

Kids' reading opens doors

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No ministry has more of a long-term impact on lives than education.

IN education. The decisions made in education ripple across government.

Good results from education will see a positive impact flow into other portfolios.

Conversely, poor results in education will lead to negative outcomes in other portfolios.

It's a burden few recognise, but with that recognition should go congratulations to WA Education Minister Sue Ellery who will continue in the portfolio that will be key to shaping WA for generations to come.

It's a huge responsibility, but it's not like Ms Ellery won't have the resources at her disposal.

The McGowan Government's election campaign rightly promised to turn much of our State's vast mineral wealth into new school facilities for future generations of WA students.

New schools, new classrooms, new science labs, the level of investment is impressive.

It shows a near \$700 million commitment to give our children the very best start.

But when we think about our own primary school experiences, do we remember an amazing and inspiring teacher or a new classroom?

We all know it's about the person at the front of the class and not the four walls surrounding them.

It is one thing to cut a ribbon
on a new school hall.

It is another to make decisions which boost the educational outcomes for every child, in every postcode in the State.

We should remember that nearly one-in-six kids in WA



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enters high school with reading levels at or below the national minimum standard for reading.

This hampers their ability to benefit from high school. It is a statistic which can't be ignored. It deserves the focus of our attention.

The good news is that solutions to improve reading in all students exist.

They are proved to work and are easy to implement (Note to the bean counters: at very low

cost). By investing in and empowering our teachers to provide quality instruction backed by rigorous training and the right support resources we would have a world-class teaching practice to match our new schools, halls and science labs.

We can't underestimate the importance that primary school plays in our broader education system.

We simply should not be satisfied with a system which year in, year out turns out another new group of Year 7 students, who despite having attended school for more than seven years already, do not read proficiently.

Take a moment to ponder the incredible difference that would occur in these children's high school years and their future prospects if they were entering high school with a level of reading which actually

gave them the platform to succeed.

As WA counted down the final days of the campaign, the Tasmanian Government made a bold declaration that by Year 7 all young Tasmanians will meet an expected reading standard that is above the national minimum by no later than 2030.

The Tasmanian decision comes on the back of the successful work in South Australia of the Literacy Guarantee and the introduction in NSW late last year of the Year One phonics check.

These are brave decisions that the WA Government should follow.

Getting reading instruction right isn't just something which ticks the boxes in the education portfolio either.

The decisions made in the education space will be the greatest boost the Government

can make to achieving its own goals of job creation and diversifying the economy over the next generation.

If the Government wants to make headway on its goal to decrease the level of Aboriginal incarceration, then improving reading instruction is an essential lever at its disposal.

It would surprise no one that those who struggled with reading and education make up a large proportion of our prison population.

These are brave and bold decisions but they would help every child in WA reach their potential, while also leaving a memorable legacy for an education minister.

Over to you, Minister.

Elena Douglas is convenor of Primary Focus, a national advocacy group for the quality of Australian primary school education