

## Australia's Best Teachers: 50 of the country's most inspiring educators

Australia is full of incredible teachers who ignite a passion for learning within our children. Here we celebrate 50 of the best as recognised by students, parents and colleagues.

Catherine Nikas-Boulos, Vanessa Croll and Andre Grimaux, May 5, 2023

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Australia is full of incredible teachers who ignite a passion for learning within our children. But as challenges on families and communities intensify, the importance of teaching within our social fabric has started to erode.

A recent study by Monash University found 70 per cent of teachers do not feel respected by the public. They are stressed, overworked and lack the recognition they deserve. News Corp Australia, launched a campaign in February to celebrate our educators and start shifting public perceptions.

In partnership with ANZ, Teachers Mutual Bank, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools, Care For Kids, Griffith University and PwC, the Australia's Best Teachers campaign has seen more than 900 teachers nominated by students, colleagues and parents across the country.

It is clear from the nominations that teaching isn't just about getting great results, but the positive difference teachers make in a young person's life. They care, they listen and they inspire.



Here we recognise 50 of those teachers:

**NEW SOUTH WALES: Kellie Clarke**  
**St Canice's Primary School in Katoomba**

In her more than 25 years working as a teacher, Kellie Clarke has not met a fellow educator who entered the profession aiming to do a bad job.

"I've been teaching for a long time and while much has changed, what hasn't is that the teachers around me ... turn up every day with the very best of intentions and with the welfare of the kids very much front and centre," Ms Clarke, a kindy teacher at St Canice's Primary School in Katoomba, said.

Ms Clarke, who was nominated as one of Australia's Best Teachers, said teachers work hard "because they really, really care about the kids".

"Teaching has been the one enduring love in my life and every year I feel so privileged that I get parents handing their most

precious thing in the world over to me to nurture and to look after," she said. "I think sometimes the level of care and compassion that teachers have is not represented or understood well by the general public.

"As humans, we don't always get it right, but we're trying really hard." For Ms Clarke, her philosophy is to ensure children feel safe, loved and valued so they can "learn and thrive".

School principal Miriam Meaney said Ms Clarke had provided assistance to many children in need of additional support. "A number of children have come from a variety of different experiences, different backgrounds, and [Ms Clarke] has a great capacity to see what a child needs and how to help that child to learn."

**QUEENSLAND: Chloe Barratt**  
**Highland Reserve State School in Upper Coomera**

Teaching Prep isn't for the faint-hearted. After all, this is a child's introduction to formal learning in a "big school", which can be fraught with apprehension.

Yet, for Chloe Barratt of Highland Reserve State School in Upper Coomera on the Gold Coast, the opportunity to create positive experiences for these young students is where she excels.

"I ensure that I build positive relationships with each child in order to develop their sense of belonging, identity and trust," she said.

Ms Barratt, who has been an Early Years teacher for the past five years, has spent the past three in Prep, ("this is where my passion lies") and said it's a privilege to be part of a child's life in their formative



years. “There is so much joy in watching children grasp a new concept or learn something new. This is especially evident when children learn to read and write and a whole new world of opportunities opens for them. Knowing that you made an impact in teaching them that is very rewarding,” she said.

Ms Barratt said she was honoured that members of the school community have

### **SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Afroza Sultana** **IQRA College in O’Halloran Hill**

Being accountable for educating our future generation is a “tremendous responsibility” and one teacher Afroza Sultana takes very seriously.

The English and Literature teacher and high school co-ordinator at Adelaide’s IQRA College lives by the philosophy: “Be the change you want to see in the world”. “I firmly believe that knowledge is a powerful tool for bringing about positive change, and as an educator, it is my role to help students recognise their potential and empower them to solve real-world problems,” Ms Sultana said.

Nominated as one of Australia’s Best Teachers for developing a “whole school approach” to learning, Ms Sultana said the recognition was an incredible honour.

“At our school, we prioritise shared success, which entails collaborating as a team to implement effective strategies throughout the high school,” she said.

taken the time to nominate her in the Australia’s Best Teachers campaign. One of the nominations was made by Bowls World Champion and Commonwealth Games Gold medallist Lynsey Clarke, whose daughter Kenzie had her as a teacher two years ago, and the memory endures.

