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Teachers deserve love, not derision for their work in a demanding career

KATIE BICE, Sunday Herald Sun
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HERE'S the truth about teachers.

They officially returned to work last week long after the rest of us. But they'd already been hard at it long before then.

They've been preparing their classrooms, writing our kids' names on supplies and buying things out of their own pocket to help their students have a good year. They are a bit like footy umpires: under appreciated, often abused but the gig couldn't go on without them.

Because we parents do such a bad job, teachers can't just show up these days and help children learn reading, writing and maths.

They now have to be nutritionists to stop kids getting fat, counsellors to stop them being bullied or depressed, swim teachers so the kids don't drown, drug and alcohol experts to stop kids taking risks, and first-aiders to save them from anaphylaxis.

And while they're at it, we expect them to be our frontline defence against sex and domestic abusers and radicalised youth.

They deal with kids from broken families, students under the care of authorities and every type of weirdo parent you can imagine.

For their efforts, they are called lazy, accused of taking too many holidays, told they aren't the smartest crop and, worst of all, blamed for our kids slipping behind other nations in literacy and numeracy. They're an easy target and it's less confronting to blame them for our kids' failings rather than ourselves.

I've never seen a teacher turn up at 9am and leave at 3.30pm. They can't because apart from lesson planning there is usually a line of needy parents at either end of the day wanting to tell them how Billy has a sore foot because he fell over on the weekend or seeking reassurance that Charlotte has someone to play with at lunchtime.

Teachers stay back for information nights, parent teacher interviews, sports nights, concerts, graduations and they take our kids on camps, all without overtime. After they've left school for the day, they perch themselves at home in front of the TV and mark homework and assignments. They collate reports, do DVD montages for parents as end-of-year gifts and search for new ways to keep the kids engaged. And then they lie in bed worrying about how to help that student catch up in literacy or how to handle Mother's Day for the student who doesn't have one. If we paid them for every job they perform they'd be earning like merchant bankers. Instead we give them a starting salary that begins with a 50 and scoff when they ask for pay rises.

We want to attract the best to the profession but there's not much incentive when you can be paid more, do less and get more praise in a less demanding career.

We want better teachers but roll our eyes when our kids get a graduate. We know teachers need experience to improve — we just don't want them "experimenting" on our kids. Yet the young ones are often the most enthusiastic and not worn down by the burden of all that comes with being a teacher but has nothing to do with teaching.

So, a few notes for the school year.

Make yourself seen but not heard: be there for your kids but their teacher doesn't need to know every time they sneeze. Try to fix issues at home before getting the school involved.

Don't assume your child is right: there will be dust-ups, arguments and times your kid tells you wild tales about school. But the truth often lies in a version of what they tell you.

Don't storm into the classroom like you own it: it's their workplace.

You wouldn't want someone in your face at your desk at 9am I'm sure teachers feel the same. Not to mention that it's disruptive.

Get your kid to school on time and help if you're asked — but otherwise stay out of the way.

And when the midyear break rolls around and you start to gripe about the 12 weeks of holidays they get a year, remember that they deserve it.

If you're so jealous, quit your job and become a teacher. Bet you wouldn't have the guts.

Katie Bice is a *Sunday Herald Sun* columnist