

# Adam Inder – Head, Maths and Science Clarkson Community High

*ET Staff*



for Australia graduates to be placed in Western Australia.

After completion of the TFA course he was given a position at Balga Senior High School in Perth's northern suburbs. After two years there he moved to his current placement at Clarkson Community High School where, at the ripe old age of 23, he now heads up the Maths and Science Department.

Clarkson and Adam Inder have proved to be another good fit, the school's use of Purkey's Invitational Theory and application of John Hattie's Visible Learning resonated with his interest in how research can shape policy in disadvantaged schools.

Student Voice in Mathematics was the centre piece of Inder's Masters Thesis, completed as part of the TFA training. His findings suggested that there was very little student voice in mathematics teaching as is evident in curriculum and policy documents and one of the first ways he's addressing that is by giving the elected student council the lowdown on how they can make their voices heard.

Clarkson is a good example of how effective these approaches can be, its NAPLAN scores have been on the up and up since the school committed to Hattie's and Purkey's ideas. How invitational learning and visible learning link in with the intentionality of a school and how that can mitigate perceived socio-economic outcomes for underprivileged schools has been an overarching concern.

"John Young (the principal) recommended that I read John Hattie's *Visible Learning for Mathematics* which was related to what I am doing, exploring the intentionality behind that and how it builds into invitational learning.

"Looking at Clarkson's data, there has been a steady increase in the NAPLAN scores, but what I was interested in was comparing that with the socio-economic status of the school. The ICSEA increased which means the disadvantage is decreasing. So what that meant was the increase in NAPLAN results could just have been due to an increase in socio-economic conditions.

"What we found was that in 2016 there was an increase in disadvantage so the score changed but the increase in NAPLAN scored spiked more strongly so that would indicate that there's been a steady increase in NAPLAN results despite continued conditions of disadvantage.

"The underpinning argument is that

**W**ith an aptitude for maths, even the hard bits, a strong ability in sciences and having been anointed head boy, school was as Adam Inder admits "a good fit" for him.

A high ATAR saw him enter uni and sail through science and engineering with a well-paid career as a chemical engineer all but locked in. Then life offered up one of its salient encounters.

Inder's industry mentor was supposed to offer insight into what was coming for the young engineer and he did just that, but perhaps not quite in the way that was intended.

Here was a good guy, at the top of his profession, earning big with great kids in good schools, it's just that he wasn't able to see much of them or do very much other than deal with the demands of his position.

"He didn't seem fulfilled in what he did – it just seemed like a job", Inder says.

It gave Inder pause for thought, was this the life that he was signing up for and indeed was it the life he wanted?

His work as a maths and science tutor gave a hint of another path, "I'd enjoyed teaching and the relationships that I'd built with the kids I was tutoring and the confidence I was able to give them. It seemed very worthwhile. At that time there was a lot of media coverage for Teach for Australia and I decided just to throw it out there and apply," he says.



*Clarkson Community High's Head of Maths and Science Adam Inder*

The selection process for Teach for Australia (TFA) – the program places high achieving graduates in challenged socio economic schools – is tough, there are three stages: a written application, a phone interview and a selection day.

The selection day is a full day of problem solving activities, group work and interviews all of which indicate if the candidates stack up to the high expectations and the strong values that TFA has. Inder did well, out of approximately 1300 applicants he was one of 67 chosen and named a member of the first cohort of Teach

everything we do, we do intentionally, with an aim in mind and with a reason in mind. This links with Hattie's contention that everything has an effect, whether positive or negative. Some things have a small positive effect, others have a great positive effect but the key is identifying what things have a great positive effect and implementing those.

"As teachers we are very time poor, so we can't implement everything but if we can implement things that are effective broadly then we're getting the best bang for our buck. In my case I've found those things include giving very specific feedback and positivity which flows into a variety of effects through things like growth mindset, the idea that intelligence is not fixed and can be improved by pushing positive cultures.

"John Young says to take the balcony approach, don't focus on things that will wear you down as a teacher and a leader, look at the big picture entirely. Taking that perspective and implementing things that will make a difference really excites me. Leading adults isn't something that I've done a lot of previously, and I'm really enjoying the whole experience, I'm meeting my expectations of myself which have always been really high," he says.

Inder says that his age has been a factor in connecting with and engaging the students at Clarkson.

"Students often relate to teachers by identifying with them as either a father figure or a mother figure, I'm a brother figure apparently, the students will often tell me that they have siblings who are the same age as myself. It does help with engagement and we're very much able to speak the same language, we're all part of the Facebook, social media generation."

He is still in regular contact with his fellow alumni of the Teach for Australia course which is one of the tenets of the program; the creation of a similarly-minded, high-achieving community.

"It gives you access to a group of very smart, compassionate and ambitious people which is invaluable for the exchange of ideas and experiences.



"Teach for Australia is looking to eliminate educational disadvantage around Australia and that's not something that can be done quickly, it will require a long-term approach. Having a professional group to share ideas with and feed those ideas back into the program is a big part of addressing the issue of educational disadvantage", he says.

As for Inder, his vision for the future will probably see him involved in educational policy or the academics around education.

"I would like to be involved in how policy around education is framed in the country but to do that I feel you need to be an expert in your field before you really have something to offer.

"I want to really master teaching within the school before I can take it further and then see how I can influence it. If I don't have that full understanding of a school and how it operates I really can't bring my all to a role like that further down the path.

"I like to push myself."

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