She was also nominated by Wendy Lim and Sarah Scotson, who says, “Miss Barratt ... has a special way of teaching her students.”

“As the high school co-ordinator, I led my team in developing strategies to enhance students’ academic performance and motivation.”

Encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and instilling a sense of purpose in students to be active community citizens is what Ms Afroza touts as her greatest love of teaching.

“Teaching is like convincing a child to make broccoli a part of their daily diet even if they don’t understand its importance,” she said. “Before offering the broccoli straight away, as teachers, we need to put in much more effort such as gaining their trust, convincing students of its benefits, adapting the broccoli to their preferences, continuously changing it to suit their individual needs, collaborating with parents, and repeating the procedure until it is successful.”



**VICTORIA: Imogen McKillop**  
**St Peter's Primary School in Bentleigh East**

Foundation teachers are usually swept up in fairytales and fun facts but Imogen McKillop, of St Peter's Primary School in Bentleigh East, had to protect her young charges when things took a sad turn.

"2021 was a very challenging year for me and my class," McKillop says. "I lost my dear friend and teaching buddy, Ange D'Amelio. I was also coming to terms with the loss of my younger brother the previous year, dealing with the fallout of Covid and balancing being a parent of three young children. And then, I was trying to wear my teacher hat, too."

McKillop says the young class faced the confronting loss of their co-teacher together, and although the aftermath was not without challenges, in the midst of it all "we did manage to have some fun and learn a thing or two".

Mercifully, McKillop also had her family's support to draw strength from.

"My father enjoyed a long, successful and rewarding teaching career so his influence, even subconsciously, probably drew me into the fold. The fact that three of my siblings also entered the vocation and continue to teach probably speaks strongly of our family values around the importance of education," she said.

"Sharing classroom stories is commonplace around the family kitchen table; we understand the unique demands and pressures of teaching, as well as the rich personal rewards that come from making a difference in the lives of children."

**The complete 50 list of 50**

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Kellie Clarke St Canice's Primary School, Katoomba**

Kellie's class includes students from different countries and backgrounds, some who speak English as a second language. She is an amazing role model.

Nominated by Kylie Ranson

**Renee Connaghan, Only About Children, Wahroonga**

Renee has been an Early Childhood educator for 18 years starting as a parent at the campus where she is now director.

Nominated by Sarah Woodcock.

**Matthew Panayotopoulos, St Euphemia College, Bankstown**

Matthew launched the Change Makers

Project – to build a library for a school in Lismore and India.

Nominated by Theony Nikas



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**Michelle Sproule, Soldiers Point Public School**

Mrs Sproule gives everyone a chance, she listens to everyone's ideas and doesn't leave anyone out. She is an amazing teacher.

Nominated by Eli Hart

**Samantha Brimfield, Santa Sophia Catholic College, Gables**

Sam creates a welcoming learning environment for both students and staff.

Nominated by Dianne Sabat

**Andrew Krisenthal, Cambridge Park High School, Cambridge Park**

Our son is autistic and struggles with social and emotional regulation. Mr Krisenthal has been nothing but supportive.

Nominated by Natalie J

**Rebecca Besly, St Mary's Star of the Sea, Hurstville**

Rebecca is my son's school principal. I nominate her because she works tirelessly at school and from home, especially during the lockdown and post lockdown.

Nominated by Yulia Santoso

**Owen Telfer, Cammeraygal High School, Crows Nest**

Fantastic Technologies teacher.

Nominated by Grant Byrne

**Vince Tavernese, St Leo's Catholic College, Wahroonga**

With his music department colleague Fiona Milkins, Mr Tavernese's input and support helped turn my son from disengaged at school to someone who is involved, confident and has purpose.

Nominated by Justin Lees

**Danielle Thummler Fox, Cabarita Mortlake Kindergarten, NSW**

Danielle is one of a kind. She always gives 110 per cent, she has the most amazing sense of humour, is able to relate to children in a way that most can only aspire to. We appreciate her efforts and her massive heart.

