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Expert warns Australia slipping in world education rankings

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AUSTRALIA is falling behind the best school systems in the world because top candidates are not entering teaching, a leading academic warns.

A new book based on a study of secondary schools and education policies in Australia, the US, England, Wales, China, and Finland, found Australian students could be worse off in the next ten years without urgent improvements.

The research found 80 per cent of Australian schools are high performing, but many others - in an remote areas with Indigenous students or disadvantaged suburbs - are struggling.

Researcher and co-author, Prof Brian Caldwell, said demanding higher qualifications for teachers - on top of rising salaries - would lure better people to the job.

Prof Caldwell, a former Melbourne University education dean, said Australia will keep slipping in world rankings if teachers continue to work in run-down facilities.

"It is critically important to put preparation of teachers on the same plane as the medical profession and follow the lead of Finland, which requires teachers to have a masters degree," he said.

"We have got to provide teachers with really good workplaces, it is an Australia-wide problem, particularly acute in Victoria.

"We really do have to redesign and rebuild our schools to make them pleasant places. The State Government has made a good start here but it has a long, long way to go."

Prof Caldwell said in Finland all students are high performing regardless of the school they attend.

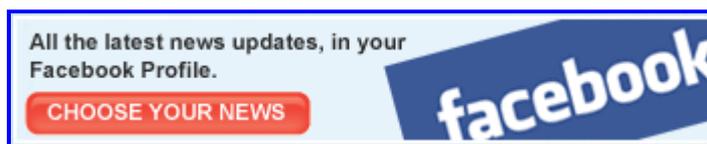
In the book, *Why Not The Best Schools?*, Prof Caldwell and Dr Jessica Harris suggest a ten point plan for Australia, including public schools being rebuilt to bring learning into the 21st century, and less red tape and greater school autonomy to personalise education.

Victorian Education Minister Bronwyn Pike said the Brumby Government is delivering on its \$1.9 billion plan to rebuild, renovate or extend every public school by 2017.

Ms Pike said it is the largest investment in school infrastructure in Victorian history.

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