

WORLD TEACHERS DAY
October 14, 2009

Ms FOX (Bright) (15:12): I rise to speak today about the role of teachers in our community as a way of marking World Teachers Day, which occurred last week when his house was not sitting. World Teachers Day is held annually on 5 October and commemorates the anniversary of the signing in 1966, between UNESCO and the IOO, of the recommendation concerning the status of teachers.

It is an occasion to celebrate the essential role of teachers in providing quality education at all levels. Sadly, I was reminded of the need to do this in our community yesterday when I was reading readers' comments on *The Advertiser* website Adelaidenow. The comments were made in relation to a story the paper ran reporting on a suggestion that underperforming teachers be given a payout of \$50,000 to leave the profession.

Now, no matter what one's views are on such a scheme (certainly not one that I would support at this point in time), some of the subsequent comments on the website revealed a woeful attitude towards teachers in our community. One person called Nathan said that, as far as he was concerned, teachers took up too much of his taxes anyway (I think he meant 'too many'). Another person complained about teachers having too many holidays. And then there was the bright spark, Darren, who announced that, 'Teaching was the easiest job on the planet.' He has clearly never been vomited on by a year 8 while trying to explain what the Crusades were.

I read these comments with some concern. They highlighted for me a basic lack of understanding about the teaching profession and about what being a teacher entails. I know for a fact that if one was to have a conversation with Nathan, Darren, etc., and suggest that they become teachers, they would immediately say, 'Not for all the money in the world.'

Teaching is a profession, but it is also a vocation. I have never thought it was brilliantly paid. I noticed the minute I became a teacher that my perceived status in society dropped, although, clearly, as a politician my stocks have not risen much higher. Why would young men and women choose to follow this career path when they face uncertain employment with temporary contracts, a lack of community support, and a continual need to justify their profession to others? The answer is: because it is a vocation.

Despite all these things, many people are called to teaching because of the public service that they can perform, the intangible dynamic of the classroom which can result in wonderful, precious moments when knowledge is shared. You cannot put a price on these things. It is very difficult to quantify the rewarding nature of a lesson well taught, even for a teacher, and it can be near nigh impossible to explain to somebody who has never taught.

So, we know that teachers are not in the profession for the money, the status or the glory. They tend to be in it because they genuinely enjoy the dynamic of education and their impact on the students they teach. Once again (and this is personal opinion), I am convinced that the excellence of a child's education is threefold: a happy home, outstanding teachers and parents who support those teachers with the respect due to professionals.

Teachers, of course, cannot control a child's home life, and they cannot control the attitude of their parents, but they can try—and I know they do—to be the best teachers they can be. My mother's first school experience was on a mission in Africa, where her teacher, Mr Ndhlovu, used to teach under a tree. My mother would draw in the dirt, and that is how she learnt to read and write; nevertheless, she has a passionate interest in education, and Mr Ndhlovu imparted a thirst for knowledge that has stayed with her forever. Of course, I am not advocating that modern-day teachers go back to this, and I think it is great to have new buildings.

However, at the end of the day, it comes back to the teacher—the teacher who will be lucky to teach at all because they are also playing the role these days of psychologist, parent and social worker; the teacher who has to justify his or her professional position on a daily basis to parents, colleagues and students; and the teacher whose work never ends at 3.30pm, even though the teacher bashers would like you to think that is true.

Has anybody ever dropped into an expensive wine bar at 4pm? I can tell you that it is not full of teachers leaning casually against the bar, consulting their Gucci watches. They are still at

school, marking at home, supervising sport or participating in some Kafkaesque middle management inspired meeting about whether or not year 10s should be allowed to wear brown socks—but I digress.

Let us take a moment to celebrate our teachers, to thank them for educating our children and to think about how we, not just in government but as a community, can better support these selfless individuals.