

Tasmanian Combined Principals Conference

Opening Address

Blundstone Arena, Hobart

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Jenny Gale – Speaking Points

Leading Today for Tomorrow

[Thank you for the invitation / introduction]

- Thank you for inviting me to open the Tasmanian Combined Principals Conference 2017.
- I would first like to begin by acknowledging the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I pay my respect to their Elders both past and present, and acknowledge Aboriginal people here today and those joining us from around the state.
- For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jenny Gale, and I am Secretary of the Department of Education.
- Today I will be sharing with you my perspective on what it means for the Tasmanian education sector to be leading today for tomorrow. In doing so, I will briefly touch upon how we are continually improving and developing our school systems, or need to, under the three themes of this conference: leading learning, addressing inequality, and management.
- Before doing that though I'd like to explore what 'tomorrow' might look like for Tasmanians – will it be what the futurists are predicting? – ever accelerating technological change, internet and mobile device domination, artificial intelligence taking up jobs that are currently done by people, 'own-time' learning and so on...???

- Some people say we always overestimate the impact of new technology and inventions and scientific breakthroughs and that in the short term not much actually happens.
- The only thing that is certain is uncertainty; and that is what makes your task a very challenging one,
- On the one hand we need to be educating our young people who are now in secondary and senior secondary years for their immediate future and on the other, those children in Kindergarten this year for a future that is more than a decade away, and who knows what that might bring?
- I do think, however, despite this that the task ahead of you is full of opportunity and promise.

[Overview]

- The State Government has made a range of ambitious commitments to build the Tasmanian economy, create more jobs, increase employment and improve education outcomes.
- Crucial to achieving these goals is having a resilient and flexible workforce, grown out of an education system that is equitable, continuously improving, and of the highest quality.
- Tasmania is a state with longstanding social and economic challenges, such as high poverty levels, high levels of disadvantage in preschool-aged children, and low adult literacy and numeracy.
- Despite this, we have seen improvements in educational outcomes as more Tasmanians stay in school longer, gaining a strong education which will equip them with the skills they need to be successful.

- To continue to see improvement, we need to be working collaboratively across the sector and within communities, and making sure that our systems support improvement at every level.
 - The most important, and indeed pivotal, leadership role to lead this improvement work is yours.
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[Leading Learning]

- Every child in Tasmania has the right to access a quality education, which is the cornerstone of their future.
- We know the world of work is changing. As educators, it is our job to ensure that we have prepared young people with the skills they need for a workforce in flux – in the next 15 years, millions of jobs will change or disappear altogether.
- In looking to the future, we know that many jobs will be nothing like they are today. As they enter the workforce, young people need to know more than just skills, but how to be creative and flexible in applying those skills to increasingly diverse environments.
- So I think we need to be clear about what our purpose is.
- I heard a wholesale distributor speaking on the radio this week about the impending entry of the mega retailer Amazon to Australia and, while I can't give the exact quote, he said something like this:
- Disruption is inevitable and what we need to do is to proactively change our business proposition to adapt and to stay in front.

- SO, our challenge, because we know that disruption is inevitable although we don't know the timing or speed of it, is how do we change our business proposition, or I like to refer to it as our value proposition, so that we can keep our young learners out in front and prepare them for their future (not ours).
- Young people will need a range of key attributes or dispositions which can empower them to succeed, whatever the context.
- On leaving our education system, we want young people to be resilient, adaptive and positive so they can navigate and shape our future community and workforce.
- We should resist the temptation to limit our goals for young people to just employment but you know the attributes we want for our young people are very similar to the attributes employers are currently seeking for a high performing workforce.
- We have reached agreement in Australia that we want our young people to be successful learners, confident and creative individuals who can be active and informed citizens. Indeed we want our young people to be literate, numerate, to be able to think critically, to be creative, ethical, tolerant and have personal and social capability.
- One of the initiatives supporting us to deliver an education system which can produce these outcomes for students, is the new *Education Act 2016*.
- Having a new Education Act for the first time in more than 20 years is a significant change and challenge for Tasmanian schools, but it also provides a unique opportunity – with a new legislative framework, we can support best-practice approaches to meeting the needs of Tasmanian learners now and in the future.

- The Act is underpinned by the key principle that all children should have an education that helps to maximise their potential and provides a foundation for a successful and fulfilling life.
 - Most of the modifications and additions to the Act are designed to keep more Tasmanians in learning, doing more meaningful things for longer; and we know that we need to do this if Tasmania is to prosper. We cannot afford to have marginalised, disengaged and underperforming students and the implementation of the Act should help to mitigate that happening.
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[Addressing Inequality]

- As we know, Tasmania faces significant social and economic challenges.
- In Australia, Tasmania has the highest levels of poverty, and the highest levels of disadvantage amongst preschool-aged children.
- Our adult population has one of the lowest functional literacy and numeracy rates in the country, and we know that low skill and educational levels in adults contributes to the continuation of the cycle of disadvantage for children.
- Education is the main driver of change - a good education is the best way for young people to improve their social and economic wellbeing, change their future, and gain crucial skills for success in life.
- We know that completing more years of education is associated with a range of social, health and economic benefits – not just for young people, but for our communities more broadly.

