

NEiTA 2009 ASG National Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Fiona Farren

Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education)
South Bunbury Primary School, Bunbury, Western Australia
Nominated by: Community Organisation
National Award Category: Community Engagement

Position: Level 3 teacher, Program coordinator • Category: Primary • Level taught: kindergarten • Years teaching: 32 years • Years at this school: 11 years • School type: Government • Town/Suburb: Bunbury • State: Western Australia • Postcode: 6230

How do you inspire your students?

We have developed a friendly inclusive environment where, each week, over 70 children and their families are made welcome. We consider the child's family as integral to our understanding of the individual, and consider the time we invest in developing a collaborative relationship with them as well spent. We have created a place where families are welcomed and heard.

Linking education and families to benefit young learners

With 32 years experience in early childhood education, Fiona Farren has dedicated herself to assisting all parties to work together to improve a child's early education outcomes. Fiona has developed the Linking Education and Families (LEAF) program. The program aims to assist each child in the transition to school, as well as raising parental awareness of the importance of the early years of learning.

In the LEAF program, each child receives a home visit before attending kindergarten. This provides an opportunity for the family to meet the teacher in their home setting. These visits have been particularly helpful in reassuring anxious students and parents about starting school.

Play cafés are another vital element of the LEAF program. Play cafés take place in the kindergarten on a day when the kindergarten is not used for other activities. At play cafés, parents of young children can relax, share information and develop a support network while their children participate in a variety of modelled play and learning activities.

Fiona has invited many members of the wider community to participate in her program. Visitors to her play cafés have included Community Child Health Nurses, speech pathologists and occupational therapists. In this way, the play cafés provide parents with easy access to early childhood development information from visiting health professionals and other family service providers.

Fiona has made an emphasis on the 'linking' from LEAF. She works hard to ensure her students' transition from home to school is pleasant and positive. The children, and their families, begin the journey to formal learning with enthusiasm, as they are already familiar with the kindergarten setting and their teacher. Similarly, Fiona knows her 'new' students and how best to cater for them. This has led to her students having a great start to their school life. Issues that could negatively affect a student's success at school are dealt with early and effectively. Fiona then nurtures and encourages students throughout the year to be creative and inquisitive learners – which is every parent's dream.

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