Nominated by Amanda Symond

**VICTORIA**

**Imogen McKillop, St Peter's Primary School, East Bentleigh**

Imogen job-shared with her best friend who passed away from brain cancer in the first month of term 1. Despite the heartache Imogen became the rock for the students and parents of that class.

Nominated by Helen Mai



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**Shaam Nundlall, Bellbridge Primary School, Hoppers Crossing**

Mr Shaam concentrates his teaching around a child's wellbeing and makes sure each child is heard and boosts their self esteem.

Nominated by Mila and Isla Bradley

**Caitlin Van Der Pluym, Knox Gardens Primary School**

Mrs Van Der Pluym is an inspiring teacher because she helped new students when they were scared. She helped other students when they needed help. She spreads smiles.

Nominated by Charlotte Warrington

**Elizabeth Moore, Mercy College, Coburg**

Ms Moore (my homeroom teacher) has made my Year 7 year amazing.

Nominated by students Sakhee Adhikari and Sienna Nancarrow

**Ben Higgins, St Francis Xavier Box Hill**

Ben has a hugely positive impact on every student he works with. He is committed to bringing out the best wellbeing and learning outcomes for every student.

Nominated by Mary Jones

**Fiona Davies, Braemar College, Woodend**

Mrs Davies has helped me through the toughest of times, told me to reach for the stars and to never ever give up. She is amazing and when I grow up I want to be exactly like her.

Nominated by student Cindy McClennan

**Cindy McLennan, Monterey Secondary College, Frankston North**

Under Cindy McLennan's leadership, the Accelerated Learning Programs at Monterey Secondary College have helped students impacted by Covid-related learning loss. Nominated by Tom Cain

**Ranvir Sarai, Sparkways Showgrounds Childcare & Early Learning Centre, Flemington**

Ranvir is experienced and collaborative with strong experience of what drives children, helping her to build strong relationships with them and their families.

Nominated by Caroline Henricks

**Nick Wall, Genazzano FCJ College, Kew**

Nick Wall installs energy, positivity and empowerment in the students, through the innovative and inclusive co-curricular sports program.

Nominated by Jemima Jones

**Tess Giles, Clyde Grammar School, Clyde North**

Miss Giles' enthusiasm creates an excellent learning environment for the children and a trusting environment for school families. Miss Giles demonstrates patience and kindness.

Nominated by Brendan Summers



## QUEENSLAND

### **Corey Micari, Trinity Lutheran College, Ashmore**

Mr Micari is a funny, kind and helpful teacher. He makes lots of funny jokes. He is hard working.

Nominated by his students

### **Terence Adair, Darling Heights State School, Toowoomba**

Terry has been an inspiration to me as a beginning teacher. Every question I have, he can answer in a calm and positive manner.

Nominated by Tim Adair

### **Anna Ludwig, Beenleigh State High School**

Anna has driven a whole school approach to the relevance of 21st century skills.

Nominated by Donna Harvey

### **Chloe Barratt, Highland Reserve State School, Upper Coomera**

Miss Barratt has made an incredible impact on our daughter through her genuine and caring teaching methods.

Nominated by Lynsey Clarke

### **Tex Lealiiee, Bellbird Park State Secondary College**

He supports us students and encourages us. He helps us with any concerns or issues on any topic and in or out of class.

Nominated by Alyssa Fraser-Ward

### **Graeme Hughes, Griffith University Business Lab, Brisbane**

His teaching has allowed me to develop my character and plot a path of where I want to go in life from where I'm currently at.

Nominated by Christopher Bonilla Cubias and other students

### **Brittany Hancock, Brisbane State High School, South Brisbane**

Brittany is an exceptional educator who goes above and beyond to ensure her students reach their potential.

Nominated by Sheree Carr

### **Ben Webb, Stuartholme School, Toowong**

Mr Webb has been the most inspirational teacher I have ever experienced!

Nominated by Elizabeth Burton

### **Nicky Theuerkauf, Kawungan State School, Hervey Bay**

Nicky teaches the Early Childhood Development Program, an intervention program for those 3-5 years with special needs.

Nominated by the ECDP Families



**Julie Pike, Cairns West State School**

Miss Pike is the most caring, loving, supportive teacher I have ever come across in my 38 years. She goes above and beyond with students and parents.