- If we want to ensure that our socio-economic challenges do not shape the future of Tasmanians, we need an equitable and high-quality school system, which gives all young people the best possible chance to succeed and break the cycle of disadvantage.
 - In leading for tomorrow, we must find ways to achieve this.
 - One way that the Department of Education is currently prioritising equality in the school system is through our Year 11 and 12 Extension Program.
 - The program sends a clear message to the community that school doesn't end at Year 10, while also providing students with more choice about where to complete their secondary education. For many students, this will mean being able to stay with their families, friends, and communities as they complete their schooling.
 - To date, we have extended 30 schools to Years 11 and 12, with a further 8 schools preparing to do so in 2018.
 - We have already seen positive improvements in the number of enrolments in schools, as we actively work to bring Tasmanian up to the national school completion average of 72%.
 - The leadership of principals has been crucial to this initiative and as the Extension Program has rolled out across the state there has also been greater collaboration between schools and colleges, which reinforces the importance of creative and flexible solutions to challenges in improving student outcomes.
 - We have always recognised that there is no one-size-fits all approach to education. Our responses, led by principals must be based in the local context, and utilise locally-developed solutions where possible.
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[Management]

- To see students gaining the core skills they need to be successful, we need to see quality teaching and strong leadership, which is the driving force behind system-level improvements.
- The Department of Education is currently developing its 2018-2021 strategic plan, and we are focussed on seeing ourselves as ‘one agency’ across all schools, services and business units – with shared priorities, and a shared commitment to improving educational outcomes and developing our workforce, and with each component part being as important as the next.
- We want to become a self-improving education system at all levels – at the system-level, school level and team level.
- We know that system-wide improvement will only occur with a strong leadership team at all levels – one that is values-driven, visionary and understands the bigger picture. Leaders like this bring others with them, develop trust and a sense of shared ownership over success in their school.
- Continuous improvement needs to be our priority. We want our schools to be innovative, outward facing, collaborative, to focus on what is important and also to take collective responsibility for our students.
- There are key factors which are preconditions for improvement – by building trust, collaboration and wellbeing, we are creating the ideal environment for improvement and learning.
- To support our principals to lead for tomorrow, I think there are a number of elements that still need to be addressed:

- We need to make sure that we are finding the right people to do the job – last week I had the pleasure of attending the National Symposium on Principals' well-being in Adelaide and one of the things that was discussed was that we miss disposition in the criteria that we use to judge who should become a principal. So, for leading for tomorrow we learn from the research about the characteristics that help principals to be effective, and then to use them in our selection processes.
- We need to better support principals to be prepared for the job and then support and develop them throughout their career. We have done much in the past but there is still a way to go, particularly in valuing and utilising the huge store of knowledge, skills and experience that is sitting within our principalship. There is some national work happening in this sphere which will be helpful to us in supporting our leaders for tomorrow.
- We also need to explicitly plan to support principals' health and wellbeing and I am pleased that we are partnering with the TPA to further this work. I was interested to hear more about Dr Phil Riley's most recent research last week which shows a significant correlation between social capital and strong principal wellbeing. The most significant contributor to social capital according to Dr Riley is trust – both vertical and horizontal.
- we need to free principals and their school communities up so they can focus on a small number of improvement goals that are determined within their local context. Ben Jensen, previously of the Grattan Institute, is working with us at the moment to help us refine our school improvement model and to develop our next four year strategic plan. His research is guiding us in this.
- Finally, I am strongly of the view that we need to step back a bit from implementing the Australian curriculum, where I think we have been too focused on the content and not enough on the general capabilities. We are slowing down our implementation to ensure we

have the right focus. Content has distracted us from teaching the student and developing those general capabilities that we know students will need to become prepared for their future, whatever that holds.

[Concluding remarks]

- Now and into the future we need, more than ever, strong and well supported leaders who work to bring people closer together in common pursuit of our improvement goals.
- Leaders for tomorrow will build strong teams where successes are shared and celebrated, where people are supported to innovate, to try something different, and failures are viewed as opportunities to learn.
- Leading today for tomorrow is no small ask – it requires commitment to shared priorities and values, and the ability to think beyond just our classrooms or our schools.
- By intentionally supporting our students to be resilient, curious, flexible, adaptive and optimistic, we will be helping them prepare for a future which is uncertain, but it is one that they will be ready and able to face.
- I will finish as I started in stating again that your leadership role is the most pivotal in achieving this. I wish you well for your conference and hope that you will take much away from the day to support you in your work.
- Thank you.