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The Australian Education Union – NT Branch today expressed significant concerns with a program that will see unqualified teachers placed in selected schools throughout the Territory.

- Teach for Australia (TFA) is a program that commenced in 2010 in Victoria and is about to be adopted in schools in the Northern Territory. The program places unqualified “associate teachers” with an initial Degree but without any formal teaching qualifications into selected low socio-economic or disadvantaged schools on a 2 year contract. After this period, they will graduate with a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching.

Australian Education Union – NT President Matthew Cranitch is appalled and concerned about the impact of such a scheme in the Territory.

“This scheme is nothing more than a band aid and a quick fix. It is all about trying to get things done quickly and cheaply and nothing about improving educational outcomes for young Territorians.”

“What it really is about is a de-skilling of the profession and sending a message out there that after a six week crash course, anyone can be a teacher. If it wasn’t so serious an issue, it would be laughable.”

Advocates of the TFA program have claimed that it will attract “the best and brightest university graduates” and place them in disadvantaged schools and therefore lift teacher quality and performance.

However, Mr Cranitch claims the reality will be very different in the NT. “It is ludicrous to think that you’re going to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for students by unleashing young graduates with no real educational pedagogical theory or knowledge into schools in some of the remotest and challenging parts of the country.”

Part of the scheme involves these Associate Teachers receiving ongoing fortnightly visits and support by University of Melbourne tutors coupled with assistance and mentoring within the school by experienced teachers.

Mr Cranitch claims that this cannot and will not occur in the NT.

“These young graduates will not receive adequate support, they will literally be thrown in at the deep end. These regions and schools are already hard to staff for a reason. Many teachers are leaving these schools and communities due to a lack of support. The AEU calls on all levels of government to improve resourcing, professional development opportunities and remote incentives so all teachers can work to achieve some real improvements in these schools, not simply a façade with no solid foundation.”

Schools believed to be piloting this flawed scheme include Katherine High School, Barkly College and other unspecified Darwin and Palmerston based schools. Mr Cranitch claims that there is no support within these schools to adopt the scheme.

“A recent information session held at Katherine High School where teachers were invited to meet and discuss the program with TFA Chief Executive Melodie Potts attracted only one person. Of course teachers are cynical about this proposal. They know it won’t work.”

Mr Cranitch insists that these teachers and schools are already swamped with workloads issues and “even the most experienced teachers, some with over 30 years in the classroom are finding it difficult to cope with the increased performance management expectations.”

“Well intentioned people can do a lot of harm to our kids. What this scheme is really saying is that in some of our schools, and for some of our kids, if we can’t get qualified teachers, we’ll at least get someone in front of the class. Sadly, this is not going in the right direction.”

For more information contact:-

Matthew Cranitch

President AEU-NT

08 89485399

0419836576