Time for parents to parent and for teachers to teach

WHEN our children fail, the scramble is on to lay blame. The system, those within it, the Government – anyone but ourselves.

While it was revealed this week that Queensland has improved in that thorn in teachers’ sides, NAPLAN, the results are not exactly thrilling.

But unpalatable as it is, if our kids’ levels of achievement are generally so poor, we need to look closer to home, not to blame, but to make real change instead of just investing in more talk about the problem.

Being honest about it and diverting anger into forward-thinking energy, is the only way to change what is broken.

Parents will wriggle, squirm, deny and defer but you do not need to draw a long bow to find the target. It hurts to accept that you might have contributed to your child’s lack of learning or resilience.

Yes – the system is under-resourced. Yes, the curriculum is far too crowded. And yes, entry levels for teaching are very low and they are terribly underpaid, so the profession may not be attracting the most suitable candidates. And parents are busy to the point of madness, certainly. But in their harried lives, they expect schools to do more and more in the raising of their child.

It is a pretty mixed up world when something as basic as raising a beloved child is handed over to another and then all we do is sit back and carp on about how lousy they are at it.

Parental expectations have moved from being reasonable – that their child receive education and develop relevant practical skills to start their adult lives – to unreasonable.

It is perverse to accept that it is OK for a child to fail to follow simple directions. It is wrong to allow a child to lash out or not participate or not complete educational tasks in class. But more parents do these things every day.

The key to change is not necessarily system tweaking or restructure. It is about people. We need to get behind our teachers and our schools. Respect given most often results in respect returned.

This is what has changed most obviously. Once, if a child got in trouble at school, the incident would be followed up at home (possibly with a paddled derriere). Now parents are up, quick as lightning, to get in the face of the teacher in defence of their child, even if any reasonable person would tell you your child deserved to be brought down a peg or that they were in the wrong – a dirty word these days.

Where once parents would ensure their child was at school by the bell in the morning, starting times are viewed as optional these days. Anecdotally, there is an avalanche of late arrivals because kids are sleeping in after staying up late or were not organised enough to get there on time.

It seems incredible that such a basic thing as getting to school on time is being allowed to slip by so many parents.

Certainly, the relentless focus on academic measures at the expense of the human elements of education is not working. Neither is being achieved fully.

The data-driven approach is not working. Every teacher today laments the endless focus on assessment and that they simply lurch from one assessment task to another, with no time to immerse their students in a subject area.

Skimming and regurgitating, then moving on to the next thing, has to be the modus operandi for young learners.

We are not alone. The American media laments its failing system as much as we do ours. So does the UK. So does Canada, and Jamaica and Mexico. They have crowded curriculums too.

But parents need to step up. Parents should expose their tots to story time, toilet train their Prep kid, discipline their teenager. It is hard work – the hardest job in the world – but that is what they signed up for.

Parents should teach their children to say please and thank you and that there are inflexible rules and expectations in life. They need to know what it is to fail. And lose. And win, too.

Teachers should be expected to teach during a school day and parents should be expected to parent the rest of the time.

Together, they could be a formidable support system in little learner’s life and give them a solid launch pad from which to learn.

It is not exactly rocket science.
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