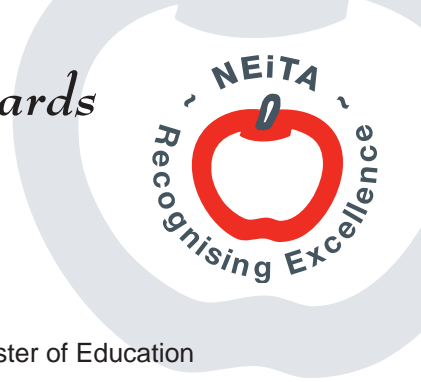


# NEiTA 2009 ASG Inspirational Teaching Awards

## State and Territory Award Recipient



## Heather Leary

Diploma of Teaching, Graduate Diploma of Student Welfare, Master of Education  
**Benalla Primary School**, Benalla, Victoria  
Nominated by: Committee of Management

*Position: Principal • Category: Primary • Years teaching: 30 years • Years at this school: 8 years • School type: Government  
• Town/Suburb: Benalla • State: Victoria • Postcode: 3672*

### Why teaching?

As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher and I had huge support from my family to follow my dream and make that a reality. I'm a 'people person'; I love kids - their energy and enthusiasm, their sense of fun. I am passionate about education and inspiring children and young people to be the best that they can possibly be, whatever their circumstances.

I believe that a great education is all about supporting and motivating kids to reach their potential and I am passionate about making a difference in children's lives.

### Creating a sense of pride in a local school

Benalla Primary School has not always enjoyed a positive reputation within the local community. Many students came from disadvantaged family backgrounds; some had motivational and behavioural problems. However, over the past five years, Heather and her staff have instilled a positive ethos into the school, creating a safe, happy and progressive learning environment.

Basing her teaching methods on the philosophy of *You Can Do It! Education*, which encourages resilience and self-esteem in students and the *Nine Values for Australian Schooling*, Heather has adopted a whole school approach to character education and academic development. Social and emotional growth is considered to be just as important as academic development and the pursuit of excellence and personal best underpins all teaching and learning. This is reinforced by teachers and support staff throughout the entire school, and parents and members of the wider community are involved in the educational process.

In addition to improving the learning environment for the students, teachers have also benefitted a great deal from specifically targeted professional development, which has impacted positively on the development of a positive school culture.

A workshop on Ruby Payne's *The Framework for Understanding Poverty* provided staff with an insight into the challenges facing disadvantaged families, and helped teachers build more positive relationships with the whole school community. In 2005 and 2006, the staff received training in Restorative Justice and Circle Time techniques. These principles have helped teachers understand some of the more complex issues that students might encounter. In 2007, Benalla Primary became a *KidsMatter* school, one of only 100 schools across Australia to pilot this initiative to improve the mental health and well-being of children.

Heather's strong and inspirational leadership as principal has led to vastly improved student outcomes, and greater parent and community involvement in a school of which all members can feel proud.

#### Contact details:

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