Nominated by Julie Harrison

**Kasey Paterson, Sparrow Early Learning, Tewantin**

Kasey Paterson is an incredibly authentic, driven, and well-respected individual who truly cares about her staff and families alike.

Nominated by colleague and parent

**QUEENSLAND****Afroza Sultana, IQRA College, O'Halloran Hill**

Afroza showed leadership skills and was appointed as the co-ordinator of high school since 2022. During this time, she managed to develop a whole school approach with her colleagues to shift the culture into learning culture.

Nominated by Hani Abul Khair

**Matthew Summerton, Crafers Primary School**

Matthew's approach to teaching, especially STEM, provides students with real world applications. His enthusiasm for teaching and learning is embraced by the students.

Nominated by Sophie Calvert-Smith

**Jo Cocks, St Columba College School, Andrews Farm**

Jodieann has taught at St Columba College for over 20 years. Her commitment to the children in her care is a credit to the person that she is.

Nominated by Michael O'Dwyer

**Darryle Phillips, Gleeson College, Golden Grove**

Darryle is an exceptional educator and has the utmost care for the students he teaches. He exudes positivity and the students that have the utmost respect for him.

Nominated by Sarah Fedele

**Julie Murphy, Principal at Elizabeth Vale Primary School**

The students are her number one priority and within a challenging dynamic she makes it seem easy when it would not be.

Nominated by Callum Jayne

**Jennifer Ness-Ferry, St Francis De Sales College, Mount Barker**

Mrs Ness-Ferry is all about relational connection and making her students feel safe at school.

Nominated by Beck Bolton



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**Belinda McClure, Caritas College School Port Augusta**

Goes above and beyond and is determined that every child will have an enriching learning experience regardless of abilities.

Nominated by Hayley Thiele

**Kathy Best, Tatachilla Lutheran College teachers, McLaren Vale**

Kathy is a wonderful practitioner with an amazing passion for physics.

Nominated by Stuart Parker

**Wendy House, Springbank Secondary College, Pasadena**

As principal she worked hard on saving Springbank when the government wanted to close it. Nominated by Lisa Johnson

**Michele Sboro, Salisbury East High School**

Ms Sboro is the most beautiful teacher in the Special Learning Classes. She treats all with the utmost respect including my son.

Nominated by Kirstie Swindley

**NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**Kelli Coccetti, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Darwin**

Kelli is an amazing teacher who develops exceptional relationships with her students.

Nominated by Rosie Harrison

**Tammy Hawkins, St Philip's College, Alice Springs**

Tammy spends long hours as not only as Director of Wellbeing but also a dedicated chemistry teacher.

Nominated by Paul Bailey

**Madia Schatz, Sattler Christian College, Bees Creek**

Madia goes above and beyond to design English curriculum which is stimulating and engaging for her reluctant learners.

Nominated by Linda Broad

**Michelle Bennett, Minyerri School**

Michelle has been teaching in her local school for 22 years. Michelle is currently a Senior Teacher and Educational Leader.

Nominated by Neil Gibson

**Awhina Matthews, Gunbalanya Community School**

Awhina is a caring and passionate assistant principal. She daily walks the talk ensuring children are kind, safe and respectful.

Nominated by colleague Sue Trimble



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## TASMANIA

### **Caitlin Ferguson, Campbell Street Primary School, Hobart**

Caitlin goes above and beyond with her very diverse kindergarten class to know each child, their family and their needs.

Nominated by Susan Jeffery

### **Brayden Morton, North West Christian School, Penguin**

Brayden Morton is the principal and also a teacher there.

Nominated by Scott Allen

### **Courtney Hardy, Andrews Creek Primary School, Wesley Vale**

I think Mrs Hardy is the best teacher because she makes learning fun. When Mrs Hardy explains she makes it fun.

Nominated by Sophia Stansbie

### **Phillip Wallace, Andrews Creek Primary School, Wesley Vale**

"I'm Nominating Mr Wallace because firstly he's an AMAZING teacher. Mr Wallace makes learning fun by telling jokes and pushing people in a friendly way to be their best.

Nominated by Amelia Stansbie

