prioritising and planning; it inspires our hopes and informs our expectations. We must encourage members of our community to ask important questions about the purpose and intention of public education, to collectively and individually seek new solutions to old and new problems. We must foster a reflective culture of thoughtful change and improvement with the goal of knowing each and every learner within the community in order to assist them to move from what they



currently know and can do, to what they need to know and do.

Whenever anyone asks me what I do, I tell them that I am a teacher because above all else I see myself as an educator – an educator within the public education system. I aim to always be a hands-on principal; one who absolutely believes we do make all the difference in the lives of children so we *must* have high expectations of all children and for this I make no apology. Public education needs to be about addressing social disadvantage through strong pedagogy leading to high student outcomes for *all* students – no excuses.

"It takes a village to raise a child". Today we speak of a child learning in the context of a connected community in which parents, teachers and government, community members and agencies work in collaborative partnership. This is our village.

This is what public education is all about.